

The background of the entire cover is a photograph of a sunset or sunrise over a body of water. The sky is filled with dark, dramatic clouds, with a bright orange and yellow glow from the sun just below the horizon. The water in the foreground is dark with some lighter patches reflecting the light from the sky.

Kevin M. Day

Sailor's Anthology

Book I

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KEVIN M. DAY

DAY

An Imprint of Kevin M. Day Book Publishers

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An Imprint of Kevin M. Day Book Publishers
 Phoenix, Arizona 85353

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Fiction;
except for the parts that aren't.

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The See'r

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Preface

With a life spent at sea many sailors claim to have experienced strange, unusual, or just down-right bizarre events. This is a story of one such event that took place in December of 2005 off the coast of San Diego, California. The author uses a fictional postscript of the real event that offers one possible explanation of what might have really happened. To readers who would say this story is too sci-fi to be plausible, the author would tell them the actual event was no less weird and remains unexplained to this day.

The whistle from the distant lumber mill sounded clearly in the late afternoon as Andy Cline walked out the door. Leaving his office right on time he was headed to the meeting place. His footsteps echoed off the smooth walls as he walked between the buildings and down the clean sidewalk towards the tree line where he was supposed to meet them. Dressed exactly as instructed, he hurried forward.

The huge technology park where Andy worked for 21.3, Inc, a Department of Defense contractor, was situated in the middle of a thick stand of second growth timber. Newly constructed, raw dirt still separated the buildings from the mostly pine forest towering above. The height of the thin emaciated looking evergreens was exaggerated because the site was located in a shallow depression within the trees. Only the north side of the park which faced the Highway 99 was clear of the wild brambles.

Reaching the end of the cement walk, Andy looked southwest towards the far corner of the property. There, nearly hidden at the top of the slope in the line of trees he spotted someone who had to be Dave. His waved hello was immediately returned in confirmation. Andy started walking towards him.

Although the letter Andy received several days earlier did not really tell him much, it was enough. The letter had several very curious features and was unlike any he had ever received before. Greatly intrigued, Andy felt strangely compelled to oblige the author or authors, whoever they were.

Who in the hell secures envelopes with wax seals in this day and age? Why? The envelope and letter, which appeared to be constructed from home-made paper, were written with pencil in neat block-style handwriting. There was no postage stamp affixed to the envelope. The senders obviously preferring to have the postal clerk in Crescent City, California, stamp it with a First Class mark instead. The whole thing was purposefully old-tech and very strange.

Why was he told to go out and buy all new clothes, even socks and underwear, for this meeting? His cell phone, car keys, wallet, wristwatch, wedding ring, even the letter itself, all safely secured back in the top drawer of his desk, just like he had been told to do. Andy was aware that finger prints and dental work would be the only way to identify him if something bad awaited him in the forest. It wasn't only intrigue though. Andy's interest in meeting the strangers was also because of what the letter did say.

The person who wrote the letter seemed to have answers and, perhaps even plausible explanations to a strange incident that happened to him while at sea over three years ago. More preciously, the incident happened to an entire Navy Strike Group including a nuclear powered aircraft carrier and several escort ships. The weirdness of that event still defied Andy's logic and reasoning. Besides, the author obviously knew exactly who he was. If he was wanted dead, Andy would be easy to find and kill.

The Navy uniforms Andy once wore so proudly were all now retired, resting undisturbed in the back corner of his closet. All exchanged for shirts and ties like he was wearing now. Andy liked the business look but hated the ties, even now reaching up and loosening the fancy red one he was wearing. The brand new dress shirt was stiff in the collar and kept snagging the tiny but painful hair stubble around his throat. Irritated, Andy swore that if he ever made it to heaven he would look up the guy that invented ties. As Andy got closer, a second person emerged from the woods. The pair walked slowly towards him now.

Andy studied the two figures as he drew closer. Still a hundred yards away, he could already see the ruddy determined look that people get after walking great distances. Or hiking, as they appeared to have been doing.

They were dressed in outdoor clothing and carried backpacks.

Standing directly in front of them now, he saw that his initial impression was accurate. Although looking relatively new, their earth-toned clothing was damp and dirty from exposure to the elements. They both wore week-old beards, and radiated that peculiar pungent smell of the outdoors. Andy thought about offering to take them home and letting them get cleaned up, maybe later.

“Hi. I’m Andy,” offering his hand instead.

The man who had returned his wave from the tree line was on his right and a little closer to him. Very slowly he grabbed Andy’s hand as if to shake it. As he did this he carefully studied Andy’s entire arm, then his wrist, and finally his hand turning it over slightly. The man had an expression of awe, or maybe it was deep concern.

“I’m Dave,” the man finally replied in a clear voice.

Dave had shoulder length blond hair and stood about five feet nine inches with a moderate build. The other man was quite a bit bigger with short brown hair, his powerful frame barely hidden under the bulky outdoor wear. The larger man kept his eyes downcast and had yet to look Andy in the eye. Although both men could have both

passed for an Earth First, or other eco-organization members that were prevalent in the area, Andy sensed that they both possessed a keen intelligence. These men were definitely not doped out hippies - for some reason he had the definite impression they were highly educated and had a very sober purpose for coming here.

“Were you waiting for me long?”

“Twenty-six minutes,” replied Dave dryly. It was no attempt at humor. “Sorry we look and smell so rough. We hiked for two weeks to get here,” he continued as they both removed their packs, placing them on the ground where they stood.

“Shouldn’t we go somewhere to talk? My house isn’t far.”

“No! We have to do this right here, right now!” Dave replied right away, a sudden edge of fear in his voice. “Sorry ... I’m sorry. Hopefully this will all make a little more sense soon,” he added after seeing Andy step back in alarm.

Dave’s eyes again communicated that strange look of awe and respect. Andy relaxed a little at the man’s sincere look and apology. Dave must have understood Andy’s concern though, they were sure to be noticed sitting here completely exposed on the dirt embankment. One man in

shirt and tie, the others dressed like eco-terrorists. If Andy's co-workers saw them they might even come over to see what was going on.

"Your right Andy, we have a small camp set up back in the trees. Let's go there," Dave offered with his palms held up in the universal sign of peace.

Both men then shouldered their backpacks and headed back towards the tree line. Andy hesitantly followed them after briefly glancing back towards his office, the direction of any would-be escape route.

"Where are they?" demanded LT Colonel Ben Kennedy as soon as he entered the secured space deep under the Nevada desert.

"No change Sir. We have an entire team of Viewers on it but our last positive hit was in the Smith River Gorge nearly two weeks ago. Apparently they were still heading north. They have completely vanished since then," replied Dr. George Stucky.

"Sir, I don't have to remind you that these two know what they're doing. Jesus, they were us after all."

"What about the See'r then?" the LT Colonel asked next, already well aware of the capabilities of the missing scientists.

“Working late at the office as usual. We’re still receiving solid RF from the devices and GPS from his cell phone. His last email was sent,” the doctor paused looking over at his displays, “fourteen minutes ago.”

“God damn it! Locate them! I need to know what in the hell it is those two traitors are up to,” screamed the hulking Air Force officer as he turned to face the retinal scanner. With a muffled clank the door mechanism activated allowing the man to leave the highly secure space.

“I know why I’m here. But why are you? And why all of this cloak and dagger crap?” asked Andy as soon as they were all seated in the small clearing at the strangers camp. They were now hidden in the trees about a half mile from the technology park.

“Senior Chief, I promise to explain everything shortly. But to answer your last question first ... we had to be sure that we were clean before showing up here,” replied Dave.

Andy looked intently at the man. It had been a while since he was addressed as Senior Chief, his final rank in the Navy.

“Andy, have you ever heard of Remote Viewers?” asked the stranger.

“Yes, actually I have. I’m a regular listener of Coast to Coast AM,” replied Andy. “You know, with George Noory and Art Bell?” As the name suggested, Remote Viewers were trained to see things, entirely telepathically, from great distances.

“Yeah, we know the program. Let me tell you that Remote Viewers are real. The government agencies that use them call them Viewers for short. In fact, they are most definitely trying their best to see us right now,” Dave replied.

“The only way we could lose them and get here clean was to walk. So, we left everything that a Viewer could associate with us, clothes, personal affects, everything that we did not absolutely need, over in Crescent City. We bought new stuff and started walking here two weeks ago. We avoided the major trails, walked up the Smith River Gorge, through the Kalmiopsis Wilderness, entered the Illinois Valley close to Sanger Peak down by Cave Junction, and kept mostly to the woods all the way here.”

“Wow. That is one hell of a walk,” offered Andy. He was studying the two strangers with new respect.

“By the way, my friends name is Ken Johnson. Dr. Ken Johnson. My full name is Dave Campbell. We are both research scientists.” The large man with Dave finally

looked Andy in the eyes smiling broadly. His face was warm and kind.

“Great to finally meet you Senior,” nodded Dr. Johnson. Andy returned the nod.

“As you gathered from my letter, we are here because of the UFO encounter you had three years ago.” Dr. Campbell’s statement hung in the air. “You have questions - we have answers ... most of them anyway. And, we have a favor to ask you. But first we need to confirm some of what we already know,” he continued.

Andy stared blankly at the two men. He had no idea of what to say, how to say it, or even if he should. He was just an observer like everyone else onboard the Princeton. Hell, the pilots from the Nimitz actually intercepted the damn things. The events from that day swirled up again fresh in his mind.

“Senior Chief ... Andy, I know there is no way for you to really trust us. We appeared out of the blue looking and smelling like something from the 60’s,” that look of awe was there again, “so, all I can do is hope you will trust us. We're hoping, no, not hoping, praying. Dr. Johnson and I risked everything to come here. Maybe even our lives.”

Andy really looked at the two men for the first time, considering what they said they had done.

“Okay. Let’s say I trust you. Is there any way I can get in trouble here tonight? Will I be in any danger for helping you? You just suggested you could be killed. What about me, my wife? ” asked Andy.

“No. You’re too ... valuable to them.”

“I’m what?” Andy sounded incredulous.

“Andy, we think you might be a very rare human being. What quantum physicists call a *See’r*.” replied the doctor.

“A *See’r*? Don’t you mean a seer? Hell, I can’t even predict when the Chargers will win,” laughed Andy nervously. The two men just sat there unamused.

“You’re joking right?”

“No. There’s no joke. We have studied all the data taken from the ships. The radar recordings, gun cameras, pilot logs, radio recordings, everything points back to you and one particular instant in time. But, we need you to tell us the story so that we can be sure,” the scientist paused, “you see, until possibly now, *See’r*’s existed only in theory.”

“Okay. Okay. I will tell the story. Hell, there’s no great secret about what I saw. I’ve told it a hundred times already,” replied Andy more than a little relieved that's all

they wanted. He could have saved them a lot of hassle with a simple phone call.

“But first, please explain what a See’r is.”

“Without getting too technical, it relates to a well known principle in modern physics. The phenomenon is known as Observer Perturbations. Basically, by simply observing an event, or an experiment, the observer always creates perturbations in the outcome. Therefore, it has always been impossible for scientists to observe experiments with absolute objectivity.” Dr. Campbell paused to see if Andy was following him.

“The effect of an observer is especially troublesome in the field of quantum mechanics. Scientists simply can not conduct most of the experiments they would like because observing them changes the results, most often in wildly unpredictable and extremely bizarre ways. To say the least,” the scientist paused again looking over at his fellow researcher.

“Okay. I’m following you so far. But what does this have to do with me? I’m no scientist. High School physics was as far as I ever made it,” injected Andy.

“I’m getting there,” the scientist responded raising his hand up.

“Several years ago it was theorized that the Ideal Observer could actually exist, someone who could observe things without creating perturbations. This theorized person is referred to as a See’r,” the scientist finished explaining.

“We think you might be one.”

“**Doctor, all readings** are completely static. No movement in RF or GPS for half an hour now. The See’r is either soundly asleep at his desk. Or dead,” the lab technician continued, “the devices should be registering at least some movement.” Andy Clines movements were under constant observation. Whenever the data became static like it was now, the technicians immediately alerted the doctor.

“Call the Colonel!” ordered Dr. Stucky.

Retired Senior Chief Operations Specialist Andy Cline had been under observation for several months now. His every movement was tracked by several layers of technology. His phone, car, clothing, and even his jewelry contained very small devices that emitted constant radio frequencies. Transmitters, clandestinely hid in various locations, picked up the weak signals and relayed them up to a geosynchronous satellite and then down again to the secure room where he was being monitored.

The technology they used was extremely advanced and could even detect the precise movements of Andy's wedding ring as he typed on his keyboard. The solitary diamond had been carefully lifted out and a very tiny RF device hidden underneath it. The device was completely undetectable, the ring entirely normal looking. Most of Andy's clothes had microscopic fibers carefully woven into them. The fibers were actually extremely accurate RF devices powered by scattered light. His car, laptop computer, cell phone, and all of his shoes contained similar devices. Andy literally could not move a muscle without his movement being immediately detected.

Unlike most people who ended up being tracked this way by the U.S. government, Andy was not in any kind of trouble. Far from it in fact, he was being protected by his watchers. Their goal was for him to be left completely alone, allowed to live an entirely normal life. At least until such time that they decided how best to use him.

The two scientists in the world that did know how to use Andy Cline were now missing. They were last seen by the Viewers west of Crescent City, California, in the rugged Kalmiopsis Wilderness in southern Oregon. The very reason why LT Colonel Ben Kennedy, head of the

United States Air Force super secret Quantum Warfare Research Project was so concerned.

Three years earlier

Operations Specialist Senior Chief Andy Cline hooked the next track - same thing. The course, speed, altitude were all identical to the other five contacts on his display. Senior Chief Cline looked at the radar sources again. All five tracks were being reported by CEC. The U.S.S. Princeton's Cooperative Engagement Capability provided operators with a composite track on contacts. He could see that CEC was using radar from several independent sources. The tracks were definitely real. Spread out evenly across his display, the tracks were all at about 28,000 feet and tracking south at around one hundred knots. Strange because the upper atmospheric jet stream along the West Coast of the United States normally travels from west to east. He was sure that was the case even now. Unless caught in a jet stream, airborne objects at 28,000 feet do not travel that slowly. They would more than likely fall out of the sky instead.

Stepping back from the display, Senior Chief Cline just watched as the strange tracks seemed to slowly float

down like snowflakes falling on a calm winter day. The Carrier Air Wing was already recovered onboard the U.S.S. Nimitz for the evening so the Senior Chief was not really too concerned about safety of flight. He decided to continue monitoring the contacts though. He had seen strange atmospheric phenomenon several times before over the course of his twenty one year career. These contacts could be almost anything. Canadian Geese flying south, ball lightening, weather balloons, ice, even a major CEC system malfunction.

Senior Chief Andy Cline did note, none too happily, that no one else in Combat seemed to be paying any attention to the strange tracks. He would definitely bring this up later but wanted to observe his team in action for now. After many months of training, he had always tried to teach his young team to expect the unexpected. To remain alert and curious at all times. If they did not know the identification of an air contact then they should be automatically trying to find out. Something no one seemed to be doing right now.

"Petty Officer Craig, turn on the CEC War Diary. I want to make sure it is working properly before the ADEX tomorrow morning," Senior Chief Cline said quietly over the shoulder of the on watch Combat Systems Coordinator.

The War Diary would record everything the CEC system was doing.

"Okay Senior," the young operator replied as he selected the button on his console, "If you want I will just have it left on from now until the ADEX is over tomorrow."

"Great. Please make sure your relief knows when he shows up."

The Air Defense Exercise starting at 1000 the next morning had been planned for weeks. Adversary aircraft would be launching from the Marine Corps Air Station Miramar and the North Island Naval Air Station in a mock attack of the NIMITZ Strike Group located one hundred miles off the coast. As the Air Defense Commander, the U.S.S. Princeton was in charge of defending the airspace around the strike group. Using a combination of F/A-18 Super Hornets in pre-assigned Combat Air Patrol stations and the SM-2 missiles from the AEGIS warships, the Air Defense Commander would repel the successive waves of enemy aircraft that were anticipated. All weapon employments would be simulated of course, but the exercise was designed to provide air defense combat training with a very high degree of realism.

After taking another look at the strange contacts, Senior Chief Cline decided to get some rest. Tomorrow was going to be another long and busy day. He left Combat and headed down to the Chiefs Mess two decks below.

"You're absolutely certain no one else noticed the tracks?" interrupted Dr. Dave Campbell as he scribbled notes on a notepad at their temporary campsite.

"As certain as I can be. I didn't want to draw attention to them myself because I wanted the watch standers to notice the tracks on their own. Like they are supposed to do," replied Andy.

"Okay. Please continue with your story Andy," replied Dr. Campbell.

The sun was beginning to set behind the trees, darkness quickly overtaking the thick forest. Dr. Ken Johnson switched on a couple of compact fluorescent camp lights bathing the clearing in good light.

Unable to sleep, Senior Chief Cline made his way back up to Combat. He had gone through again and again in his mind what the source of the strange contacts could be. What on earth fly's like that? Certainly nothing that he had

ever witnessed before and he had spent a lot of years staring at radar displays.

After making a lame excuse that he couldn't sleep to the questioning tactical action officer on watch, Senior Chief found an empty console at the back of Combat. The contacts, six of them this time, were still there. Although they were presumably different contacts than the group he had monitored a few hours ago, they were making that same strangely coordinated progress from north to south. This group too was at 28,000 feet and traveling around one hundred knots.

No one in Combat was paying any attention to the tracks.

Senior Chief verified the War Diary was still on, took out a pad of paper and started taking notes. Something very strange was definitely happening. Senior Chief Cline spent the last few hours of the early morning quietly observing the peculiar radar contacts.

"What's up Senior?" the off going tactical action officer asked him as he sat down in the empty chair at the Front Table in Combat.

“I’ve been watching those contacts for some time now. What do you think?” asked Senior Chief Cline.

“What contacts Senior?” the TAO immediately replied turning his attention back to the large screen displays.

In response, Senior Chief Cline hooked one of the tracks. The information instantly displayed on the console.

“Oh those. We’ve been discussing them all night long. You ... you pointed them out several hours ago, remember?” replied the perplexed officer.

“In fact Senior, the captain is making his way down now for his morning brief. It would be great if you help me brief him,” continued the TAO.

Senior Chief Cline just looked at him. Although he had been in Combat since very early in the morning, no one had said a single word about the contacts, especially not him. All of a sudden it seemed the entire air side of Combat was talking amongst themselves about the curious tracks. They were all behaving as though the contacts were common knowledge and a subject of great interest during the long night watch.

But, that simply was not possible. He had been there all night and no one had even seemed to notice the tracks, let alone talk about them all night.

“You’re sure about the time you had the discussion with the TAO?” inquired Dr. Campbell interrupting him once again.

“Absolutely, the TAO was five minutes late getting relieved. I remember it distinctly,” replied Andy, “that was a very strange day. I can recall many mundane details that I normally wouldn’t concern myself with.”

The two doctors simply looked at each other their eyes speaking volumes. They both seemed to be agreeing on something but were doing it silently.

“What is it ... what did I say?” inquired Andy seeing their strange looks.

“I’m not sure how to tell you this but, the contacts were not there until the precise moment you mentioned them to the TAO,” said Dr. Campbell carefully.

“The hell they weren’t! I have notes! The CEC War Diary recordings clearly showed them during the entire time,” injected Andy, “I ... I, talked to the Nimitz pilots who intercepted the damn things. They all claimed they looked like giant Tic Tacs and kicked their asses in dogfights!”

“Let me finish,” the scientist stopped him. “Andy, we know what happened after your captain agreed to intercept the contacts. We talked to the pilots too and have seen the radar recordings of the objects traveling Mach 15 and going from 28,000 feet to the ocean’s surface in less than a second, point seven eight seconds to be exact. When the

interceptors left the area, the objects shot straight back out of the water and resumed their prior course, speed, and altitude. We know their capabilities, believe me. I said they weren't actually there until you're conversation with the TAO, not after," explained the scientist.

"Andy, the contacts you saw were real. However, they were approximately five hundred miles to the northeast of your ships until you spoke to the TAO. Your team didn't fail you - the objects simply weren't there until that instant in time."

"Okay. You've got my attention. Just what the fuck are you talking about," asked Andy who was now seriously concerned about his own sanity.

"What I'm about to tell you is classified at the highest levels in the government. Even the President doesn't know about the project. Andy, I need you to tell me to continue," replied Dr. Campbell.

Andy saw that the scientist was deadly serious. He also knew that he should not be making this decision lightly. He got up off the log and looked into the trees, the last rays of the sun stabbing his eyes. Just what in the hell was going on? What did they want from him? On the other hand, he had come this far hadn't he? This would probably

be his only chance to get answers to questions that haunted him for years. He turned to face the scientists.

“Go ahead Doctor. I’m ready to hear what you have to say,” replied Andy.

“Okay,” the scientist paused, nodding his head slightly in agreement, “the objects you stumbled on were part of a research experiment. Out in the Nevada desert we have a complete mockup of the Nimitz Strike Group, or more precisely, all of the sensors and computer systems. We can track everything that the actual strike group can with our multiple radars, electronic support equipment, and identification gear. Even our Combat Information Center is similar,” the scientist paused, shifting his seat on the log clearly uncomfortable speaking about this subject.

“The objects themselves were ... are, highly advanced technology based on experimental quantum mechanics. We got the materials, a sort of metal, and other technology from ... well, let me just say it’s not from around here. Anyway, on December 17 and 18, 2005, we were using our mockup to continue with a series of experiments trying to determine how effectively a U.S. Navy armada would be able to detect and track the objects. Andy, somehow you alone were able to see the objects exactly as if they were flying over the real ships, your ships in the Pacific Ocean. I

assure you Andy, no body else saw them because they really weren't there at the time," Dr. Campbell paused again searching Andy's face. He decided to just continue after seeing his blank stare.

"At exactly 0651 on December 18, 2005, our objects in the desert suddenly vanished," the scientist swallowed hard, "and reappeared over your ships in the Pacific, as we only later discovered. 0651 was the exact moment of your conversation with the Princeton TAO. We don't pretend to fully understand the quantum physics involved but somehow, the memories of your crewmates instantaneously adopted the memory of the objects as well. So did all of the ship's systems in the entire the strike group. Although we can't confirm it, the CEC War Diary likely did not record a thing until you verbalized your awareness of the objects. At that instant in time, a previously unproven theory in quantum physics invoked itself and an alternate reality simply copied itself over the past several hours."

"Andy, you were the only one to notice. Even though you could not have understood what happened at the time." The scientist then visibly relaxed as if a great burden had just been lifted from his shoulders.

"But how ... *why*?" asked Andy quietly, greatly disturbed by what he had just heard.

“Because Andy, you’re apparently an Ideal Observer. A See’r,” replied Dr. Campbell. He had that same look of awe again.

“I ... I don't understand how this is possible,” Andy stuttered.

“Look, I know this sounds crazy but you were apparently able to see the twin set of quantum particles. It’s a principle Albert Einstein once described as spooky behavior at a distance. Scientists have theorized that, at the quantum level, two paired particles, twins as they’re sometimes called, maintain their relationship with each other even though they can be separated by light years in distance. We can only guess as to why, but a second set of quantum particles, the twins to our research objects, existed in unreal space above the real strike group even as their real twin particles existed over our mockup in the Nevada desert. Of course, the second set of unreal objects above your strike group were not actually there in the version of reality that was invoked at the moment,” the scientist paused again. He knew the explanation was confusing and he didn't want to lose Andy.

“When you communicated an awareness of the alternate reality,” the scientist continued as he searched for the right words, “at that precise moment, the tied realities

changed places with each other! And, our objects in the desert instantly reappeared over your ships.”

“So what does this mean, how am I involved with this now?” asked Andy after barely following what the doctor had described.

“Don’t you understand? You apparently have a very powerful gift,” the doctor replied.

“Andy, imagine the interest of the government in a person who is able to make quantum particle war machines suddenly appear in the enemy’s backyard.”

Andy sat on the log, completely speechless for several moments. He was thinking about everything he had just heard, and reviewing in his mind again the events from three years ago. The red sky in the west was barely visible now through the tall trees, the forest almost entirely engulfed in darkness. The heat of the warm June day was beginning to lose the fight to the coolness of the coming night. The scent of pine forest baked by the fullness of the day's sun was diminishing too. Or, perhaps he was just getting used to the once familiar pine smell again. The two scientists remained silent, giving him time to think and assess the profound significance of what they had told him. It was some time before Andy was ready to speak again.

“Let’s assume for the time being that I accept your explanations, as absurd and fantastical as they are, there’s still a couple of things I don’t understand,” Andy finally said breaking his silence.

“How can you be absolutely positive that I’m what you claim I am?” continued Andy. “Also what about you two, you’re *them* right? You have been involved with this, with the government, from the beginning. So, why exactly did you come here? Why would you risk everything just to tell me this?”

“Andy,” it was Dr. Ken Johnson that spoke now finally breaking his long silence, “it’s absolutely vital that you understand the importance of why we are here so I will answer that question first. Then, we have a test we want you take that will answer your other one. Okay?” replied Dr. Johnson.

“I’m listening,” replied Andy.

“My field is mathematics and I’m probably the world’s foremost authority on the esoteric math involved in quantum physics. Quite simply, we are here because the government refuses to listen to our warnings. They want to use you, and so did we at first, to assist them in quantum experiments. The fact is that this research is so new that

until very recently nobody understood how to best make use of your abilities. Andy, you have been under constant observation by the government for several months now, as insurance to your safety. They were still trying to figure out the best way to approach you, but we managed to get to you first.” Dr. Johnson paused searching Andy’s face for questions. Seeing none, he continued.

“You see, although a See’r would enable never before possible observation of quantum experiments, you also have another ability that was never anticipated - not even by our ... our friends. It was a surprise to everyone that See'r's, apparently, also have the ability to invoke alternate realities. Worse, the mathematical models strongly suggest there is no limit on the magnitude of those events should they occur. In other words Andy, given the wrong laboratory experiment you could unintentionally replace a city, the entire world, or even the entire universe with another reality. Basically, we could very easily fuck up and unleash the power of the Big Bang itself! If you so much as gain the awareness of the alternate reality by observing the unreal twin pairs of quantum particles like you did three years ago, the co-realities could immediately trade places with each other. Everything and everybody could simply disappear in the wink of an eye! The problem is that we

have no way of knowing which experiments would be completely benign and which ones would result in disaster, the science is just too new. The government seems quite willing to play with fire, Dr. Campbell, I, and certain others of like mind, aren't. We made the decision to give up our lives if necessary in order to warn you."

"But how can you be so certain that I have this ... this thing?" asked Andy, now convinced his so-called gift was a curse.

"Yes, your other question," answered Dr. Johnson thoughtfully.

"Andy, we have a test we want you to take that will answer that question beyond any possible doubt," continued the doctor.

Dr. Johnson opened his backpack and pulled out a silver attaché case. Opening the box he removed a device that resembled an oversize pair of sunglasses. He also removed a handheld device that looked like an iPod player.

"This device was given to us by some friends of ours. They designed it to test for Ideal Observers. Although not quite quantum experiments, the mathematical models that run on this device are very close approximations of them. The test subject simply dons the device and the test begins. As each math model runs, each step in the math problem

gets represented by a three dimensional fractal image looking a lot like a Windows computer screensaver. This process simulates the act of observing the quantum experiment, without the danger involved with the real thing. When the current question is finished, the answer will be represented by an everyday object. Like a cat, a banana, a lamp, or a boat - could be anything. The test subject simply says aloud the image they see,” explained Dr. Johnson. He paused to see if Andy was following this explanation.

“Then, the next problem will start. Each math model is repeated at least twice randomly. An Ideal Observer will observe the same result time after time because they are able to do so without introducing observer perturbations. A non-Ideal Observer would never be able to observe the same result because the perturbations they introduce always change the final outcome. It is impossible to cheat or guess correctly because the odds of it happening are simply astronomical – no pun intended,” he finished. Dr. Johnson’s eyes twinkled with humor in the glow of the camp lights.

Andy looked at both of the doctors and then reached out for the headset. Dr. Johnson got up and helped Andy set it comfortably on his head. Immediately, the test began.

“Shoe ... fence ... baseball ... ship ... bat ... fence,” Andy continued for several minutes as he observed the colorful and strangely beautiful images, each one followed by a common object. Quite suddenly the view inside the headset device went dark and he felt hands removing the device.

“Well?” inquired Andy after seeing Dr. Campbell standing beside him with the headset in hand.

Dr. Johnson simply turned the iPod looking device so that Andy could see the display. It read 47 / 47 in large green numbers. The doctor’s satisfied expression told the rest of the story.

“What should I do?” asked Andy sadly. He knew his life was over. There was no where he could hide from this, hide from *them*, and he knew that too.

“We can only tell you what we would do,” replied Dr. Campbell solemnly.

“Andy, we may have a way out of this if you’re willing to play along.”

In the glow of the camp lights, Andy could see that both doctors were grinning ear to ear. At that moment, as if an electrical storm had just passed overhead, the clean crisp smell of ozone suddenly invaded the scent of pine.

"*Oh my god,*" was all Andy could manage when a new presence suddenly joined them in the small clearing.

"Go overt. Secure the See'r. Right now!" barked LT Colonel Ben Kennedy into the secure telephone.

"Send in the OST units. One in the last known position of the doctors, the other to search the woods around that technology park. Take the doctors alive if possible, kill them otherwise. Do not harm the See'r!" he slammed down the secure phone and left to make his way to the airfield.

The panicked Air Force officer had no options left. Although he had no way to know if the doctors had made contact with the See'r, he wasn't taking any more chances. He had to get to the See'r before they did and had decided to use overt strike teams to do it.

Andy was surprised when the office door opened quietly, it was locked and he was expecting it to be blown off its hinges instead. He lay on the couch in the office pretending to be asleep. He was fully dressed back in the clothing and personal possessions that he now knew to be bugged. The four members of the security force didn't say a word as

they set up a defense perimeter at the door and in front of the couch where he lay.

“Are you Senior Chief Andy Cline, social security number 345-78-9911?” asked LT Colonel Ben Kennedy as he strode confidently into the room.

“Yes sir. Just who in the hell are you guys?” responded Andy.

“Don’t play coy with me Senior Chief. We found the doctors in the forest. The cowards didn’t even try to run,” said the Air Force Officer dryly. “Get up, you’re coming with us.”

“Um, Colonel. My friend over there might have something to say about that,” Andy replied with a broad smile looking in the direction of the water cooler.

“What fucking friend, get ...” the officer started but stopped suddenly.

Preceded by the smell of ozone, a tall Gray suddenly materialized out of thin air in the corner of the room. The Air Force Officer immediately recognized the Gray, he was one of several aliens that worked alongside his government researchers.

“What are you doing here Onat?” the now nervous officer asked the alien.

“To make you a deal Ben,” replied the Gray in perfect English. “Leave the See’r alone and we will remain hidden from the American public. We will continue to honor our contracts.”

“But ... but, we have a trade agreement! You can’t do this!” yelled the furious officer.

“We can and we will. You have no idea what you’re playing with Ben. Even Grays are afraid of *God* you fool!” Onat shot back in an unmistakable challenge.

The officer just glared, fully aware they were powerless to harm or interfere with the alien.

“Touch the See’r and the next place I materialize will be the floor of the United States Senate. I’m sure C-SPAN viewers will be very interested to hear what’s been going on in their government.”

Andy would later swear the alien’s smooth featureless face actually formed a smile.

Second Chance

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Preface

Life onboard a United States Navy ship is a mirror of life as found in most other places. Sailors can certainly experience excitement, adventure, camaraderie, and great accomplishment. They can also experience boredom, fatigue, frustration, disappointment, and great failure.

This is a story of a sailor who is experiencing the latter and contemplating suicide. The author uses the all too real fictional account to expose the reader to a few of the less glamorous aspects of life at sea onboard a modern U.S. Navy warship.

Ensign Mike Bassett stared blankly at his feet in the darkened bunkroom, a man completely defeated. Barely illuminated by the soft red glow of several night lights, he sat hunched over at his tiny desk with his forehead resting on his forearm. He felt at least a little seclusion in the cramped six-man bunkroom reserved for junior officer personnel. Ensign Bassett was stealing a few moments rest, hiding really, before heading up to the bridge for another long mid-watch. He listened to the sleeping sounds being made by his shipmates, jealous they could apparently forget their troubles and sleep. Unwilling to join them and even try, he instead sat and listened just feet away in the small, cramped space they all called home. Purposefully still, Mike faced his torment. His screaming mind the only thing he allowed to betray the fragile quiet.

Mike Bassett was in a terrible battle with his thoughts. He sadly realized that in spite of his best efforts he was failing miserably. Since arriving onboard the U.S.S. Chosin things had gone disastrously wrong for him. His first job as a junior naval officer and he was ready to quit. It was worse than that though, he was nearly ready to give up entirely.

Not yet ready to contemplate how he might do it, he had already accepted the idea of death as a quick end to his misery. The suffocating, merciless anguish he felt would

forever be struck dead - suddenly and finally. Mike sat motionless, letting the shame and guilt of his suicidal thoughts struggle with the tantalizing promise of nothingness. As the drama played itself out again in his mind, Mike knew that shame and guilt was also the only thing keeping him alive right now.

With workups for the quickly approaching deployment to the Middle East well underway, Mike had not slept in almost two days. When did he have time to sleep? For Ensign Mike Bassett sleep was completely restless anyway, a too short and unsatisfying escape from the reality of now. Quickly losing his will to survive, Mike's mental struggle was blossoming into full blown insomnia.

Mike's understanding of his future was growing as well. He was learning why so many people decide to end it all. Starting as a small grotesque seed of thought, his empathy for suicide victims pushed ever deeper in his mind, and was now firmly rooted his psyche. He no longer considered himself a better person than those who succumb to struggle and willingly take their own life. In fact, he now felt ashamed and embarrassed that he had ever felt that way.

The outrage of being stuck in heavy traffic last summer now returned to him with the feeling of a large

block of ice slowing melting in his stomach. How could he have ever been so callous as to will a poor homeless lady to hurry up and jump? All because she was tying up traffic on the Coronado Bay Bridge and he wanted to get home. Was he really that heartless, that, *unknowing*?

A starkly brutal awareness, almost acceptance really, was growing within his tortured mind. The finality of death both scared the hell out of him and urged him on towards it. He wanted to die and the shocking trueness of that fact made him want to hide from everyone and everything, just like he was trying to do now. Mike wondered how much longer could he believe his own lies and continue faking it on this ship. Continue acting like he was alive when in reality, he already considered himself quite dead. In the darkness of the sleeping bunkroom, Mike's mind continued to race, wrestling with itself, breaking down his remaining will to survive. Even pleasant memories now seemed to collude against him, joining the bad in a vote of death. His death.

What should be anchors of hope in his life, were instead weighing him down, dragging him to the bottom. Good thoughts, good memories. Even memories of Sherry had now turned against him.

The young Vietnamese girl he dated lived on 43rd Street, just north of University Boulevard in a small rented apartment she shared with twelve family members. Perhaps it was just the spontaneous memory of her or else the unmistakable smell of fried garlic really was floating up from the galley one deck below. Memories were one thing, but were smells also conspiring against him? He could actually taste fried garlic, burnt in cloudy week-old oil, just like the first time he entered Sherry's apartment and the strong odor immediately invaded his mouth and eyes, saturating him like it did everything else in the tiny place.

Small it was too, with nowhere for stench to hide, just like this musty bunkroom. Like him, Sherry lived in a confined space, where almost every act is public, and no way to be alone. With everyone working different schedules of the day and night, she was always surrounded by activity. The girl slept with the other women in the apartment's only bedroom. Her clothes and personal belongings stacked neatly by her small encampment on the floor. Not that much different than his small bunkroom with only a coffin-sized rack in which to sleep and an urn-sized locker in which to store belongings.

Like it must be for her too, Mike had no place and no where he could truly hide. His at-sea living conditions and

hers on land were worlds apart but yet hauntingly similar. At least Sherry could walk out the door, jump on the trolley, and go somewhere else. Like over to his apartment where she made love to him with a naked fierceness that always startled him. Even now the arousing memory of her tight, girlish body threatened to interrupt his dark mental panorama. Unlike her though, Mike had no where else he could go - no matter how fiercely he desired it. Except, of course, to The Final Place.

Mike's life at sea came with very little privacy, never-ending watches, a mandatory-meeting-happy Executive Officer, an impossible-to-please Commanding Officer, fast-food that was certain to result in coronary failure or terminal acne, and a division full of enlisted personnel who didn't seem to care about much of anything - especially not the United States Navy. Worst of all for Mike right now was the fact he had nowhere to go and hide. He remembered a puppy he owned once that had taken ill. After missing for more than a day, the biochemistry of advanced rigor mortis shouted the whole story even before found the poor thing dead behind the clothes dryer. With its last bit of strength, the little dog had sought out a comforting place to hide and accept the death it knew was coming. Mike wondered how soon death would be coming

for him too. Was that his reason for wanting to hide? So that Death would know where to look for him? For the time being at least, he met his need to hide, right here, at his small desk in the relative quiet he found after 2200 hours at night. Most of the time though, he would simply lay down on his rack fully clothed, slide shut the thin privacy curtain, and stare at the dust covering the overhead light just inches from the end of his nose. To assuage a sudden wave of recurring guilt, Mike's tortured mind retorted that no one could really survive in this environment.

“Why would anyone want to?” he whispered, mindful of his snoring bunkmates.

Mike knew his thoughts were rambling, jumbled together in a skull that threatened to crack open any moment, exposing his noxious thinking's to anyone that happened to be there when it finally happened. He didn't care though - he allowed his mind to wander freely as he sat in the dark. His attention catching only brief random thoughts like scenes from a too familiar home movie left on with no one watching it. Even now Mike thought hard about refusing that job offer in Detroit after graduating with a bachelor's degree in marketing from Michigan State University. Entry level job or not, he would much rather be there than stuck here on this so-called warship cutting

endless circles in the ocean off the coast of San Diego. What was he thinking when he decided to apply to Officer Candidate School? He knew the answer to that question though. He wanted to get as far away from Michigan as he could. At least he had succeeded in doing that. Now that he was here though he wondered what had been so bad about life in Michigan that he had traded it for this.

Mike honestly did not know how much longer he could go on. All he wanted was to get away from here, find his own warm place to hide, and curse death until the grim son of a bitch was insulted enough to find him. He was ready to die but wanted Death to kill him.

The U.S.S. Chosin had been underway for two weeks, a continuation of at-sea training periods lasting nearly a year. The ship was assigned duties as the Air Defense Commander for the NIMITZ Strike Group and was participating in a fleet graduation exercise known as JTFEX. It would be the ship's last major exercise prior to deploying to the Middle East in support of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM.

Mike only had a few minutes left in solitude before had to head up to the bridge for another long mid-watch. About the only good thing about the upcoming watch was the fact that the captain would likely not be there to

criticize his every move. Hopefully, the watch that night would be uneventful and the asshole would remain asleep in his stateroom one deck below the bridge. Mike knew he should be doing a million and one other things with these precious few moments, but letting his mind rage in thought satisfied his resolve the most.

“What’s up?”

Mike jolted. The sudden voice startled him badly.

“One of your guys in trouble again?” LTJG Ken Springfield continued, not seeing his friend jump.

“No. Just trying to clear my head before I go on watch,” replied Mike quickly, his pulse now racing full throttle in his ears.

“Got the watch on the bridge again,” too high-pitched, his voice behaving strangely in his throat. Mike forced himself to recover. For weeks now, he made every attempt to keep his torn emotions well hidden.

Mike hoped that his reply sounded far more genuine than it felt coming out. With that lingering sense of guilt, he did his best to smile in the dark. Caught off guard, Mike did not hear his friend enter the stateroom. Just relieved from watch in engineering, Ken was hoping to catch a few hours sleep. Tomorrow was sure to be another long day at sea.

Ensign Mike Bassett and LTJG Ken Springfield had become close friends. They bonded quickly after discovering they were both active distance runners. It happened within the full five minutes it took for the next closest runner to cross the finish line of the crew's last one and a half mile run. They now shared an apartment in Point Loma and usually spent their free weekend's together running, partying, or just kicking back at the place. They planned to participate in the San Diego Marathon after returning home from deployment.

Ken had been deeply concerned for his friend Mike for several days now. In fact, he was scared. Once so easy going, Ken couldn't believe how much Mike had changed. He wondered if others had noticed too. Mike seemed to have almost completely withdrawn within himself. Now often unresponsive, refusing to eat or sleep, his already skinny frame was beginning to look almost skeletal. Ken wondered if his close friendship allowed him to see what seemed so painfully obvious. The six-months-ago-Mike and the now-Mike were exact polar opposites.

Knowing something far more menacing was lurking just behind Mike's outwardly upbeat appearance, Ken sat down at his desk next to his friend.

“Mike, I know you’re very stressed out right now. I’m your friend, I can see it. Hell, when was the last time you slept?”

Not receiving a reply, Ken continued, “Give it time Mike and take it easy brother. Being a junior officer on a ship like this can really suck sometimes. Shit, most times. It’s going to take time but things will get better.”

Mike turned to face his friend.

“Ken, you’re my best friend in the world right now and I know you can see it. I tried but I can’t hide the truth from you any longer. Jesus, how long am I going to be able to fake it with everyone else?”

“Fake it? What are you talking about?” Ken gently asked his friend.

“Ken, don’t you get it? I hate this fucking place!” Mike replied much too loudly as he pounded his fist on the desk. “My life sucks and I need to find a way out of this shit!”

“Mike, I ... I” Ken stammered before Mike cut him off in mid-sentence.

“Why the fuck does the captain ride me so hard? He knows OI Division was screwed up well before I ever got here. How can he expect a junior officer with only a few months onboard to fix it? Jesus, he wants results

overnight! *God damn it.* Fix it he says? Fuck it! Fuck him! When do I have time? All I seem to do is stand watch and attend ridiculous mandatory bullshit when I should be sleeping or spending time with my guys instead. I wish I had never signed up for this fucking joke. I really fucked up my life didn't I?"

Mike's sudden revelation hung naked and ugly in the small space. The sleeping sounds from their bunkmates ceased, made instantly aware now by Mike's angry and frustrated outburst. A long and uncomfortable moment followed before the drone of the ships gas turbine engines could mercifully rush in and drown the awkward silence.

LTJG Springfield just watched as Mike stood up and left the stateroom. Ken reasoned that his friend would probably be just fine. The fresh air on the bridge would definitely help Mike more than anything he could say or do right now anyway. Ken satisfied his growing concern for Mike's well being by promising to keep a closer eye on him. He would talk to Mike again tomorrow. Right after the daily operations brief was over.

Ken knew that Mike was taking his failures as a Division Officer pretty hard. They discussed it often while on liberty together. Even though Mike had tried, he just couldn't

seem to bring order to the chaos that persisted. The problems within OI Division were no secret and not at all at result of Mike's doing. At last count, two of Mike's sailors remained absent without leave and yet another had been sentenced to prison last month for dealing methamphetamines from his off-base apartment. Dealing onboard the ship was also strongly suspected but so far no one had been caught.

It was almost a daily occurrence that an OI Division sailor would get written up one charge or another. In fact, since Chief Elders retired last year leaving OI Division without senior enlisted leadership, Captains Mast for OI Division personnel was almost a weekly event onboard the ship. The division had gone from one of the best onboard to the absolute worst in less than a year.

Ken felt terrible for his friend. How could someone with so little experience fix something so fundamentally broken? Ken wondered if he himself could be doing any better if he had the unfortunate job as OI Division Officer. He seriously doubted it.

Ken thought the Navy must be totally crazy. OI Division is comprised of Operations Specialists, highly trained enlisted personnel that man Combat Information Center or more informally referred to as Combat. The nerve

center of the ship, Combat is the place from which the ship engages its adversaries. A successful Combat team would be absolutely critical to the ships survival in any type of real combat situation.

So, what in hell was taking the Navy so long in getting a new OI Division Chief Petty Officer onboard? The division was in desperate need of leadership, the type of leadership that only a senior enlisted sailor with many years of experience could bring to bear.

To Ken's way of thinking, and every other junior officer sharing the cramped stateroom, it seemed so unfair to hold Mike responsible for a mess he had no role in creating. To make matters worse, Ensign Mike Bassett was ranked last among the five ensigns onboard the ship on the last evaluation cycle. In his debrief with the captain, Mike was told that lack of progress in fixing personnel problems combined with his lack of progress on personal qualifications was preventing him from becoming successful on the ship.

Determined to catch up with Mike tomorrow, LTJG Springfield undressed, climbed into his rack, and set his alarm clock for 0410.

Seaman Steve Alexander zipped up his jacket even tighter and pulled down his stocking cap to cover his freezing ears. Slapping his hands together in an effort to keep them warm, he scanned his assigned section of water and sky as Chosin's aft lookout.

Seaman Alexander was thinking about his car in the dusty temporary parking lot located just outside Naval Station 32nd Street, San Diego. He was pissed off that he had to leave his Mustang, used or not, in that shitty crime-infested place every time the ship got underway. If he could just get advanced to Third Class Petty Officer he would at least be able to park his car on base and away from the dust and criminals that lurked around that area.

The last time he was at sea, some fuckhead had smashed in the passenger side window and stolen his newly installed Polk Audio system! Now he was wise enough to leave nothing of value inside the Mustang and he didn't even bother to lock the car. That fucking window had cost him almost two hundred bucks to replace. It was better to just let the fuckers open the door and discover nothing inside. At least his windows wouldn't get smashed out in the process.

Alone with his thoughts, Alexander turned his attention once again to the portside of the ship. As he

visually scanned the oceans dark surface, he spotted something about a mile out barely visible in the weak moonlight. There bobbing and weaving in the white capped water was what appeared to be a small yellow life raft.

Becoming excited and hoping to get a clearer view, Seaman Alexander quickly scaled the ships railing. Even though he had been instructed never to do this, he was able to gain almost two feet in height and the possibility of losing his balance seemed remote. With a foothold on the lower railing and confident in the fact that he had done this many times before, he strained to focus his binoculars on the life raft so that he could make his lookout report to the watch on the bridge.

“Bridge aft lookout, there is a small *whoa!*” As Seaman Alexander excitedly began his report, his left foot slipped off the damp railing. Fighting to regain his balance, he instead tumbled over the port side of the ship! Just as the lower half of his body splashed into the cold dark water he was able to grab hold of the thick cord that attached his headset to the sound powered phone outlet on the ship’s deck.

Seaman Steve Alexander immediately realized he was in extreme danger. Although he was very strong and just last year broke a long-standing record in pole vaulting at

West Albany High School, he was being dragged chest-deep through frigid water mere feet away from the ships wildly churning screws. The only thing preventing him from being instantly ground into fish food was the death grip he had on the sound powered phone cord. At best he would be swept away in the cold dark ocean in the middle of the night long before anyone even realized he was missing.

Seaman Alexander knew he needed help, and fucking fast, before the cord gave way. He did his best to wrap his right arm around the cord and held on as tightly as he could. Risking the chance he would lose his grip, he used his left hand to key the microphone located on his headset cord.

“Shit! Man overboard, man overboard. Port side!” Alexander screamed into the headset that was now cocked sideways on his head.

Luckily for Seaman Alexander, Operations Specialist Third Class Brent Jones was wide awake. Jones was manning the bright bridge display console on the ships bridge and had primary communications with all of the ships lookouts. Petty Officer Jones immediately reacted to the distress call from his aft lookout.

“Man overboard, port side!” Petty Officer Jones’s voice jolted the quiet on the Chosin’s bridge like an over inflated balloon bursting.

Jumping at the sudden report, LT Stevenson reacted quickly. As the ships officer of the deck, LT Stevenson immediately reached for the ships whistle and sounded five short blasts. At the same moment, Boatswains Mater Second Class Parker, passed the word for man overboard over the ships general announcing system.

“Helm, full port rudder, all ahead full!” Shouted LT Stevenson as he continued the well-rehearsed procedures.

It was night and he instinctively ordered what is known as a Williamson turn. The ship would speed up and turn sharply to the same side as the man in the water in order to clear as much distance as possible between the man in the water and the ships screws. The Williamson turn would cut a race-track pattern through the water and hopefully take the ship back to the last known position of the man as quickly as possible.

“God damn drills! Fuck I’ll be glad to get back into port!” Thundered LTJG Brown as he reluctantly rose from his rack still half asleep.

Whenever a man overboard was called away, all hands were expected to immediately muster to their assigned location on the ship in order to determine who, if anyone, was missing. The captain was notorious for running these drills at the most inconvenient times.

“Hope this is a drill Brownie,” said LTJG Ken Springfield. “No mention of a drill at last night’s brief. I’m heading up to the bridge to see if Mike is doing okay. He must be shitting his pants by now if this is for real. Jesus, the captain won’t wait to flame spray whoever fucks this one up!” LTJG Springfield hurriedly threw on his coveralls and stepped into his boots.

Ken Springfield was actually concerned about Mike for an entirely different reason. He dared to think the obvious. Is this what Mike meant when he said he needed to find a way out of this? Sure Mike had been in a deep funk for several days now, but was he distraught enough to attempt suicide?

Instinctively knowing that something was terribly wrong, LTJG Springfield raced out of the stateroom and headed up towards the bridge. He knew he should have acted sooner to help his friend and hoped he was just jumping to conclusions because he felt guilty. Why had he waited?

“Aft lookout, Combat, report the man’s position!” Operations Specialist First Class Vith said as soon as he donned his headset and punched into Net 52, the lookout communications net.

“I’m the man! Fuck! *I’m the man!*” Seaman Alexander screamed as he desperately held on with one hand and keyed the mike with the other. Alexander’s situation had gone from terrible to deadly serious. As the ship continued to increase speed, he began to skip terrifyingly across the top of the waves like a water skier who had fallen and forgotten to let go of the tow rope. *“Help! God damn it, slow down! Oh Jesus, tell the fuckers to slow down!”*

Already having marked the man’s initial position on the digital dead reckoning tracer, Petty Officer Vith was intent on getting an update on the man in the water. Every 15 seconds he was supposed to report the man’s relative bearing and range so the Officer of the Deck could maneuver the ship and recover the man from the water.

Turning towards the impatient Watch Officer, Petty Officer Vith appeared conflicted by what he just heard, “Jesus, I think the man in the water *is* the aft lookout! He must be holding on to the side of the friggin ship somehow!”

“Bridge, Combat, recommend all stop! *All stop!* The man in the water is the aft lookout! I say again, the man in the water *is* the aft lookout. We believe he is trying to hold on to the ship!” Petty Officer Vith looked around Combat at unbelieving faces as he made his report to the bridge.

“This is the captain, I have the conn!” Roared Captain Rogers as he bolted onto the bridge half dressed. The captain knew this was no drill. All drills, especially those that were to occur at night, would have been approved by him first.

At the same moment the captain took the conn, the report from Petty Officer Vith in Combat blasted from the loudspeaker on the bridge.

“Helm, all stop, rudder amidships!” The captain immediately ordered the ship to come dead in the water. He had instantly understood the significance of the incredulous news from Combat and knew he must stop the ship as soon as possible.

Although the captain couldn’t know how it happened, he did know the aft lookout had, incredibly enough, reported himself as being overboard the ship! The maneuver designed to recover the man would surely kill him instead if he didn’t slow the ship, and damn fast.

Now I really have seen it all thought Captain Rogers as the whine of the gas turbine engines died down and the ship slowed in the water.

“Ensign Bassett, take the Boatswains Mate and go haul the aft lookout back onboard the ship. *And hurry up about it Mister!*”

“Aye, aye sir! Come on Boats, let’s roll!” Ensign Bassett exclaimed only too happy to get off the bridge and away from the captain’s unpredictable and explosive anger. Slamming shut the water-tight door behind them, the two rescuers scrambled onto the starboard bridge wing and down the ladder heading aft towards the fantail.

Ensign Mike Bassett and Boatswains Mate Second Class Parker were gone only a few moments before LTJG Springfield arrived, now visibly frantic. After a quick glance around the dimly lit bridge failed to spot his friend, LTJG Springfield knew the worst must have actually happened.

Mike was on duty and should be standing right next to the helm watch! Jesus, he should be able to reach out and touch him from where he stood! As the Junior Officer of the Deck, Mike would have assumed the duties as lee helm during a man overboard emergency. It was impossible for

Mike *not* to be there, especially with the captain on the bridge!

Instead, Mike was nowhere to be seen. Ken's anguished mind imagined his friend slowly sinking below the waves as he watched the ship race away over the horizon.

In the darkened conditions on the bridge and not at all thinking clearly because of his growing fear, LTJG Springfield did not pay much attention to the captain hunched over the shoulder of Petty Officer Jones at the bright bridge display console. The captain was busily studying the current positions of the other ships in the strike group and preparing to make a voice report over the radio to his boss, Admiral Edwards onboard the U.S.S. Nimitz.

The rescuers had since made it to the fantail and recovered Seaman Alexander from the water. He was now sobbing and shaking on the deck but apparently uninjured. Although Ensign Bassett had pulled his calf muscle during the rescue and was visibly in pain, he was greatly relieved and wanted to report the good news directly to the captain.

Ensign Bassett had just seen the face of death and his heart thumped loudly in his chest. He was overjoyed to see his shipmate safely back onboard the ship. Breathing the

cool night air deeply into his lungs, he felt truly alive for the first time in months.

“Captain, its Ensign Bassett.” Petty Officer Jones said solemnly as he removed his headset and handed it to the captain who was standing in the dark beside him.

Before the captain had a chance to don the headset and reply, Ken ran off the bridge. Unlike the captain, he had totally misunderstood what was happening. Hearing his friends name, Ken thought that Ensign Mike Bassett had just been identified as the man in the water!

In Ken’s tormented mind, his worst fears had been confirmed! His friend Mike must now be surely drowning in the cold dark waters of the Pacific Ocean. Ken turned and quickly left the bridge.

As Ken ran down the ladder and out onto the weather decks one deck below, he cursed himself for not acting sooner. He should have done something! He swore he would give anything to get his friend back alive. If he could just have a second chance! He silently promised God that, this time, he would do everything in his power to help his lost friend.

Ken stood at the deck railing and desperately scanned the dark water for any sign of Mike.

The U.S.S. Princeton was less than a mile off the starboard side of the U.S.S. Chosin when news of the successful man overboard recovery was signaled. The entire strike group was en route to the scene of action to assist in the search for the man and Princeton had been the first to arrive.

Watch standers on the Princeton's bridge had a clear view of the Chosin's starboard side when the clouds suddenly parted allowing the full moon to shine brightly through.

On Chosin's topside weather deck and clearly illuminated for all to see were two male sailors in a long and full embrace. The skinny sailor stood on one leg with his other leg lifted slightly off the deck like that women in the famous World War II photo.

They all gaped at the scene in front of them but no one dared to say a word.

Ruby's Boots

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Preface

Ask a sailor why he joined the Navy and he will often reply “to see the world”. This is a story of the “world” as it was found in the Philippines in the late 1980s. The author uses deliberately graphic language and imagery to expose the reader of how things really were in that once favorite port of call. To the reader who would say this story is too graphic, the author would agree - and add, *you should have seen the place!*

“Come on Frank. Let’s get the hell out of here and go party!” Steve Banks urged his friend and shipmate.

“Hold on a second, I want to talk to this girl,” replied Frank Fontaine, pointing with his chin towards the young Pilipino girl working behind the counter.

“Shit, she doesn’t even look like a bar girl.”

“I know. That’s why I want to talk to her,” Frank said as he started for the sales counter.

Operations Specialist First Class Steve Banks and Sonar Technician Second Class Frank Fontaine were enjoying their second full day of liberty in the Philippines. Their ship, the U.S.S. Gridley, pulled into Subic Bay early yesterday and neither one of them had duty until tomorrow morning.

The two pleasure seekers just checked out of the cheap hotel next door and were heading into town when Frank spotted the girl inside the small thrift shop. Immediately attracted to her, Frank turned to enter urging Steve to follow.

Already past noon, they had both just woken up after a long night of partying. The wild nightlife on Magsisi Boulevard was famous throughout the U.S. Pacific Fleet for cheap beer and beautiful young girls desperate to hook up with sailors who always seemed to have money to burn.

“Hi. Is this your store?” Frank asked, finally catching the beautiful girl’s attention.

“No. It’s my moms. She’s out running an errand and will be back shortly”, replied the girl who was wise to the often crafty advances of drunken sailors. Not all girls in the Philippines were prostitutes! “Can I help you with something?”

Not knowing exactly what he was going to say but wanting to continue talking to her, Frank looked up at the shelf behind the girl. The idea struck him as soon as he saw the perfect solution sitting up there covered in thick dust.

Up high on the top shelf was a pair of ancient looking boots that looked to be about his size. He didn’t really want the boots but he did want to watch the girl as she would have to somehow reach up to get them down. She was wearing a short red mini skirt and her panties were nearly showing now as it was.

“What size are those boots up there?” Frank pointed using only his finger. His eyes continued to admire the girl.

“Those old things? Those boots have been up there since I can remember. Look, there is a department store right down the street and you can get a brand new pair there pretty cheap,” said the girl not wanting to get the boots down or deal with the drunken sailors.

“I know, but my friend is in a hurry and those look like they will fit me. What size are they?” Frank smiled broadly, asking her again.

“Okay, hold on.” The girl said in a defeated tone of voice as she unfolded a small ladder. She didn’t want to have to explain to her mom how she lost a sale. Even if it was that old pair of filthy boots that likely nobody had noticed before.

She was well of aware of what the sailor in front her really wanted. He was attracted to her and hoping to score. The same reason why she rarely wore her dresses so short. At five feet nine inches tall, jet black hair, perfect skin, and a top models figure, she was absolutely stunning. Just turned nineteen, she could have easily passed for sixteen or even younger. Many Asian girls appear far younger than they actually are, another reason they were so popular with sailors looking for a good time.

With the ladder placed close to the large shelf, the young girl reached as high as she could while standing of the top rung. As she did, her short skirt slid up past her hips fully undressing her perfectly formed butt in a pair of very tight fitting white panties.

Unable to grab hold of the boots, the girl reached even higher by standing on the tippy toes of one foot and

swinging her other leg out slightly. The girl's extra efforts on the ladder were just enough so that Frank could easily see her entire crotch. Frank's eyes bulged as the most intimate folds of her small vagina became clearly outlined through the very thin fabric of her panties.

Each time she bounced up on her toes and kicked out her leg, her vagina opened ever so slightly revealing her firm erect clit. The girl's tight panties wrapped her smooth tender flesh like the fingers on a glove. It was the most erotic experience Frank had ever witnessed. The sight could not have been more arousing if she had been completely naked. Years later, Frank would still remember this moment. The boots were worth whatever price the girl could ask, whether they fit or not.

Frank was already reaching for his wallet as the girl pulled the boots off the shelf, stirring up a cloud of dust. The boots must have been on the shelf for a long time, because the thick accumulation continued to rain down through a bright ray of sunlight that somehow knifed its way through the store's heavily painted front window.

Safely off the ladder with boots in hand, the girl smiled and said, "The boots are size eleven and will cost you five American dollars. They will have to do you though because my mom won't let me go out with sailors,

no matter how cute they are.” Her voice was not unpleasant but remained stern.

“I’ll take them. Look, my name is Frank. It was really great to meet you.” Not knowing what else to do, Frank paid the girl the money and stuffed the boots in his backpack. He flashed his best smile back at the girl as he left the shop and headed back out onto Magsisi Boulevard with Steve.

“Wow. That was totally worth it!” Admitted Steve as they walked back out into the bright sunlight and stifling Philippines humidity.

“Too bad the bar girls last night weren’t that fucking hot!”

“Damn, did you see that? I’d suck her daddy’s dick just for the chance to kiss her!” Frank replied jokingly as he punched Steve hard on the arm.

“Oh well. Let’s find a place to cool off and start drinking.” As Frank turned to leave, he thought he saw the girl in red mini skirt peeking out the door at them.

Magsisi Boulevard in Olongapo, Philippines, is nearly wall to wall with nightclubs. There is something for everyone. Some of the clubs are totally unpretentious consisting of nothing more than a spot on the sidewalk covered by a

grass or bamboo roof and a few plastic chairs. The bar girls flirt aggressively, probing the weaknesses of passerby's with offers of ice cold beer while flouting their super short mini skirts. Once stopped, large hand fans and chilled wash clothes instantly come into action closing the deal on the now captive pedestrian.

Other clubs are Western style dance joints featuring dark lighting and ice cold air conditioning, Sit down in one of those and two girls appear out of nowhere trapping the prospect between them. The girls know that even the most resolute married men often crumble when caught between two beautiful young girls. Especially when they act like they desperately want to fuck. Inhibitions are methodically destroyed by the constant supply of cheap alcohol as the girl's gentle caresses finally convince a weakening mind that no one will ever know what happened here.

Many American sailors soon become grateful for the fact that prostitution is not only common, but also a respectable way for girls to make a living in many overseas ports of call. The Philippines is one of the best ports too, offering inexpensive food and alcohol, and of course, very sexy young girls. The girls in the Philippines have the extra appeal of their hard earned reputation. The little brown darlings are famous for their honesty and fun-loving

natures. Most sailors love the Philippines and are always excited to return.

As most American sailors understand so well, the United States derives many of its laws from staid puritanical social norms. Many Eastern societies are far more liberal by comparison, a fact that is happily exploited by tireless sailors with a few days of liberty and a pocket full of money. In fact, sailors are often surprised to learn that culture shock does not happen in the Philippines, Hong Kong, Singapore, or Thailand but instead when they return home on leave to places like Rose City, Kansas and Bisbee, Arizona.

A guy can get used to girls fawning all over them and, of course, that doesn't happen back home! The sailor's life overseas is mostly free from familiar societal attitudes. The real shock occurs when a sailor returns home and sees his town through the lens of non-American cultural experience. Even a high school Homecoming game can seem boring, confining, and depressingly familiar to a sailor home on leave.

“What do you say we get something to eat?” Steve asked Frank. They had been drinking steadily for several hours in

the cool air conditioning of the club and he was now hungry.

“Okay, let’s try the American style pizza place down on the corner.” Frank readily suggested after looking around again at the sparsely populated bar.

The best looking girls wouldn’t really begin to show up for another couple of hours anyway. If they were going to last through the night, Frank knew they had better slow it down a little.

“Damn, this pizza is actually pretty good.” Frank said after taking a couple of huge bites.

“It reminds me of ...” Steve stopped. A commotion on the street outside the small restaurant caught his attention. “*What the fuck?*” he finished by asking.

When Frank turned to look, he instantly recognized the girl in the red mini skirt. She would have been hard to miss in fact because she was pointing at them through the restaurant’s front window. A large and still growing crowd of people was formed up behind her. Including what must have been the girl’s mother were about nine Olongapo policeman, even more U.S. Navy Shore Patrol personnel, and tens of curious onlookers. They were all now moving very quickly towards the front door of the restaurant.

“Oh shit. What in the hell did we do?” Frank groaned as he put down his slice of half eaten pizza. He was here to have fun and unwind, not get into trouble!

“Please, tell her to calm down!” The senior U.S. Navy shore patrolman was yelling as the throng of people pushed into the restaurant. The girl’s mother was frantically pointing at Frank’s backpack and yelling in Tagalog quicker than any human could possibly form the words.

“Petty Officer Fontaine, do you still have the boots?” Ensign Pete Kendall asked the now greatly worried sailor, his voice barely audible above the uproar.

“Yes. They’re right here in my backpack. What’s in the hell is going on sir?” the now sober Frank asked the Gridley’s young Disbursing Officer. Clearly out of his element, the junior officer had shore patrol duty and was doing his best to keep the peace between the townsfolk and his crewmates from the Gridley.

“Please! Just give them back to her!” Ensign Kendall replied pointing at the girl’s mother.

As soon as Frank pulled the boots from his bag, the woman grabbed them and turned them upside down over the table.

A thick wad of American one hundred dollar bills fell from one of the boots and hit the table with a dull thud!

Franks mouth gaped as the woman quickly grabbed the money. She then pulled Frank out of his chair and gave him a terrific bear hug. The woman was so happy that she kissed him full on the mouth as hot wet tears rolled down her cheeks.

The girl in the red mini skirt just smiled as she shared her mother's deep relief and happiness.

Three weeks later

“Gents, I need to have your attention for a moment”. The familiar voice of the U.S.S. Gridley's commanding officer blasted from the ship's general announcing system just before taps and lights out.

“This is the captain. It looks like our trusty old evaporators have finally quit working on us. The Chief Engineer says they need to be replaced. Listen, I really need you all to conserve fresh water for about a day and a half, Seventh Fleet has just ordered us to go back into Subic Bay for immediate repairs! I can't have you all smelling to high heaven when we get there. That is all.”

A joyous booming of male voices spontaneously erupted throughout the ship. They were heading back to the Philippines.

“Fontaine, the helo landed last night with mail,” Petty Officer Sides, the off-going Watch Supervisor said as soon as Frank walked into Combat Information Center to relieve him.

“You have a package down in the Post Office and the Disbursing Officer keeps bugging the hell out of me for someone to pick it up. Go ahead, I’ll cover you until you get ...” Frank was gone before Petty Officer Sides could finish his sentence.

When Frank discovered the box was from a Miss Ruby Onguya, in Olongapo, Philippines, he nearly fell down the ladder on this way to the berthing compartment in his haste to open it.

Secluded by his rack, he opened the box. Inside was the now famous pair of ancient boots. Stuffed inside one of them was a Pilipino magazine. The girl in the red mini skirt, Ruby, was on the front cover wearing green cotton pajamas! She was jumping in the air with her shiny black hair flying wildly. Ruby was holding a small red pillow with Christmas tree embroidery. The magazine looked to be for young teenage girls.

This is the letter that fell out of the magazine:

Dear Frank,

November 23, 1989

I figured there couldn't be that many Fontains onboard the U.S.S. Gridley. If you're reading this letter right now my package must have found you!

I remembered your name because the shore patrol man called you Petty Officer Fontains (am I spelling that right?) that day in the pizza parlor.

As it turns out, our little meeting in my mom's thrift store probably changed my life forever. You see, the reason I was wearing that red dress was not to attract sailors. I had an interview later that day for a legitimate modeling job down in Manila.

Believe it or not, the team that came up to conduct the interviews in our local provinces saw me walking down Magsisi Boulevard with a large crowd following me! They told me later that they thought I was famous or something! They were very surprised when I later showed up for my interview! After trying on several outfits and answering a bunch of silly questions, I got the job!

Frank, I'm back in Olongapo now until after Christmas (I'm Catholic). I know I might never get to see you again so my mom told me to tell you that you're a great kisser...hehe...

I would really, really love find that out for myself! Please write me back and let me know if your ship will be coming back here.

With Love,

Ruby O.

P.S. Don't worry - my daddy is up North and won't be home till April.

Jack (1857-1875)

~

Preface

Although based on actual places, dates, and a real American clipper ship named the *Flying Mist*, the author uses fictional characters to describe several aspects of life as a sailor in the mid-1800s.

Meet Jack. He's a hat, a Panama to be precise. And not to be confused with the common fedora which is pinched at the front and worn pushed back on the head as made popular in the Hollywood movies of the 1940's. Jack has a broad round brim and likes to be worn level for best protection from the sun. The same way that President Theodore Roosevelt wore his own Panama after his visit to the Panama Canal during its construction.

You could buy Jack right now for \$3.75 at the Salvation Army Thrift & Boutique in Santee, California. A steal of a deal considering the fact that Jack was made in 1856 in the town of Montecristi, Ecuador, using only the finest toquilla. The price is even a better deal when one considers the amazing life that Jack has had. Now Jack certainly looks un-amazing in everyway. Even now he just rests there on the four-legged folding table along with a pair of dirty white sneakers, a phony crystal bowl that Susie Baker won at the El Cajon carnival, and an old Monopoly game with a house and four hotels missing.

Jack doesn't mind though, he has been in far worse places. In fact, Jack kind of likes it here. Sort of like with people, the thrift store is a kind old folks home for once prize possessions now forgotten and discarded. Besides, since arriving here in April of 1999, Jack has made of lot of

friends – his stories ever popular in the wee hours of the night and sometimes all day on Sundays when the store is closed and no people are around.

Just like this Sunday. A new shipment of things that people didn't want anymore had arrived yesterday and there was quite a conversation being held with everyone getting acquainted. Many of Jack's more talkative friends had already told their stories and now it was his turn again.

"Jack, tell the new arrivals about your first journey across the Pacific Ocean," yelled Dennis, a cheap fiberglass bow with no string, from across the room. Even at .85 cents, Dennis had been there since August of 1995 when Kirby Householders family moved to Portland, Oregon and his dad donated their unwanted junk. Young Kirby Householder was Dennis's only owner but they had many grand times together in the summers of 1994 and 1995. Dennis's stories were favorites in the store, especially the story about the time an errant arrow he shot lodged itself in the front left tire of the Santee Sheriff's personal vehicle.

The room got quiet anticipating Jack's turn to speak, many of them had never even been out of San Diego County before and loved hearing about Jack's incredible and often unbelievable tales.

Jack allowed the quiet to persist a moment before starting. The street outside could be heard clearly again as cars raced by along Cuyamaca Boulevard on their way to somewhere else. A fat black woman and her two cute little girls walked by the front of the store and everyone briefly listened to the youngest one crying about her ice cream. Melted by the July sun it had fallen off the stick and onto the dirty sidewalk right at the peak of her enjoyment. As the girls' crying sounds died away, Jack spoke.

“I was made on Tuesday, September 12, 1856 by Jose Mercado, the finest Panama hat maker in the finest Panama hat making city in the world, Montecristi, Ecuador,” Jack started in his best Spanish accent. “He constructed me from his best weave using eighteen hundred of them per inch and sold me for fifteen dollars in the port city of Santiago de Guayaquil, a tidy sum in those days, to Felix Miles, an American deckhand on the *Flying Mist*.”

The two hundred foot clipper ship had set sail on December 10, 1857 from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and was on its way to Hong Kong with a load of iron ingots and nineteen passengers when her captain, Ebenezer H. Linnell, pulled her into the port of Guayaquil to take on eighty five barrels of Ron extra Anejo, the Ecuadorian aged rum his crew loved so much.

Felix Miles was fair skinned and wanted to good hat to shade his face and eyes during those long days in the sun. Besides, he was drunk and spending money like it was free to come by when he spotted me for sale at the open air market. The young man did have an eye for quality sober or not - especially with the girls I can tell you.

Felix and I spend three days in port and had ourselves a really good time. He was especially fond of young brown skinned girls and together we bedded at least ten of them during our time together in Ecuador. Of course, all of the girls were paid for their services but that was just fine with Felix. Girls that young back home would have surely landed him in jail or killed by one of their fathers.”

“My lord,” blushed Debbie, a 1972 art deco table lamp, “do you really have to tell us all the sordid details?” Debbie was tagged for \$1.95 but as a single lamp would have a hard time getting the price. Her twin sister May was broken in 1983 by Johnny Stevenson, the 8 year old son of a preacher who was playing ball in the house one raining day in June at their proper seaside home in Cardiff.

“Ah, let him go on,” replied Albert, a slightly dented Louisville SL105. With a sticker price of only .75 cents, the aluminum baseball bat would probably sell soon enough.

“The new arrivals deserve to hear the entire story,” he continued.

The thrift store erupted in loud agreement. Most of the old timers were shouting for Jack to continue and all of the new arrivals wanted to hear the story as it really was. When the commotion finally died back down, Jack continued.

“As I was about to explain, that’s the way it was with girls back then in South America, and Felix was no different in that regard than most other sailors. A practical matter more than anything else really, the younger girls were less likely to carry the dreaded diseases and were a far cry prettier than the older ones. Like other sailors too, Felix liked to drink rum and smoke tobacco - we did our share of that!

In those days, the port city of Santiago de Guayaquil had about 25,000 people and was greatly influenced by the Spanish culture. When ships came into port, the population swelled to nearly twice that as merchants and girls came into the city to conduct their trades. Because of the fact the land around the Guayas River was flat and there was very little rock available for construction, most of the buildings in the city were made of wood. So the Spanish style architecture common to most South American cities was not nearly as prevalent in Guayaquil. Everything else was

the same though and at night the port city was a truly wild, fun, and at times, very dangerous place. Pirates invaded the city on a regular basis and actually burned it down twice prior to 1857.

We finally left Ecuador and headed west fully loaded with cattle hides from South America, iron ingots from Pennsylvania, and our barrels of Ecuador's finest aged rum. Good thing too because young Felix was dead broke.

We made good speed across the Pacific Ocean logging 311 miles on March 11, 1857 and 387 miles again on March 12th running in front of a tropical depression moving west and north towards the Sandwich Islands. The ship rode nicely and without incident, neatly cresting the waves and slicing smoothly down their backsides.

On March 31, 1857, we dropped our anchor in Manila Bay, Philippines. Even before we anchored, small boats surrounded us and lots of yelling and bartering ensued between the sailors and the local merchants.

Felix and I were knocked clean over the side by a load of cattle hides being lifted off the deck when he spotted a boatload of young girls waving and smiling at the sailors. You should have seen the boy, pure shameless that one. He was busy yelling and waving me over the top of his head

when the load hit him square from behind. We instantly launched over the side, cart wheeled spectacularly through the air, and landed with a terrific splash in the water just feet from the boat full of girls. A few of them pulled us to safety as a tremendous cheer erupted from onboard the ship. That proved to be the ice breaker, for the next week the crew of the *Flying Mist* had the time of their lives in Manila, Philippines – especially young Felix Miles.

I've known a few sailors in my time and I swear that young man was born for the sea and the adventure of far off lands. I heard him say a number of times that he was more comfortable getting drunk in a grass hut in Singapore than he was in his hometown of Philadelphia. Broke most of the time, he somehow managed to live like a king when ashore. The native people seemed to sense his affinity for them too, because they sure did love him – as did I," Jack faltered. His voice sounded far-off with a longing quality to it.

"Awe, Jack, that's sweet," whispered Lilly, a pink jewelry box with a .94 cent label. Her pop-up ballerina was bent but she still played *Over the Rainbow* well enough.

"Enough with the sappy stuff will ya! I want to hear about the girls!" yelled Frank, a Coleman lantern with a missing bail, from clear across the store. The darkened

room erupted in laughter and appeals for Jack to continue his story unedited.

It was a while before Jack was able to go on though. He was old and had many loving memories of the owners he had sheltered from the sun. They all still lived within his fabric, their very emotions perfectly recorded in rich and vivid detail. A hundred, a thousand triumphs, friendships and lovers, losses and tragedies were also his. Hat's are worn up high where they get to see and hear a lot. And Jack, he had been worn a lot.

“Hurumph,” Jack attempted, trying to clear the tension he felt from the suddenly intense memories. “A humph, yes. Well, we spent a solid week in Manila. Let me tell you that was some kind of place in 1857. The Roman Catholic priests tried their best to control the town but they couldn't make a dent, not really. As wild as Ecuador was, the Philippines was tens times so. Hot, humid, and dirty in the daytime. A little less hot, even more humid, and nobody cared about the dirt anymore after the sun set. But the food was good, the rum was cheap, and the girls, they were young, pretty, and plentiful.

As it turned out, Felix didn't need any money while we were in Manila. They wouldn't have let him spend it anyway. On the second evening in port, Felix was at the

outdoor market where villagers sold their goods. He was admiring the large variety of things available for sale when he noticed a young native boy sitting in the dirt about 50 feet away. The boy was poking at something with a stick underneath a ramshackle building along the street. The boy suddenly fell backwards in fright as a huge black snake reared up above the boy ready to strike him. Recognizing the snake as a highly venomous King Cobra, quite common in the Philippines, Felix grabbed a large green papaya from the table he was standing by and without hesitation, hurled it at the snake.

Amazingly, the papaya struck the snake just below the head slamming it into the wall of the shack. Seemingly without fear, Felix was on top the momentarily stunned serpent like lightening. The young man grabbed the Cobra with both hands just below its head and started wrestling with it trying to get distance between the snake and the petrified boy. Although Felix had his knife with him he was unwilling to let go of the highly agitated snake for fear of getting bit.

Not knowing what else to do and quickly losing strength against the incredibly strong viper, Felix jammed both of his thumbs into the snake's soft throat. The ferocious snake hissed loudly with its mouth wide open, its

putrid spittle stinging his face. The demon's black eyes were locked in a stare of death and hate that sank deeply into Felix's soul. If he let go, he knew he would be a dead man. Using every bit of strength he had left, Felix sunk his thumbnails in as far as he could and punctured through the reptile's tough skin. With a ferocious scream that bunched all the power remaining in his arms, Felix ripped the snake apart at the throat. Instinctively the mangled snake recoiled away from its tormentor, tearing itself from Felix's weakened grip. Felix staggered over the dying snake, the front of him completely splattered with its cool reptilian blood.

Felix had killed the deadly King Cobra with his bare hands. The huge snake lay withering on the ground as the crowd, shocked into silence by what they had just seen, looked on in total disbelief.

A moment later, a loud cheer then went up from the market place. Felix was carried above the jubilant crowd all the way to the local village for an impromptu celebration. It turns out the young boy that he had saved was a favorite grandson of the village leader. From that moment on, Felix's every need and desire was waited on by the women in the village. And every night two new girls shared his hut.

Several days later when we left, the entire Eastern shore of Manila Bay was filled with islanders. The story of Felix and the snake had traveled quickly, and natives from far-off villages had made the journey to take part in the celebration and to see the brave white man who had risked his own life to save one of them. They were waving and crying and playing music. It was one of the most moving experiences I have ever seen. Felix had become an honest to god living legend and probably could have lived quite happily in the Philippines for the rest of his life. But of course, lust for the sea and new adventures drove Felix Miles on.

Instead, it was me that ended up staying in the Philippines. As the *Flying Mist* was tacking out to sea against a stiff Westerly wind, a sudden gust blew me off Felix's head and sent me over the side. Captain Linnell just laughed at Felix's animated pleadings to turn around and pick me up – I'm just a hat after all! The last time I saw Felix Miles he was standing on the starboard side of the *Flying Mist* looking back at me. I like to think there were tears in his eyes but it could have been just the angle of the sun too.

I floated all the way back to shore with the wind and was finally pulled from the water by one of the natives. I immediately became the proud possession of Mayunda

Umagat, the village leader and grandfather of the boy Felix had saved. I sheltered Mayunda from the sun for the next eighteen years until May of 1875 when another sailor entered my life,” Jack stopped his story at the sound of someone opening the front door of the store. It was Mary Albert, the stores manager.

Jack and his friends instantly turned into plain old junk again. They all settled in for the long wait until nightfall when there would be no people around. And Jack could treat them to even more amazing journeys.



Recruit Training Command, San Diego, California, September 1986.

About the Author

Kevin M. Day is a twenty two year Navy veteran. Serving his entire career in San Diego and Hawaii, he completed 7 Western Pacific Deployments and visited many of the countries that touch the sea between the West Coast of the United States and the Middle East. Retired from active duty in November 2007, he is now a Systems Engineer for a Department of Defense Contractor.



Kevin M. Day at the Highway 93 Hoover Dam Lookout in April 2008.