

Mahai

Chapter One

Out in the far west where the earth is colored yellow - gray and desolate stretches of lonely land separate a few small communities of hardened men and a few women who truly believe that there's oil in "thar them hills". Dotting a large area, isolated drilling camps resemble those of the great oil discovery in the friendly rural ness of Pennsylvania that took place in the late 1800's, and most of the equipment used at Mahai looked like it dated from that era.

Guafeng and his partners had attended Harbin Institute of Engineering and Geology, they were superbly trained for wildcatting throughout the chinese hinterland poking holes in the ground trying with a little science and a lot of luck to strike a hefty gusher. The agreement between the partners and the government in Beijing states that all discoveries are owned by the Petroleum and Energy Ministry; the various companies that hit paydirt are allowed to develop their finds with a fair amount of autonomy provided that sixty percent of refined fuel sales become state property, the remainder is profit and operating expenses, this is the present formula created to encourage capitalist endeavor and is considered generous.

This system is outrageously biased in favor of many in the upper echelon of politics and business. The members of those two groups send their family and friends to the engineering school knowing that only graduates of these colleges are granted licenses to find investment money, mostly from foreign sources, set

up petroleum based businesses and most importantly, stake claim to real property.

Guafeng is one of those fortunate few coming from that privileged class, he recognized early on the potential for returns and promised himself that 'I'm going to be the Chinese Rockefeller'. His father, Lee Song Min, is a high ranking accountant in the Ministry of the Treasury and Finance, Wigi Aiying, a charming woman, is General Director of the Xian Cultural Commission over seeing a ever growing art exhibition in one of China's busiest tourist destinations, she is Guafeng's mother.

In the masculine outskirts of Mahai 70% of the population is male, there is a handful of women who work in the camps as laborers, how there are some who are 'requested' to be there for a special role. Bai Li is one of those women, and she is requested by Guafeng. Her beauty is a distraction for the other men, so much so that Guafeng frowns on her leaving their trailer without his being there; so she stays cloistered most of the day keeping her quarters and skin clean. The comfort that Bai Li provides is a necessary part of living as far as Guafeng is concerned, he doesn't think much about it even though he has a wife in Xian named Fu Kai, the daughter of a shipping executive who met Guafeng at a political rally for education reform five years ago. The marriage is happy, Fu Kai is a smart woman; sophisticated and educated though not as lovely as her unknown rival, she seems attractive through stimulating conversation, active participation in social issues and putting in an effort to please in short, paying her dues.

Another day ends with an orange sun slipping from the sky, yet the camp grows noiser when secondary generators are brought on line, now the inhabitants must put up with thick dust mixed with exhaust on everything and the irritating diesel engines pounding in the dark. Only when everyone is ready for sleep does silence fall across the hovel. "Tonight is our turn for bathing,..odd day", HoTu, another large framed, good natured man tells Guafeng as he jogs ahead. "Slow down, the water isn't going anywhere", Guafeng replied. A light steam filled the enclosure; the odd number men work up a rich lather and talk of the minor, sometimes silly events of the day.

"You are the most spoiled Guafeng.., You'll smell good, eat good food, then eat a sweet woman". Laughed Hotu

"Don't say that Ho,.. Mahai is only an hour away, there are many people there.., many young women who could come out and visit.., you could show them the platform, explain how the equipment works, maybe show them your equipment". The younger men smile and hoot.

"Oh, what a original idea, let me see? My wife will call at 9:00, I'll run it pass her". Again the men laugh and feign surprise. Turning his head slightly, letting the water splash on his neck, Guafeng speaks slowly in a half smirk.

"Well, I'm sure Li Ping is concerned with your health and well being..., she wants you to be happy and ready to work hard each day".

Ho passes a side-glance at his boss.

"Hot sex is a important component for my work performance".

This remark draws howls from the young men as they twist the faucets shut and press towels to their bodies. These young laborers, who come from all walks of life, definitely work hard, they are the descendants of peasant stock that built the Great Wall, staffed the imperial armies, tried desperately to meet the demands of feeding the countless millions and adhered to the centuries old teachings of Chinese philosophers who taught that discipline, honor and family are the foundations of mighty civilizations. The men are more than happy and consider themselves quite fortunate to land employment that pays well and can take them to 'who knows where'?

Everyone heads to the dinning trailer where the tantalizing aroma of food is drowned out by the chattering workers, eagerly grabbing a chair at a long table set for eight. Spotless white plates sit next to large iron woks, inside vegetarian dishes are the norm except for one, which is filled with beef cooked quickly made more appetizing with bright carrots and crunchy radish. After dinner the table is disassembled and comfortable lounge chairs are arranged around a big screen TV fed by satellite broadcast. Lifting his legs on a hassock, the second geologist, Pu Chow mentions a strange rock formation a mile and a half from camp. Chu Teh listens and nods as he opens a letter from his children in Shanghai. Good fortune smiles the next day; instead of a jet black gusher the company hits what appears to be a substantial pocket of natural gas, delirious with euphoria the crew quickly swings into action to cap the escaping gas. This is done just in time for a radio weather bulletin reports a menacing low pressure front with 40 PMW, the perfect ingredients for a blinding dust storm.

The dull beige sand, fine like talc, darkens the sky, it causes men to choke and scatter for shelter, the sun is submerged, blurred out of focus; slowly everything is buried. Safe inside Guafeng proudly radios central management describing Mahai 61 as a 'major' find and in return is congratulated by Beijing, naturally the inclement weather forces everyone to remain put, this includes the day workers who make the drive from Mahai and those who went shopping in the city.

The frontier post of Mahai was originally settled by the infamous Tatars of Asia minor, owing to it's prime location on the trade routes between Persia and the Far East, the other plus is a reliable fresh water aquifer, which had been fought over for hundreds of years. Modern Mahai has precious little going for it as far as a lovely setting; it does not sit at the base of towering mountains, or grace the shores of a picturesque lake; it rose among blunt hills with sparse foliage growing haphazardly during the millennia, then literally abandoned in the 1700's. The city was hastily rebuilt to accommodate the surge of petroleum employees, support staff and where applicable, their families. These pioneers came out to the Chinese west looking for energy.

Bai Li stopped by a friends' beauty salon to get some pampering, like a manicure and facial, trade gossip but mostly to talk to Mini Poo about her on going, yet going 'no where' relationship with Guafeng.

"I'm tired Mini, two years of my life has been spent here, I'm in love...I miss Nanjing, my parents, my old life...he's not interested in my future"...blankly looking out the window Bai Li's soft voice trails off.

While reaching for a slim file and a bottle of scented alcohol, Mini Poo smiles comfortingly.

“Bai, only you know how you feel and what’s best for you, does he ever mention his intentions concerning you... where he will go from here?”

“He says off shore reserves will soon be exploited, we may all move to Fujian”

“So... are you going? No one would criticize you.., I think the change will do you good, still I want to share a little bit of my life with you, it may help you think more objectively. I met and followed someone, he served in the military in Yunnan... I was there... he was transferred to Hainan and occasionally worked in Hong Kong, Hainan is beautiful, but I could not go to Hong Kong. Eventually he met a woman, one younger and prettier, had a son, moved to Fuzhou and we went our separate ways. I had 13 years with him. I then lived with my sister in Hangzhou, we took care a my mother and I met Deng Sung Je, he did business contracting supplies for the Navy. It took him 3 years to tell me he had a wife, but he said he wasn’t happy and was going to get a divorce, seven years later he did get a divorce but married the daughter of a plastics factory owner. Now I find myself married to a good man who is old and not quite healthy, he has children from his deceased wives and is a partner in a trucking company. You see how complex and varied the twists of life can be”.

Bai Li was wiping tears from her eyes then cast a poignant look at her friend then gave up her left hand for its manicure. A TV in the background began to air video of a dirty brown haze enveloping Mahai.

Clogged with dust, the equipment was hard to start. Armed with brushes, brooms, cloth and portable generators that were stored inside away from the open, the men began to blow and clean and start the machinery. All was preparing to finish site 61 and move to another spot within the designated zone where Guafeng could stake a new claim, a secondary crew would be assigned to construct pipelines that will transport the natural gas to refineries at Mahai. In 4 days time the camp, completely mobile, would be settling at its new location some 40 miles farther west. His elated mood was still riding high especially since his wife called and gave him her arrival time. In Guafeng's mind long distance relationships have both pros and cons, spouses must reconcile the fact that living apart is expected if one is to make money, not only in today's business world but in time memorial. As long as he creates wealth, pays proper respect to the family and keeps an upstanding reputation, a man can allow himself a certain indulgence. Guafeng works hard, the harder the work is, the more he loves it and the greater his aspirations grow. So if he takes some pleasure with Bai Li it is more than compensated by all his effort and planning for a brighter future with Fu Kai; whom he truly loves.

Walking around site 62 Guafeng discusses the next days schedule with the staff minus two crucial individuals who said they were on an inspection tour. Pu Chow and Chu Teh took one of the land rovers to the interesting rock anomaly that caught Pu Chow's eye two weeks ago, it was out of the ordinary and he wasn't sure if it was natural. Digging at random places throughout the outcrop of distorted boulders a stunned Pu Chow finds steps and crude Bas

Reliefs of camels loaded with goods, figures of men wrapped from head to toe as if to shield the travelers from the elements.

With quick estimation Pu guessed that the reliefs were about 6 feet in height stretching for several feet protruding from a rust colored rock wall. Now shaking in disbelief Pu continued to shovel away gravel; the swing of his spade so violent that he clips Chu Teh's shoulder slightly breaking the skin. Uncovering a seventh step the duo encounters a large square block heavy with engraving, but the symbols are different from standardized Chinese, it appears archaic, pertaining more to an ethnic minority language. "Chu!.. help me budge the stone maybe if we both..."

The stone was not solid but was made of mud brick that gave way, sending Pu down a dark, shallow annex.

"Pu! are you all right?"

"I'm fine, I think I hurt my wrist.., move from the opening let the light in". A bright shaft of light shone on a specific spot on the floor that looked like it was swept that morning. " Pu, here.., the flashlight". Pu Chow's eyes widened incredulously, he stood slack jawed, stupefied. He had fallen on a wide landing that led to a semi-circle series of steps and a large chamber filled with vases, chests, figurines; huge wooden containers and misshapen shadows, "Ch..Chu, hold my hand".

High on the top of the drilling platform, Hotu signals an all clear indicating that the apparatus has been serviced, examined, and is sound; ready to operate. A fast wave of a green flag tells the machinists to start the motors that turn the

drill bit. As usual the crew seems oblivious to the roar, dust, and smoke swirling around them, their concentration is on their duties, carefully gaging the depth of the well and crossing their fingers hopping for another big hit. Monotony set in until the early evening when a caravan of vehicles were seen snaking toward the camp, 8 sizeable trucks carrying precious supplies, first in line is a van with Fu Kai in the passengers seat. Not waiting for the van to come to a complete stop, she runs to her husband throwing herself into his arms, and he fully embraces her. “You look well husband, handsome and healthy”.

“And you look,.. I missed you”.

“I miss you too, more than words can say”.

Motioning her over to the make shift office, they chat quickly then he turns his attention to supervising the inventory of new material.

As evening falls the camp takes on a festive air not only for the female company but because of the gourmet treats Fu Kai has brought with her; candied fruits, sweet meats in steamed buns, european pastry filled with cream and though prohibited, white wine sent by an American friend from California. Fu Kai is not the only wife to visit; Li Ping and Lai Lu wait on Hotu and Pu Chow respectively.

Close to twelve midnight, workers and guests retire for a good nights sleep, the Pu Chows are the first to excuse themselves. Alone together, Guafeng sensuously removes his wife’s clothes and playfully plops her on his bed, he tenderly climbs between her legs, kissing her belly and caressing her breasts.

“You smell so good, likes always ”, he whispers as his mouth reaches her lips.

“It’s all for you, we mustn’t be apart for so long.., I can’t stand it”. Taking his face in her hands, her eyes shone with longing and sincerity.

“ I only wish that we could find something that we both share,..spend more time together”.

“Now, now.., you know what’s’ at stake here. There is so much potential, so much to gain.., you heard what kind of find 61 is.., no other outfit is doing as well as us.., you can stop working if you want”.

“All true”.., she replies putting two fingers against his lips, “By the same token you don’t have to work in the field.., we can make do with a office position in Beijing”. Guafeng’s brow furrows and he rolls on to her side.

“There’s no way I can stop, not at this point in time.., we have to much invested.., there’s too much money to be made.., this is what I want to do”.

“ I want to do something new too, I want a baby”. Guafeng suspected his wife was going to bring up the subject of children on this trip, their phone conversation hinted as much. “We can start now, I see no reason to wait”. He coos nuzzling her ear.

Tranquility reigned for the next three days, during which there were short interruptions in drilling, Chu Teh consulted with the geological survey bureau puzzled by the lack of progress with Mahai 62, he felt that they should have immediately found another large pocket of gas, another lucky strike, another addition to the legend. The venture had reached a crossroads, within the space of a little over two years Guafeng and associates had made 2 major discoveries

and many smaller yet profitable acquisitions. The trade journals dedicated to the oil and gas industry featured extensive articles about Guageng's firm; who's in it and how do they uncover their energy bonanzas. VIPs from the petroleum ministry begin to fly out to Mahai and confer with the company, which after some deliberations has been renamed Greater Sino Petroleum. It has more than 3,000 employees directly under Guafeng's control, an operating budget of 50 million U.S. dollars, and the priceless cache of being named one of China's top 100 businesses. In the course of all this expansion, there was new management positions to fill. Hotu is now the Director of Machinery, Logistics and transportation; permanently stationed at Mahai. Pu Chow and Chu Teh were made vice-presidents responsible for finance and refinery supervision, these jobs require constant travel. The other machinists and laborers all received promotions and sizeable bonuses. Even Bai Li gets to share in the feast; she becomes a corporate secretary assigned to Guafeng Shi Min, China's youngest oil executive.

"I can't wait to tell him.., he'll be so happy.., we'll finally be a family". Sitting with her mother-in-law at Shanghai's International Airport, Fu Kai is about to burst with joy. Her doctor has told her she is with child expected in July. "And you'll provide a warm, wonderful home for Guafeng and the baby.., Papa and I am proud of you". Wigi Aiyang leans and hugs her daughter-in-law. Unlike many domineering Chinese mother in laws, Counselor Wigi has a mild, kind temperament. She is known as a thoughtful, friendly woman. Educated and

cosmopolitan, she sits on the National Council of Antiquities and Archeology and recently has been asked to become a deputy on the Board of Tourism for Central China. Like her sons she is tall and expressive, fair of complexion with the classic lacquered black hair. "There he is.., and how nice, Carlborg is with him". Fu Kai waves to both men. The American is Carlborg Andersen, a private consultant and now energy lobbyist employed by several American oil companies who want to acquire interest in China's petroleum industry. Andersen who speaks fluent mandarin, met Guafeng four years ago at an OPEC conference held at Jakarta. "Welcome back, how was your trip"? asked Fu Kai "Very successful", replied Guafeng "It was more than successful, we had major breakthroughs", explained Carlborg shaking hands with Fu Kai and Wigi Aiying "Your husband is a great negotiator.., fare, yet hard nosed.., we have to act fast now.., feel like visiting the U.S."? Fu Kai turned to her husband, surprised and impressed. "We'll talk more about that later.., lets get moving".

On the congested freeways of Shanghai the details of the trip were revealed to the two women who formed a captive audience; another massive natural gas discovery, labeled Mahai 68 was reported by Hotu, there was talk of joint exploration in the South China Sea and greater still, the prospect of building power plants to help alleviate the chronic power deficiency in the country. The Guafengs' leased a high-rise apartment close to the waterfront, it was one of the newest and tallest residential towers in the city. "You seem more cheery than usual.., almost giddy", remarked Guafeng quizzically.

“I was hoping you’d notice”. Quickly taking his hand, Fu Kai leads him to a large comfortable couch in front of a spacious window offering a spectacular view of Shanghai, humming a children’s lullaby she declares in sing-song fashion.”

“We’re going to have a baby”.

“We are”? He teased,

“Yes, we are..., congratulations darling”. Fu Kai kisses Guafeng, holding him tight.

“You are happy aren’t you?...This is something we wanted for so long”

“Yes, Yes”, cries Guafeng, “You know this is a dream come true, are you feeling okay”?

Smiling, laughing, wiping tears from her eyes Fu Kai describes the entire doctors’ visit , including embellishment. That evening joined by Guafeng’s parents, Carlborg, and Wu Yee, Fu Kai’s mother. Everyone toasted the happy parents-to-be, possible names were suggested and their meanings. An occasional ringing phone allowed Guafeng to share his good news, he was so busy that it finally dawned on him to call Pu Chow and Chu Teh, before he had the opportunity Pu beat him to the punch. The Vice president wanted to report the performance of locally manufactured vacuum pumps, used within the pipelines to propel the gas from place to place, against foreign designs. Once company talk was over Guafeng casually mentioned that he is a father-to-be, Pu Chow offered his most heartfelt congratulations and inquired of Fu Kai, Wigi Aiying then took the receiver so she could tell Pu that she is sending him the catalogs he spoke to her about.

The Vice-President bought a near by town house in the upscale suburb of Tang Dong, a new development constructed over former small farms. Luxurious and appointed with rare wood the home possessed a certain élan; these are the dwellings of the up-in-coming, the 'movers and shakers' in modern China and Pu fitted in perfectly. He had the fine physique, and proper bearing of someone raised in a 'good' family. His parents are high-ranking party officials living in Fuzhou and never cease to tell their adult children of the clan's very modest beginnings; of the the tough times and harrowing experiences of surviving the regime of Mao. In living in the crowded, poverty stricken nameless towns surrounding the city of Nanjing. The senior Chows pushed and used strict discipline to instill in their offspring the ideals that one must constantly apply oneself in order to escape obscurity and create a world of wealth and accomplishment. It is no wonder that the Vice-President trained his mind, perfected his body and focused on tomorrow's possibilities in an effort to be a winner.

In the past several months, Pu had made a few 'official' trips to Mahai since the mushrooming growth of Greater Sino, but he and some associates began to excavate the rocky outcropping, literally shipping every item via plane and truck to warehouses in Jinan, the capital of Shandong province. The fabulous objects, worth millions of Yuan; in terms of culture and heritage, priceless, were stored in large crates and kept under lock and key. It could be quietly appraised using the artifact catalogues supplied by Jung Chung.

Throughout all this concealment, Chu Teh had been silent; almost

invisible. He busied himself with the concerns of his office, choosing not to be involved or dwell upon the historical treasure disappearing under the hand of his superior. This convenient arrangement may have suited the more stout hearted, but Chu Teh had a “developing conscience”. The deal struck between the two men, a 50-50 split, began to grate on Chu’s nerves; especially after a recent news story regarding an ancient cemetery being pillaged in Hebei was reported in the People’s Daily. Money had begun role in after Pu Chow had sold six vases to a Taiwanese collector who turned around and anonymously donated the pieces to the National Museum, while inquiring if more might be available in the future.

None of this mattered to Chu, a kind of obsession with the rape of the site was settling in, and he was losing control. He sometimes called Pu and spoke in an erratic manner regarding the objects, this behavior was a threat to all that Pu had worked for and dreamed of; now was not the time for cold feet or second thoughts. The men decided to meet at Chu’s home and talk once again.

Walking along Wiltshire Boulevard, Carlborg was trading dirty jokes with Guafeng until they reached the offices of Nova America Energy corporation, this company was chosen by Beijing to assist Greater Sino in the off shore exploration effort 300 miles south from Hainan. Accompanying the two was Ju Yao Ping, Secretary of the Ministry of Petroleum and Energy, he was the only government official of both countries to attend the discussions.

“Good morning, Gentleman”...

“Good morning Gil”...replied Carlborg, “this is Secretary Ju Yao Ping and

of course the man you've heard so much about, Guafeng Shin Min". Nova's CEO is a plain looking, though courteous and amiable late-middle aged man who staged a hostile take over of a struggling oil concern in the early 1990's. In 13 short years, Gilbert Sabol now owns the 9th largest oil and gas company in the U.S. His father had been a close confidant of President Nixon, he visited China with the presidential party and realized that the 21st century would be the 'Chinese Century'.

..." I am honored to meet you Mr. Guafeng, I'm sure many great things will be happening for our two peoples". Carlborg acting as interpreter relays Sabol's remarks and for the next 3 hours, intricate negotiations take place.

..."There may be close to 70 or 80 billion barrels in the south China seas..., we would need six platforms in operation by 2020, two are nearing completion as we speak".

..." Yes Gilbert", Carlborg replied in halting sentences as he rearranged words and inserted definitions while Guafeng waited for clear space to respond.

..."Mr. Sabol, we all agree on the vastness in the south seas but it's the capital commitment that is most vexing..., we would need tremendous flexibility to exploit the area..., given all the variables like water depth, ocean climate, global economic conditions and such"... Nova's chief listened and smiled discreetly to himself knowing the Chinese oil men understood the business the way he and his people did.

..." You are correct Mr. Guafeng, and I can't tell you how pleased I am that we both see much common ground..., we stand ready with a 14 billion dollar offer

and an additional 6 billion in bond and other securities... Greater Sino has obligated 2.5 billion and will be given the labor concession...the contract will divide the profits 60% - 40% for the first 5 years of maximum production, with a renegotiation clause after that”.

Nodding heads indicated that approval was a foregone conclusion, the two CEO's poised over the opulent boardroom table and signed the multi paged and various colored documents sealing the deal. On they're way to the elevators, Sabol and Carlborg stopped to answer questions by the press; Guafeng's attention was drawn to a beautiful blonde talking to Secretary Ju. The brief statements were issued and the party entered the elevator. Carlborg took the liberty and introduced Guafeng to the gorgeous blonde.., “ Guafeng may I introduce Linda Sabol, Gilbert's daughter”. Guafeng extended his hand, but focused on her face, polite conversation ensued and he learned that she spends extensive time in Beijing and Shanghai. She also was instrumental in making contacts in the Chinese government because of her education background and the fact that she spoke Chinese.

“I'm impressed by your knowledge of my homeland and my people.., do you know as much about the oil business as well”?

“Well, I am quite familiar with the energy industry as a whole, but I admit.., I'm just a learner”.

“I see, I see.., I would be more than happy to share my experiences with you”.

“Maybe tonight at the reception”, she replied giving him an engaging look.

Linda Sabol had naturally heard a great deal of Guafeng Shi Min; on orders from her father she compiled an comprehensive profile, complete with photos, on the young entrepreneur. She concentrated on his family background, formal training, personal life and again, on request from her father, a psychological interpretation. Miss Sabol liked what she learned, she recognized Guafeng's drive to be tops in his field, she determined that, although you could not consider him an intellectual his excellent instincts served him well. This combined with his optimism sharpened and heightened his leadership qualities. Lastly, she found him physically appealing, at 6'2" the oil executive looks great in either filthy, oil splattered work clothes or in designer suits. Living out of doors gave Guafeng that rugged, virile feel that many women admire, not to mention the magnetic nuance of success.

..." Great I can introduce you to my wife". They shook hands again and stepped out of the elevator. In the back of their limo, Carlborg and Guafeng double checked all the details of the contract, giddy with excitement, both men could hardly contain themselves; they squealed in anticipation of the announcement hitting the media, catching many in the industry off guard. All other accomplishments paled in comparison, with the consequences for China the most far reaching and rewarding.

If the reserves are as large as reported China will have the capacity to feed her own present and growing needs for 'black gold', with the other astounding possibility of becoming an exporter as well. Guafeng mused back to his earliest memories of his siblings and elementary school, of being taught the

tenets of communist social planning, he remembered the black and white newsreels of the multitudes singing as they labored for country and Father-Emperor Mao. How different things stand now, post 1970's China has cast such a stark contrast to the world Guafeng grew up in. He secretly admitted to himself his intense dislike to the Marxist system and how he could never live under that brand of politics again. His attitudes towards other topics were undergoing examination and change likewise, he began to frown on women in positions of authority; it would be best to have them in the roles of mothers, teachers in girls schools or employed in a health care discipline, places that are subservient to men. He also developed the view that in the vast space of China, homogeneity was always difficult to attain, as such there are certain minorities who are Chinese citizens but, have not one drop of Chinese blood, they don't resemble the people of 'Han', or adhere to traditional practices. They represent a stubborn backwardness, and from his point of view could pose a threat to the stability and progressive policies of a modern China.

Many VIPs were sipping cocktails in the packed ballroom and buzzing over the reason for Nova America's somewhat cryptic press release. This added to the tension and suspense while the Guafengs and their entourage showed how charming and urbane they could be under the critical glare of the American energy elite. The guests were falling over themselves waiting to be formally introduced to this mysterious product of the orient; events like this crystallized Guafeng's image as a major international businessman. The crowd ranged from the governor and other state politicians and the Hollywood glitterati to Chinese-

American artists ready to talk about corporate sponsorship and increased cultural exchanges. Eventually the Sabols and Guafengs took their turn at the podium extolling the rewards and benefit of this joint venture, once again there was the obligatory photo op and then Gilbert Sabol lead the way to a sumptuous buffet. Secretary Ju offered his arm to Fu Kai and Mrs. Sabol stood with her daughter urging others to go ahead of them. Guafeng unobtrusively walked up from behind Linda saying,

“Would you be my dinner partner”?..

“I would be honored”.

Despite the exotic concoctions both ate little and soon Linda was pointing out the city’s landmarks via it’s recognizable lights.

“Are you a native of Los Angles”?

“yes, I grew up in Gardena..., way over that way”. Stretching her arm, she brushed against his chest.

“ And I drove to school at UCLA”. It was a ploy to impress him with her education background.

“Were you active in sports”? he asked asked.

“Somewhat, mostly soccer..., It helped to keep me in shape”.

“And what a fine shape it is”. He added

Guafeng’s face had a sensual look, innocent and honest yet, sending a message which was received loud and clear. Silently they slipped through a side door and took flight up the stairs to Linda’s room, quickly shutting the door behind them, they became locked in a passionate embrace hungrily reaching for each other’s

skin. Guafeng pined her against the locked door and lifted her off the floor as she wrapped her legs around his waist; with one hand he undid his belt then reached under her butt and pulled her underwear. In a rapid movement he penetrated her soft flesh and deeply moaned, he bit her neck and increased his thrusts, perfectly timing with her body until both heaved in blissful climax. Like adolescences who knew that they had to be someplace else real soon, Linda flew into the bathroom while a chuckling Guafeng snapped up his trousers, adjusted his tie and glanced around the room. Noticing the closed bathroom door, he called out "see you", and headed back to the party. All this took place in less than 30 minutes, but some realized the duos absence.

Guafeng reappeared explaining how something 'didn't' agree with him, Fu Kai instantly reached for her purse and produced two white tablets. The rest of the evening went by in pleasant conversation, dancing and guests' hoping that they didn't eat the same things Guafeng and Linda had.

Morning found Madame Guafeng groaning over the commode, occasionally heaving, with literally nothing coming out, her husband awoke and sympathetically rubbed her back,

"I'm fine..., just morning sickness" she said as she rinsed her mouth.

"I think you should rest today,.. no going out".

"But, I wanted to tour the studio..., they went through all the trouble and the Los Angeles Chinese Business Council..., their dinner is tonight".

"That's why I want you to rest, got it".

Fu Kai raised her hands in surrender, just then there was a knock at the door,

spying the visitor through the peephole Guafeng turned the knob. Standing there, stunned and pale as milk was Bai Li, “Chu Teh has died”, forgetting herself she sadly draped herself in Guafeng’s arms weeping.

The scheduled meeting between the two vice-presidents took place not at Chu’s home but, at Pu’s. It was easier to get Pu’s wife out of the house and he had, if needed, useful props in the form of numbers and schematics to show that the ‘goods’ are safe, secure and more importantly, to point out that he, Pu Chow, is doing all the work and taking on the vast majority of risk. Chu cautiously sat down and with a piteous voice began to clear his conscience.

“I can’t take this Pu.., it’s ruining my life.., I can’t sleep, my appetite is off, I have these headaches.., I can’t take it anymore”. Shaking his head with waning vigor he continued; “ Please come clean.., with me.., what we’ve done is wrong, wrong, wrong! There is no way to justify what’s taken place.., we’ve ensconced with our history.., for what?.. money!.., no, no, not any more”!

Temporarily composing himself, Chu feverishly wiped his brow and stared at the floor. Pu sighed, took his friend’s hands in his and spoke slowly and haltingly.

“I would never, ever, at any time, jeopardize your health or welfare or that of your family”.., Chu gripped Pu’s hands tighter, his head bowed.

“ I understand the grief you’re suffering.., perhaps we did act in haste.., everything happened so fast, and I know you’re tired of me saying, but we have a right as private citizens who have found buried treasure to dispose of the property accordingly; this is international law, if a Spanish galleon is located off Cuba, the finders are entitled to a certain percentage; we are in the exact same

position". Chu made an effort to clarify the difference between maritime archeological activity and a similar discovery on dry land.

Pu Chow continued, "It will take time to deal" ..., "To sell" .., interrupted Chu abruptly.

Slowly the distraught Chu began to rub his left arm and twist his neck in a unnatural way, he slumped forward falling into Pu's lap muttering something unintelligible.

"Chu..., Chu...!" a startled Pu gently laid the old man on the floor, realizing it must be some kind of heart attack or stroke, he sprang to his feet and reached for his cell phone. Later in the day, with his family sitting at the foot of his bed Chu Teh passed into immortality. Of course, Pu Chow began to notify those in the loop; first he explained that Chu was taken to the hospital and was having tests done, that was all. He did not contact Guafeng until after Chu was dead. This was a terrible personal blow to Sino's young president and he freely let his tears flow, recounting with his mistress how good a friend and how professional his late partner had been. A surprised Fu Kai emerged from the bathroom, just in time to answer the phone. It was Pu Chow, he figured that Guafeng would have a million and one questions by now, it was very hard for him to collect his thoughts, all he knew was that one of the most respected men he had known in his life was gone, taken so suddenly; no one was aware that Chu even had a heart condition. Things were going so well, so smooth, the company was flourishing; isn't life like that, it gives with both hands and then, as if needing food itself, seizes it's pound of flesh, consumes it so it too can live. Plans were made to

leave the next day, to go home and bury Chu Teh.

Back in Shanghai the Guafengs were besieged by reporters wondering how the capable vice-president's passing would affect the ambitious plans of Greater Sino and Nova America's attempt to make China a major oil producing country. After a short meeting in the airport's VIP lounge, Hotu was chosen to issue the brief statement;

"The management and employees of Greater Sino Petroleum are deeply saddened by the sudden and sorrowful event regarding our outstanding mentor, co-founder and colleague. Chu Teh worked incessantly to create one of the most dynamic companies in China today, he has been an example for all of us to emulate, he was instrumental in every stage of our conception, expansion and future endeavors. We cherish the memory of our friend and offer our most heartfelt condolences to his family".

The party then headed to Chu Teh's residence, Guafeng had ordered all top brass of the company to Shanghai for the memorial observance, but this afternoon he wanted to express his sincere loss to the widow and her children. Formal messages of sympathy were being sent from members of the communist party, high ranking bureaucrats in the state, foreign energy concerns and the National Petroleum and Energy Ministry, numerous business leaders and many, many nameless persons who came who came to know the amiable Chu Teh. Ju Yao Ping was one of those who spoke on behalf of a major government agency, as secretary of the Petroleum and Energy Ministry, Ju knew the operation of Greater Sino intimately, he was one of handful who could say how well the

company was doing, what is the true state of the Chinese oil industry as well as the smaller energy outfits, and what the broad direction of Guafeng's company is, more or less. Into Ju's hands was placed the responsibility of protecting, nurturing and 'keeping an eye' on this crucial segment of China's economy, the secretary must maximize profits and production while keeping corruption at a minimum or hopefully, with the right amount of muscle, so small as to be ignorable.

He was known for strict discipline and an attitude of intense patriotism, carefully navigating the treacherous water of Chinese politics, Ju brilliantly walked a tightrope between the party line of 'centralized control' and the need to unleash China's staggering capabilities.

As secretive as the government hierarchy is, there are those who speak openly of Ju, someday, moving into the presidential apartments in the Forbidden City. This shows how potent the influence of the energy secretary is. Because of the tragic circumstance there did not occur the quiet discussion between Ju and Guafeng; just the two of them.

Turning the key from his front door Guafeng, Fu Kai and Chai Sun, a son of Chu Teh, silently enter his luxurious home.

"Chai sit down..., can I get you a drink"?

"Sure, I need one".

Guafeng motioned to Fu Kai and sat next to Chai Sun.

"I still can't understand the time difference..., the ambulance reached Pu's at 12:30, Pu phoned the clinic at 11:45..., Dr. Wong said father would have survived

had the ambulance gotten him there sooner”. Chai’s voice broke with emotion.

“The clinic is but 10 blocks away and we’re talking about off hour traffic”.

Guafeng shook his head, concurring with Chai.

“There must have been heavy traffic.., it’s the only answer”.

“I have a friend who is a clerk at the clinic, I need to talk to him” Chai added sadly.

“Do what you need to do and put your mind at rest”.., Fu Kai advised while handing a drink to Chai, “once you’ve satisfied your yearning, your pain will heal and life continues”. The three continued to console each other late into the night.

Altogether the one figure who remained quite visible, yet had the least to say was Pu Chow. He magnanimously took command and dived into the preparations for the memorial observance, acting with gusto and enthusiasm, it was a marvel that he was not able to secure the Great Hall in Beijing for the ceremony. Instead Shanghai’s newest civic center was transformed into a impressive indoor garden stocked with countless blossoms and shrubbery, with a dramatic catafalque close to the center; a hundred member choir was hired and placed behind the casket and 5,000 guests were expected to attend. When all was said and done, Madame Chu Teh publicly thanked her husband’s closest friend and confidant for all his ‘kind attention’; Pu Chow.

The quick success of Greater Sino gave everyone who was connected with the upper echelon of the company envious benefits, including Bai Li, she became an executive aide to the president; despite the fact that most of the

intricate work was done by 3 assistants specifically assigned by Secretary Ju.

Bai none the less answered phones, made appointments and did her best to learn computer skills; while making herself available for 'overtime' duties.

Pinning as she did over Guafeng; she reveled in her new post and rank in management.

She never had so much money in her life, making the equivalent of \$15,000 U.S. dollars a year, her parents could not fathom that kind of money for a 'clerk', this did not count an extra \$1,000 for a New Year's bonus. On top of this Bai Li found positions for a sister and two brothers, who were promptly sent to Mahai. Mini Poo closed her shop and moved to Shanghai so she could take up tenancy in the Greater Sino Tower soon to be completed by early next year, her new shop would be called 'Hair for the Divine'.

Her elderly husband agreed to a temporary separation due to 'business concerns'; he was persuaded to join his wife when she reported how much money she could make and that they could live like royalty.

Kai Chang was one of the last to partake in the largesse, he is a cousin of Bai Li and had once been a member of China's Olympic Decathlon team, hence he had traveled outside his homeland and was something of a minor celebrity. However, no real employment had materialized and when a drivers job opened up Bai sent him a preprocessed application. Mini was delighted when Bai Li called and set up a luncheon get together.

"Hello and good morning princess..., how are you doing"?

"Fine, what's up with you"?

“Oh.., I was just wondering.., what are you doing for lunch tomorrow”?

“Uh, having lunch with you”.

Both women laughed girlishly.

“Good, because I want you to meet a friend of mine, she’s from America and is”...

“Very important”? interrupted Mini

“What else.. replied Bai Li.

She then went on to discuss who the American lady is; Linda Sabol. Miss Sabol had come to China to attend Chu Teh’s funeral, she remained to coordinate the massive joint venture between Greater Sino and her fathers’ interests. Bai Li was greatly impressed by Nova’s star employee; so young, so pretty, so smart. She was the epitome of American culture and society, of course it helps being born into a wealthy family, still Linda Sabol proved her mettle, she did not act like a spoiled debutante. Bai dreamed that with Mini’s expertise in beauty care and Miss Sabol’s business acumen, the three might unite and start a cosmetic enterprise for the Chinese woman.

The threesome passed the afternoon discussing everything from fashion and design to nutrition and family. They laughed and spoke almost in a shout, then huddled and whispered gossipy secrets. As Bai Li had mentioned, Mini Poo was captivated by the vivacious American and her flawless mandarin dialect, her elegant attire and worldly way made her not only fascinating but also considering how many men keep staring at their table, immensely attractive in a very physical sense. Linda had promised to do a study on the marketability of a line of makeup

and hair care products. She had good ideas for product names, target age and income groups and corporate structure. After almost 3 hours of 'lunch', Linda regretfully had to take her leave explaining she had to meet her brother who was flying in from Colombia. Eric Sabol also worked for Nova America; his expertise was biology and environmental matters. Traveling constantly between North and South America Eric was Nova's 'man of the land', he basically did the spin on how Nova's operations would change its surroundings. He prepared environmental assessments, met with local governments and citizenry groups and at times engineered token criticism of the company that he will someday inherit.

Everyone in Shanghai has a driver, it's just the way it is, and it's so convenient. You can hire one for the day or week or however long is needed. Linda, being true to her 'fair and equal' philosophy, choose a women and rented a large, dark burgundy Cadillac. On her way to the airport she received a message from Chuck Manning, a corporate attorney who was working on an Agreement to stop the piracy of American music and video intellectual property.

"Thanks for the lift.., I, as usual, owe you one".

"Aw, think nothing of it.., as usual". Linda laughed, "How'd the talks go"?

"Well, okay.., it went okay.., You know, everything's' in place, we agree on the language.., it's the enforcement that's' the hang up. The government has got to investigate our complaints and shut down the illegal studios. Millions and millions of dollars are being heisted by the pirates and, I believe at least, it's reaching a crises point, not only for American artists but Japanese and European

interests as well”.

“I hear you”.., Linda responded, “And you’re right, it’s the enforcement issue, Beijing has got to get serious and crack down.., there’s no two ways of looking at it”.

The two continued to chat in the back seat until reaching Shanghai’s airport, reaching over to give Linda a peck on the cheek, Chuck added “Call me from the American embassy the next time you’re there, I need to talk to you about something important”. A puzzled Linda nodded and waved goodbye. The burgundy Cadillac circled the parking lot While Linda waited for her brother in the arrival terminal. The ‘something’ that the American lawyer was concerned over was his belief that the Chinese government was monitoring the phone lines of high profile foreigners, he also felt that the same group was under strict surveillance. Chuck Manning was not one for the ‘cloak and dagger’ routine and he certainly had no concrete evidence, but his fellow multi-nationals meet regularly and all topics are on the table for discussion, plus one should not discount intuition.

Brother and sister found one another, stopped at the baggage claim and swung open the back passenger door.

“ You had a chance to sleep on the flight right”?

“ Oh yes.., Dr. Sanchez gave me a strong decongestant that made me so drowsy.., just what I wanted. Usually I get a cold maybe once a year, this is the third one so far and there’s what.., two months left”?

“You’ve been working too hard.., rest is important.., so what’s

happening with the De la Rosa field”? Linda asked?

“ Yeah.., De la Rosa .., theres’ a few good things and naturally, some tough breaks, real tough. The field is almost producing at capacity, that is until some one throws a bomb, or takes workers hostage, or blasts an expensive pipeline for the umteenth time”.

Eric went on and painted a bleak, senseless job oddly combined with hope; hope that eventually oil wealth would trickle down to the dirt poor tenants who worked as laborers drilling and maintaining pumping stations that bearly cleared environmental protection regulations. He detailed the squalid villages and isolated hamlets where semi-literate indegenious Indian people vye for, in their eyes, well paying jobs.

“The worst part is the poverty.., the lousey health care.., no doctors really want to be stuck out in the middle of nowhere and those that stick it out get very frustrated because of the limited resources. If there isn’t a military contingent protecting you, no professionals will take a chance.., the god-damned guerillas will kidnap you, hold you for a few days and then release you miles from camp; that is if you’re a nobody”.

Eric reserved the strongest criticism for the government officials and insensitive politicians who rake in millions and then throw pennies and empty promises to the dark skinned aborigines. “We pay our agreed costs and fees.., as well as the other multi-nationals.., what happens after checks are delivered is another story.., it’s no wonder the insurgents have grassroot support, there is a limit to people’s patience, you can’t bullshit people forever”. In a way it was good

for the environmentalist to come to China now; his dissatisfaction with the local authorities was festering, he had pangs of guilt knowing how well he 'had it' and being forced to acknowledge it on a daily basis. The poor living conditions of the peasants plus putting his personal safety in jeopardy, especially since Nova America's internal intelligence had reported that he is considered a major target for abduction made Eric doubly miserable.

"You can take a breather here, at least for awhile". Linda cooed, "If anybody snatches you we'll know who to call".

"Who"? he asked incredulously.

"Beijing, who else"?

February in Beijing means its time to celebrate the Festival of Lanterns along with the more modern National Chinese Music Fair. Musicians and their admirers flock to the capital, unfortunately increasing the normal crush of tourists both domestic and international that the fulltime residents both rue and thank; most keep in mind the economic bonanza the visitors leave in their wake. Languages from every corner of the globe can be heard in and around the monuments and parks, but above all, broadcast on loud speakers, the extravagantly haunting sounds of traditional Chinese instruments. The familiar table harp 'Guzheng' and the two stringed 'Erhu', a long necked violin, along with a symphony of other music makers, create a forgettable fantasy land in the capital city.

Those new age, enterprising Chinese however, intended to make a splash in this year's event as well; half the musicians registered introduced unique, high

tech devices that produced eccentric sounds that they defined as 'New Millenia Music', which seemed to most listeners to have no structure or form. Despite this, 'millenia music' was attracting critical review and a special article appeared in Rolling Stone magazine.

Wigi Aiying was honored to have been named a perennial judge due to her position and standing as one of China's foremost cultural specialists. She had lobbied for a music fest since the early 80's, and as recognition or punishment, depending on your capacity for hard work, the communist central committee named her director of the event and a judge since its conception nine years ago. A heavy Fu Kai had agreed to her mother-in-laws wishes and accompanied her to the Forbidden City, there was no danger to the mother-to-be and if any problem arose, Beijing is known for its excellent hospitals and clinics. No 'mother in the making' looked as good as Fu Kai, though rotund and a little slower, she was chatty, bright, frivolous and beamed with a healthy glow. She kept a relatively busy schedule seeing many business associates of her husbands' and stepping out at least twice weekly for evening engagements. Wu Yee, her mother, was able to get leave without pay to help with her daughter's confinement, but this was anything but that, still the quiet Wu forced Fu Kai to sleep late into the morning, eat the appropriate foods and make her regular doctor visits.

Guafeng had invited upper management officers from Nova America to tour Guangdong Province and inspect possible sites for new refineries that would be needed to handle off shore oil production. The Americans had never been to

China and Guafeng was determined to impress them with the vigor and increasing economic strength of his country, and Guangdong was the perfect place to start. The province has undergone intensive industrial development in the past fifteen years, from food processing to mining, Guangdong leads the country in textiles, metal and machinery manufacturing and contains one of China's largest shipyards; this last accessory is of paramount importance to Greater Sino, Guafeng has to show the americans that China has the capability to construct the oil platforms indispensable in deep water crude extraction.

"As you can see gentlemen, China is on the verge of exploiting it's vast reservoir of potential, both scientific and human..., there is very little that we cannot do for ourselves". After the translator finished, the Americans looked at one another and nodded in assent.

" Everything seems to be in order, I see no reason for delay..., construction would begin immediately". Stated John Purnell a Houston engineer who had invested personally in the 'China Promise'.

" I see a period of beneficial growth not only in terms of business, but in the realm of social, cultural and political endeavor..., all of us here today, who are contributing to this venture can look with pride over our accomplishments thus far and what we will do in the future".

The Texan and his party sincerely felt that good business could be had, despite the fascinating contrasts; a modern economy standing next to agricultural practices used hundreds of years ago, steel and glass towers within eye sight of thatched roofed homes with no indoor plumbing and open air markets that looked

like Manchu era scenery. Still, the group's optimism was infectious regarding the prospect of making money in China and helping to conjure up the largest consumer state in the world. The rest of the tour went well but with Ho tu doing the introductions; Guafeng was called to Beijing to be present at the birth of this son.

"I'm so proud of you..., thank you with all my heart". The new father carefully held his wife and gently kissed her. "She is a beautiful baby isn't she"? Fu Kai asked.

"Of course..., she's precious".

"You're not disappointed that we didn't have a boy"?

"No, no..., we have been blessed with a healthy baby, and she'll have a brother soon enough".

Visitors in the waiting room shared their seats with huge bouquets of flowers and gifts and were allowed to see the new parents in twos'. The Guafengs reinstated a family tradition by requesting that their friends and callers suggest names for their daughter. One friend who was busy, away on company business but submitted the winning name was Bai Li and she chose ' Jai Song' meaning a descendant from the ancient royal families. Bai was acting as special hostess to the American oilmen, seeing to their hotel and touring arrangements. Because of her limited knowledge of corporate administration, she never possessed influence over company decisions or really knew of the dark secrets involving individuals and actions, she just took care of messages and basically managed receptions etc..., however her close proximity to the president of Greater Sino

made her a object of interest. Those who watched closely enough more or less guessed at the truth. Bai's youth and stunning looks were assets bestowed by nature, her mind could be molded by her will and slowly she began to learn, experiment and demonstrate her increased confidence by handling more demanding projects like, assisting in the environmental research department. This idea came from Linda Sabol knowing that Bai Li would be working with her brother Eric.

Five days after Jai's birth, Guafeng was back in Shanghai wrapping up the final details for the six off-shore drilling platforms, the estimated cost topping 3.2 billion. Once again Greater Sino made the headlines in all China's dailies, the story featured photos of the handsome CEO posing with the American executives and even included a blurb about his new child. Later in the evening a peaceful quiet fell across the suite of offices that made up Sino's headquarters in the Kwok Liong building, the Greater Sino Tower would be opening in four months and Bai Li was asked to head the task force in charge of moving. Guafeng was making a few phone calls as he watched the city lights twinkle throughout the expanding metropolis.

"I'm so pleased..., Pu Chow and I have looked at the estimated reserve numbers and it's awesome, 40 billion in oil and gas..., just incredible..., and we are strategically placed, the lion's share is ours". Walking past his doorway was Bai Li carrying a large box.

"At any rate, there are some financiers from Taiwan who said they're interested in working with us..., Yes, I know that only too well..., I forwarded their inquiry to Ju

Yao Ping.., thanks again.., talk to you Tuesday”.

Guafeng hung up and walked down the hall.

“Bai, when you’re done I need to see you”. He called.

Bai sat on a chair in front of her boss’s desk, Guafeng was standing behind the bar pouring drinks.

“How’s the moving plans going”? He asked.

“Moving right along” she joked, “I think we can do a complete move in seven days”.

“Very good” .., you’re doing a fantastic job”.

He handed her a glass, patted her back and sat at the edge of his desk.

“ Guafeng, I’m really excited about the environmental assessment report.., it’s due in one month”. Guafeng took a sip and nodded his head, keeping his eyes on Bai.

“Environmental assessment! My such big words.., you’re turning into quite the professional”. He teased. Bai smiled and continued.

“Oh stop.., I’m serious, it’s very interesting work.., you know.., and I get a chance to learn about a whole new field. I’m learning a lot Guafeng.., I don’t intend to be a messenger girl forever”.

“ I see”. Guafeng replied, bending down and kissing her neck.

“I mean it Guafeng, I want you to assign me over.., I want to start right away”.

“What am I going to do with out you here”? Nuzzling her breast and reaching under her skirt, he continued “You’re doing such a terrific job, I’d be lost without your direction”.

Bai Li pushed back suddenly and coolly said, "Don't talk down to me, okay"?

"You know how grateful I am for all what you've done for me, but please think of my future.., I need to do this". She pressed hard against him, pleadingly using body language.

"I really need your understanding and support, I see myself growing, maturing and environmental studies does something to me".

"Why don't you do something to me"? His piercing look met her's and together they fell on a ornate couch, slowly he carefully unbuttoned her blouse, undid her bra and buried his face in her breast. In simple movements they were nude, giggling, stroking and kissing until lust overcame them and earnest lovemaking began.

Linda had just opened a letter from Madame Guafeng thanking her for the lovely flowers and gift and inviting her to visit the newborn the next time she was in Shanghai. Wistfully she thought of the baby's father and their physical interlude, the shameless way they satisfied their lust, her episode of blushing was interrupted by a phone call, it was Guafeng he wanted to set up an appointment. They had'nt really talked since California, other than the obligatory exchanges at official business events; he suggested a quiet luncheon and Linda agreed.

David's was a trendy eatery catering to foreigners and featurd pacific rim cusine, as usual it was packed but, it had private booths for 2 to 6 people, just right for intimate conversation. The maiter'd motioned to Guafeng standing across the room.

“Hope you’re hungry.., I took the liberty of ordering you a drink”.

“How thoughtful.., congratulations on your baby girl”.

He followed, slidding behind her on the smooth leather seat.

“Did your family return from Beijing”?

“Not yet, I’m flying up this weekend to bring them back. It’s good to see you.., getting pretty busy now”?

“Yeah, no rest for the wicked”. She joked, “I’ve got a lot of small matters to handle, but nothing like your schedule, I’m sure.., You’re in the papers just about every week, right”?

Guafeng smiled and nodded modestly.

“Yes, but I’m beginning to wonder if that’s such a good thing, I’ve noticed that photographers are skulking, kinda stalking me, they wait.., outside”.. Guafeng pointed his finger at the front doors.

Linda noticed that despite Guafeng’s increased interaction with government hierarchy, academics and international business associates, his speech, once he felt at ease, was filled with colloquialisms and local slang; the kind of dialogue best suited for blue collar workers in China’s manufacturing sector.

“Fame, as they say is a double edged sword.., anyway, what I really need to talk to you about is, I want you to help me learn English.., I need a teacher, I want someone discreet, who can work flexible hours and can travel at a moments notice”.

Linda laughed, looked at him quizzically then said, “ I thought you liked the lovely

translators at your beck and call”?

“ I do, I do.., sure, who would’nt, but you miss so much regarding innuendo, body language and you know..., the whole world speaks English. It would be great for my personal sense of worth, I want people to think that I’m really smart”.

Linda sighed, “You don’t think people feel you’re smart”?

“Well.., I would like them to think I’m smarter than they originally thought”.

They both chuckled and were interrupted by a waiter ready to take their order.

Linda promised to find a suitable tutor and they agreed to have dinner Friday night.

Large maps spread out on tables and the floor at Eric’s apartment featuring the topography of eastern Yunnan province, close to the border with Guizhou; an area rich in sensitive wetlands that has been attracting scientists interested in environmental, botany studies and aquatic animals. Eric Sabol’s name has been associated with conservation efforts at the international level and an obscure Chinese conservationist had a very unique story to relate to him. Do Chi is an elderly gentleman of impeccable manners and bearing, he was another who made it through the Mao years; had learned to survive and possessed a genuine belief that socialism will save the world in the long run. For the past four decades, he had been conducting research in Guizhou, living in houseboats on the various lakes and rivers that crisscross the region, many amazing discoveries and truly ‘breakthrough’ anthropological hypotheses were the fruits of his labor but, these attainments pale with his startling and secret concept.

Speaking through his trusted student Do Chi began his tale when he meet some local fishermen in those 47 past years.

“They were born and raised near a lake called Hoyang, it is a large body of water covering a few hundred acres, besides it’s size it is also known for it’s depth and erratic shape; sometimes close to sharp cliffs. The fishing was always good and the water itself, clear and sweet due to the multiple rivers feeding and draining the lake, though flooding is not uncommon. In spite of it’s deep, cold waters there are small islets, closer to the shore that the fishermen use to store equipment and dry their catch. Each generation had perpetuated the myths of Hoyang including the fable that seemed to come right out of the pages of a science fiction novel”. The old man took a long drink of tea and continued, “ It is said that the inhabitants of Hoyang and all the wetlands of their Kingdom were ruled by a benevolent king, this monarch worked tirelessly in improving his subjects lives. Unfortunately, a neighboring potentate coveted the wetlands and plotted to overthrow his kinsman, this was achieved by a traitorous minority seduced by cheap promises. In the ensuing conflict, the honorable lord was slain and the land laid to waste; gazing from the heavens, Lei Kung, the god of thunder and retribution punished the evil doers by turning them into hideous creatures and banished them to live in water, never again to enjoy the comfort of fire and dry garments”.

Eric shielded a soft yawn by politely shifting his seat, this boredom was to change very quickly.

“You would think this is just another fanciful tale from China’s shadowy past..,

and that it may very well be..., or maybe just the origin of a true and astonishing real life fact”.

Do Chi went on to describe joint British and German expeditions in the 1920's organized to search out reported amphibian invertebrate lifeforms in the lakes of Guizhou and a Yunnan provinces; occasionally these adventurers came across farmers and fishermen who said they saw strangely formed fish that lived in the rivers and wetlands but, investigate as they did they came away with nothing more than a few grainy photos that lacked any kind of authenticity. Then in 1929 the British team acquired an oddly shaped skeleton that the local residents swore was the remains of a 'waterman'. The fact that the bones were never laid to rest but, was kept in a temple basement lent validity that it was not human and therefore unworthy of burial. The following year another skeleton was revealed to the Europeans and again was attributed to the 'water people' who inhabited western Guizhou province. Both skeletons were ill fated however, one was destroyed in a fire caused by unpaid laborers rioting in Canton and the other was stolen by one of the hired guides and held for ransom; both the guide and bones were never heard from again.

The Japanese invasion of 1937 followed by World War Two totally disrupted any kind of research into the alleged 'water people'. In 1948 the Communist party not only prohibited, but made criminal any examination in the phenomena, at least publically. Still accounts were made to provincial officials and were suppressed, Do Chi was the 'specialist' that Beijing dispatched to calm the nerves of witnesses, who saw the 'evil creatures'.

Throughout the course of this duty he was able to compile the most comprehensive bibliography of sightings, testimony and descriptions; he was thoroughly convinced that a race of human like, water dwelling somethings existed in remote Chinese bodies of water. The men conversed into the early morning hours when Do Chi and his exhausted assistant staggered home, and Eric Sabol reached for the phone and placed an urgent call to his father.

The nurses were busy distributing the hundreds of bouquets that were addressed to the Guafengs to the other patients, Fu Kai and Wu Yee kept an ongoing list of those who sent flowers and gifts, so that they could send thank you cards. One very important person who merited not only a note but a personal phone call was the energy secretary. Both Ju and his wife came to visit, being an older couple who had grandchildren, they offered family rearing advice and epitomized the Confucian ideal of filial relations. With the oil price shocks of the last several months, Ju had been forced into prominence for keeping a lid on a potentially explosive situation and managing the lightspeed pace at which China was developing her natural resources. Before arriving at the hospital, the secretary fired off another enterprise over negotiations with three other countries regarding the control of waters surrounding the Spratley Islands. Ju was putting 12 hour days at the energy secretariat, expanding an ever complex network of fuel depots, pipelines and begging the central committee for massive funding to build desperately needed refineries. It was his prime objective to process oil into gasoline and diesel at just the right rate so as to prevent the Chinese economy from stalling, nevertheless all his efforts fell in the

shadow of Guafeng.

Beijing had embraced the policy of lionizing its captain of business and industry, not only so much for domestic consumption but, for the world financial markets. There were other conspicuous Chinese in such diverse fields as science, medicine, architecture, and literature and all these stars in the galaxy of China's nationhood were celebrated and became a source of pride, yet Guafeng was allowed, by the lower rung of government to be the spokesman and lodestar of China's evolution as a major or the number one economic engine on earth. The Greater Sino president strode across the country's landscape commenting, assisting and critiquing whatever topic he was asked about. Not everyone gazed at Guafeng admirably; the dignified and conservative members of the Central Committee were beginning to question the wisdom of quiet acquiescence just so that China has a showpiece to prove, once again, that it is second to none.

Guafeng even took the plunge in the world of high fashion, making a point of working out in his private gym, his tall frame filling with muscles. The nation's women's magazines featured stories of the handsome executive and when the Shanghai clothiers union introduced their seasonal lineup, Guafeng brought the house down when he agreed to be one of the celebrity models. That same week, during his birthday bash, Linda made good on her promise by introducing him to Frances Wong, a Chinese American student who recently graduated from Berkley and accepted her friend's offer to move to Shanghai and tutor the VIP.

Within the hallowed halls of the central committee's enclosure hushed voices murmur state affairs, questioning, dissecting, prognosticating what the

next day will bring. Observing through his window, Secretary Ju made note of the colorful flower beds in the private garden reserved for him and his department's use, he had just finished a dossier on the management teams of China's few domestic oil companies. One curious item stood out pertaining to the death of Sino executive Chu Teh, his corporate position frozen temporarily because Chu's son had initiated an investigation of his father's sudden passing. A scratch at the door allowed an undiscript middle aged man whom Ju had summoned to bow before him and receive careful instructions.

The faux marble façade added such an elegant finish to the exterior of Mini Poo's hair salon, the work men complimented themselves and her on the choice of colors and textures. 'Hair for the Divine' was scheduled to open at the end of the month and Mini spent big on advertisement; the first hundred customers were going to get half off all services and although she was not religious, Mini asked an elderly uncle to ritually bless her business and chase away anything 'malevolent'.

"Nice huh"? Mini inquired.

"Very.., it looks modern and professional.., we did a good job".

Bai Li hugged Mini's shoulder.

"The caterers are familiar with the location right"?

"Oh yes, I went over the directions twice and when I mentioned your name and employer they were falling over themselves trying to accommodate".

"Yeah.., It pays to know the right people or sleep with the right people" Bai said frowning.

“Have you seen him lately”?

“Briefly, he’s got a new girl..., I mean an assistant..., ah..., a tutor; he’s learning English. From what I understand his lessons are at all hours of the day”.

Mini Poo rolled her eyes.

“No, it’s not like that this time..., she’s short, dumpy, wears glasses and ..well..., just homely”. Bai remarked. “”If they’re doing it, I would be the most surprised”.

She added emphatically. “ But you know he has done me a big favor..., again..., I’ll be transferring out of his office, I’ll be working with Eric Sabol..., Linda’s brother, on environmental issues”.

“ Good, I know that’s what you wanted, I’m sure you’ll do great..., Guafeng’s not going to miss you”?

“ I’m not going to miss him”. Bai Li corrected. “ Still I won’t antagonize him..., he’s my best insurance against unemployment..., I just want a different kind of relationship with him”.

The two women continued to inspect the finishing touches and meandered into the main hall. “ Come over to my place tomorrow night, Linda and Eric will be there, I’m having a little dinner..., just a small something, I told Linda that your shop will be open soon and she knows many wealthy business people ..., get your client list off to a good start”. Mini readily agreed.

Hengtong Avenue, in the center of Shanghai’s business district, is Linda’s business address, soon she’ll be moving to her permanent space in Guafeng’s Greater Sino Tower. She had just about packed away all her possessions, and the movers were busy jotting down the contents on the outside of the boxes. A

secretary, with her hand on the mouth piece on her phone, indicated that a 'C. Manning' wished to speak to her.

"Hello Chuck". Linda cheerily called.

"Hi princess, how's everything"?

"Good..., wonderful, I'm almost outta here..., I can't wait to be in my new digs..., what about you"?

"Well..., things are better, I'm still counsel for Eruption records and that's..., well..., it's just a mess. There are agreements, arrangements, licenses, contracts..., everything you can possibly imagine you'd use to stop piracy..., I mean we have left no stone unturned and yet rip offs happen on a gigantic scale and the Chinese make like it's relatively minor..., no..., wait..., they are serious and concerned because it's making them look bad internationally, but they just don't enforce..., er..., beef up their enforcement divisions. Reports are made on a monthly basis..., just about., and they are checked out, but by the time the police organize..., and ..., you know..., mobilize, the pirates have skipped town..., they've moved on to another locale..., all whats left is an empty warehouse and broken down recording equipment". He lamented. "Like I said, they are making an effort..., they would much rather have the ability to legally reproduce musical compositions in a regulated setting; have permission and all, but they are so busy with playing 'catch up', so busy with reforming the bureaucracy to fuction in a more modern and efficient way..., they have to organize a billion plus people..., to move in one direction..., I mean they do have my grudging respect".. He went on to discuss that important matter he spoke of the last time they saw each other

at the airport. "I was called for a short meeting at the American Consulate here in Shanghai, the topic was the growth of organized crime in the major cities. Supposedly, these crime syndicates were looking into 'taking care' of law enforcement, government officials, business agents..., anyone who was involved with cracking down on anykind of illegal activity..., because of the high profile coverage regarding the music companies demands for acting against the counterfeiters and the fact my name was mentioned in the People's Daily several times, it was concluded that I was a logical target for reprisal". Chuck continued that Eruption Records decided on a rotation of their legal team and gave him the rest of the year off, with pay. "So I was free, I felt a little strange; with all this international skullduggery and shit, but the money is good and it's never boring..., anyway here's the big news,..I got hired by a private consortium to help create a Chinese football franchise..., isn't that amazing"! Chuck went into minor details about his new venture and ended up being invited to Bai Li's intimate dinner party.

Chai Sun bowed to the two doctors who had kindly granted him an appointment to relate the events of his father's death. Dr. Pu Tung, the head physician in the ER, attempted to revive Chu's heartbeat, but to no avail. He explained to the despondent son that had his father been brought to the hospital immediately, his heart would not have sustained so much damage. Chai rationalized that the heartattack had to have killed his father in minutes for the simple reason that Chu Teh was only a few blocks away from the hospital. He then asked the doctor at what time, approximately, did his father expire, the

physician responded that Chu Teh was dead for perhaps an hour; starring in disbelief, Chai protested that it cannot be so, it did not make sense.

Dr. Tung nodded in agreement; suddenly Chai remembered that a friend, who was the admittance clerk on duty that day, recorded the time that Pu Chow called for an ambulance, and that the trip from the hospital to Pu Chow's and back again was only forty-five minutes. Chai was determined to get to the bottom of this discrepancy and as he pieced together his father's last moments with Pu Chow a sinister impression formed in his mind.

The ringing of his cell phone broke his train of thought; he promised his mother he'd stop by on his way home.

Yang Fei had done her widow's sad duty and carefully gone through her husband's goods, she had given away Chu's old clothes and, working with her children, secured his estate, protected their financial assets and paid the death taxes. All his business papers were turned over to Greater Sino, namely Pu or Guafeng and after all this time she still came across documents that she was unsure where they belonged, naturally she consulted Chai.

"Were you busy today, Son"? Yang maternally asked.

"Mostly catching up on errands". Chai replied, he had no intention of telling his mother what he was up to.

"That's my boy.., always busy.., never lazy.., I want you to look at this, the storage company called and said the last of daddy's boxes would be delivered this morning, there was a small strong box with this file in it.., it seems to be a invoice or inventory". Chai leafed through the few pages while making his way to

the kitchen. "Is it anything important"? Yang Fei asked unobtrusively. Chai replied 'not really', he finished his drink, kissed his mother and said he'd call her later, just then his nieces and nephews burst into the living room, romping over the furniture and jumping up to get their kiss.

High pitched children's laughter carried over the shade trees of Fuxing Park while the adults who watched them sat on European style benches, chatting and nibbling on snacks on a clear, pretty day. Only underschool age children are to be found in parks at this time of the day, unless they choose to be delinquents and cut class. Fuxing Park is one of Shanghai's more reknown commons, originally referred to as 'French Park' and used mostly by foreigners, it intrigued the Chinese for it was laid out in western European fashion reminiscent of Versailles. The walkways that intersect the garden provided many areas for nannies and their strollers to sit and give their charges some sun. Fu Kai and her mother visit Fuxing twice a week, weather permitting, and she has made the acquaintance of the other recent mothers they sit, gossip and exchange advice on discipline, schools etc... Most of the women, in their late 20's and early thirties, are the wives of the wealthy or influential, hence they do not work and are chiefly concerned with their families; they all know one another due to business connections and once they realized who Fu Kai's husband is, they began to treat her with the utmost deference. She's astute enough to know that these ladies would love to have her husband call theirs' and create somekind of business arrangement, so she accepts their compliments and flattery with her own words of praise and pleasant conversation. After the usual 2 hours of

socializing, Fu Kai bids farewell and heads for the parking lot where an American full size car waits with it's smiling driver opening a rear door. Madame Guafeng waves to him as he pops open the trunk and collapses the baby's carriage, she has come to depend on her driver's conscientiousness and professionalism, not to mention his friendly disposition and secretly admire his resemblance to her husband. Kai Chang is mellow and kind, strong and quiet; at thirty-three young enough for occasional light hearted banter, since Guafeng is always away, his is the only male company she enjoys. Her mother thinks highly of him too, they often talk about the events of the day, the weather, his family wherein Wu Yee would remind him to find a nice girl and settle down, laughingly he'd agree. As the car gently rolled forward, Fu Kai coyishly studies Kai Chang's eyes in the rear view mirror, sometimes their eyes meet and he smiles again.

“ I love living in apartments..., I just love it, I don't think I'll ver live in the country again”. Mini Poo declared shaking her head.

“ All those years of squalor and struggling..., and now..., look at us now”! She added, Bai Li had a self appreciative smile on her face, “That's right..., you know, we really have a lot to be thankful for..., think about it, you said a mouthful, we were nothing until Guafeng entered my life ..., our lives, if it was'nt for him we'd be broke, busting our asses and miserable. Now is the time to make as much as we can, to grow and spread our wings..., take advantage of what the world has to offer and even give something back..., you know..., charity”.

“Yes, you're right, but for now charity begins at home”.

Both women grabbed one another giggling.

Bai's apartment was in one of the newest buildings made to look like a New York brownstone, the street fronting it was noisy, well traveled by pedestrians and vehicles, but inside was placid spaciousness; there are two large bedrooms and baths, an elegant living and dining room combination, a modern kitchen, adjoining bath and laundry with plenty of storage. Chuck and Linda arrived on time and hungry; both had played two rounds of golf with Greater Sino executives and Japanese bankers who were investing in the offshore project officially named 'Tai Ching' meaning vast and bright. Their evening lasted until midnight when Mini, alarmed by the late hour, begged to be left off, Linda offered to drop her home, but Chuck, who had drunk a little too much, succumbed to Bai's offer to spend the night, which was extended to the two women as well. Despite's Chuck's limited knowledge of mandarin and Bai's complete lack of English, the two managed to communicate and express other things.

A rich green, canopy spread out before Eric Sabol and his four member expedition; using connections at China Airlines, they were able to fly directly to a small airfield after a brief stopover Guiyang, Guihui's capital. Do Chi had procured all the necessary travel documents especially the permits to travel into the prohibited districts, these rural areas are mostly unaccessible by vehicle and is uninhabited. The central government had long ago cleared out villagers under the pretext of protecting endangered species, and this also had the desired effect of preventing any future reports of unusual creatures living in lakes and swamps. Two large hydroplanes were hired and several hundred pounds of

supplies purchased by Eric through a Nova America account. Standing on the tarmac, it was hard to fathom his thoughts; what strange new discoveries lay ahead, what if a new form of humanoid life is found? The entire world would be thrown on its ear; religion would become irrelevant, how would society react? And how would the man Eric Sabol change? His deep thoughts were disrupted by a sharp whistle from Do Chi, stepping up the short ladder into the plane's fuselage. Shan Yi, the clever, dedicated student began to explain the next leg of their journey.

"It will take us three hours to get to Hoyang Lake, we'll arrive at dusk..., I choose the far end, that is where the last sightings took place..., our camp site should be some 50 feet above the water's surface..., just in case of flooding".

"Let's keep our fingers crossed..., hopefully we'll find something tomorrow". Eric joked. Over the fantastic landscape the planes droned on, slowly leaving the last few traces of habitation behind. Do Chi quietly puffed on his pipe and the two laborers played cards, occasionally yelping after one played a good hand. Eric studied maps and Shan did his best to interpret rarely used Han inscriptions that he admitted he could only guess at.

By the time the planes gracefully landed on the surface of Hoyang, the orange glow of a paling sunset was just about spent and everyone helped in carrying the supplies to the sandy shore. In half an hour a large tent and roaring fire crackled in the hushed night, the group including the two pilots, sat around the camp fire finishing their dinner and talking about the next day's agenda.

"We'll check out the small islets..., I think that's' the best way to go..., right"? Eric

looked apprehensively at Shan, the assistant turned spoke to Do Chi and responded , “Do Chi feels that we should work during the night, the dark hours..., he says most of the sightings took place early in the evening or in the early morning hours”. Eric nodded in agreement and reached for a map of Hoyang Lake.

“We’ll go to this point and check out the north side, against the cliffs. I’ll send Bo and Yip to scout the shoreline..., they may find something bizarre, or at least keep them busy for a few hours”.

“Good idea..., I think we’ll be able to set up the cameras by 5:00pm..., we can set the traps with tonights catch”.

“Yeah..., and if they’re vegetarian, plan ‘B’”. Eric pointed to black bags containing water plants picked up in Guiyang.

Soon the party curled up in their sleeping bags and Eric set his alarm to ring at 4:00am. Early the next day the group began to stir and Do chi and the two helpers had started to pile rocks around the campfire, he stacked the stones one on the other until the circle reached a height of three feet. When questioned why such an elaborate wall, Do Chi related last nights dream; ‘the water people were curious over the ruckus that they, the campers made, they began to emerge, folding their fins close to their bodies, but as they approached the camp the heat and popping from the flames frightened them back into the water’. “ A barrier like this limits the heat and directs the light upward”. By the time dawn had broke, the pilots were cranking their engines preparing for the flight back to civilization, from the lakeshore the party waved as the planes picked up speed

and climbed into the sky, they looped over Hoyang and disappeared through a mountainous pass.

The full splendor of this subtropical wilderness became evident as the morning sunshine revealed a dark jade green forest in all directions, massive trees and thick vines just beyond the sandy beach where the expedition had pitched their tents, bushes and shrubbery entwined in combat for space and sunlight and all this mirrored in a smooth, cold lake that took on the color of quicksilver when the clouds rolled in. The most panoramic vision, though was the jagged cliffs, hammered into strange shapes by wind and rain; exposing red and brown rock while in other areas, lush boughs of wild plants hang perilously close to tumbling into the water, all the while a cacophony of birds hidden in the flora. Everyone went about his duties as assigned, Bo and Yip hugged the lake front moving in a southeast direction and Eric, Shan Yi and Do Chi set out in the zodiac heading directly across the lake and then as inspection on the closest islets. The next few days meandered in an uneventful pattern, nothing out of the ordinary except an occasional passing shower, the roaming cameras recording nothing substantive and none of the traps were sprung. There was talk of moving locale to the extreme eastern shore or investigating the larger rivers that feed Hoyang, the men were in discussion and preparing lunch, when from around a bend a small boat was seen making its way in the direction of the adventurers. Shan alerted Eric and both men watched as the newcomers drew closer, the boat was filled with fishermen, mostly young except for 2 elderly men, smoking pipes, sitting on carefully arranged nets on the floor. The

fisherman waved and Shan called out a welcome, which was answered; at Eric's urging Shan Yi instructed them to stop by for hot tea or coffee.

Everyone sat under a large tree going through a friendly ritual of curtesies, as these were common folk who have never left the region, their customs and language were steeped in tradition so much so that the younger men did not speak unless they got permission. Eric was the first Caucasian they had ever seen and they were thoroughly impressed with the supplies that the Sabol party was equipped with, he captured their images on a cam recorder and played it back to the amazed fisherman. Since the visitors were from the vicinity, Shan and Do Chi peppered them with questions regarding the wildlife, both in and out of the lake. Shan Yi took the liberty to reassure his guests that he and the others are on a private, recreational vacation; not connected with the government in any way, this he sensed put the visitors at ease. Do Chi carefully brought up the 'fanciful' tale about beings, similar to humans, living in Hoyang and other close by bodies of water, he further elaborated that Eric owned a magazine in the U.S. and would pay handsomely for any kind of stories, or better, pictures of the 'water people'. The fishermen became visibly agitated and spoke softly with each other, Shan Yi quickly picked up on the controversy and leaned passively on Eric to summarize the situation. Eric told Shan to reiterate Do Chi's statement about the fictional magazine and emphasis on the money offer, at which Shan promptly complied. After a short silence, a middle aged man named Cha Bi said that he would like to show his hosts 'something' that he thinks they would find interesting, but not today, he would be back the next day and they would have to

go to another part of the lake's reach. With that the fisherman rose, clasped hands with Eric and rowed off into the distance.

"What do you make of them"? Asked Eric.

"One can never tell.., they may have bones or somekind of artifact.., I wonder what it is" Shan Yi added.

"What ever it is, we sure got their attention.., and visa-versa". He finished, nervously biting his nails.

Not really concerned over the possibility of foul play or bandits, Eric and Shan Yi nonetheless did carry firearms concealed in their vests, Bo and Yip would remain at camp with instructions to summon the pilots from Guiyang if no one returned within 24 hours. Cha bi returned as promised accompanied by just one of the fisherman; he described a cave, at roughly an hours' walk up a steep grade, yielding outrageous views of the lake. An offer to use the zodiac was readily accepted as they would reach their destination much quicker. A forty minute boat ride brought the group to a small cove with unusually large flat rocks on a red sand beach but a few feet wide, the men carried the zodiac away from the current and started their trek up a small path, single file. Their pace was minimized due to Do Chi's age and the overgrowth of plants yet, one could still make out a trail of sorts and the high humidilty made everyone drip in sweat, moss covered stones caused an occasional stumble, but the anticipation of what was in the cave kept the energy high. After leveling off, the trail became disorganized and Cha Bi stopped briefly to get his bearings, then headed into a dark, craggy hallow, shadowed by thick vegetation flowing over open spaces

along a broken rock wall. The temperature change, due to a cool breeze emitting from a sizable cave opening, was a welcome respite. Flash lights permitted the intruders to walk 30 feet until Cha Bi uttered 'here' and slowly removed small stones heaped in a pile, he straightened, holding a large cream colored object in two hands and offered it to Eric and his associates. Dry mouthed and with his heart pounding an almost deafening beat, Eric touched the dry surface of what appeared to be a medium sized, deformed, football shaped human skull, "This is a water man", Cha Bi said solemnly. Do Chi began to wail, slapping his face, muttering incoherent words, Shan Yi wrapped his arms protectively around his mentor, tears welling in his eyes.

The longer one looked at it, the more alien it appeared; a greatly elongated jaw bone and lack of nasal passages made it resemble a animal, something akin to a large snake or lizard like reptilian. Other features missing or altered were absent holes for ears, and a huge chamber taking up over half of the skull, was divulged when one peered through the eye sockets. For twenty minutes there was hushed murmuring, suddenly three of the fishermen who were entertained yesterday entered the cave, but kept alongside its walls. Cha Bi smiled and raised his hand saying, "Don't be alarmed, we're just defending our people's rights and heritage.., now you see.., the legend is true.., here is the proof, now it is time to talk business". He went on to say that that he will not allow photos to be taken and certainly not to allow the bones to fall out of his possession.

" Only heaven knows how much money you will make, there's no way we can

enforce..., what is the term..., royalties...,on any future profits., so it looks as though we will have only this one opportunity to do well". Shan rapidly interpreted this development and Eric responded, " I understand your position, I'm sure that we can arrange an more than adequate offer..., first we have to test the remains in some secure laboratory..., to ensure that it is authentic and not a clever result of a surgeon's hand..., at some point you're just going to have to place your trust in my hands". Disturbingly, loud booming sounds vibrated through the cave walls then the drip of water from the ceiling, "It's raining", Cha Bi softly said, still the men haggled for another hour and finally hammered out a one time payment of \$100,000 for control of the skull; to be paid up front and, to a third party. Out in the open the hiss from the thunder shower made communication difficult, everyone was completely drenched by the time they reached the zodiac, the three tardy fishermen disappeared into the jungle and bursts of lightning lit the gray sky. Cutting through the water and with vision poor, Eric noticed two large shadows dart in and out of the zodiac's wake; "stop", he screamed, reaching to kill the engine, the craft sank in the water, "I saw something, there", he pointed emphatically, but nothing could be seen except the countless dimples of raindrops on the lake's surface. "What is it", Shan Yi called out, "I saw something, two big somethings". Eric started the engine, circled the immediate area then gunned the motor, keeping a sharp eye fixed on the water. The relentless rain began to fill the boat and Do Chi took a bucket and began to bail; soon enough Eric spotted the camp with it's large silver tent and sheets of water pouring off it's roof. Bo and Yip ran from the shelter garbed in heavy rain gear to

help the group and tell Shan Yi that radio broadcasts announced thunder storms were passing through the region and that flooding was happening in low lying areas. "Radio the planes, tell them to pick us up as soon as the weather clears, then dismantle the cameras", Eric ordered. Once Shan Yi finished, Eric contacted Nova America's office in Shanghai and left careful instructions, lastly, he called via satellite link a Dr. Frederick Pullman, an elderly friend and retired professor of anthropology. Cloaked in a roll of plastic, Cha Bi defied the climate and slipped away in his bamboo raft.

The gas burner made sure that the soggy crew had a hot meal and everyone changed into dry clothes, while Eric and Shan Yi packed the the non-essential supplies. Bo and Yip returned from their assignment, collecting the video equipment with an unsettling account; the cameras had been smashed beyond repair. " Was there any footprints or anything laying around the tripods"? Eric asked.

"They didn't take notice..., they just saw everything lying on the ground", replied Shan.

"Do you think Cha Bi", as he spoke, Eric cast a harsh glare at Shan.

"Hard to say..., something tells me no though".

"Then who..., it looks like it was bashed with a rock"..

"Who or What", added Shan cryptically.

The Storm rumbled through the night and the men were genuinely afraid that they would have to move to higher ground, but as morning ripened the clouds dispersed their menacing sway revealing patches of blue and broken

triangles of birds in flight. By the afternoon the recognizable hum of airplane engines meant that the 'splendid isolation' was soon to end.

Chapter Two

Vienna was abuzz with the news of China's Tai Ching off shore project, the delegates could speak of nothing else, especially with the ongoing price shocks rippling across the international markets. Guafeng brought a large entourage of associates and family, Pu Chow, Hotu and Chai Sun, who had reluctantly joined the company his father helped found. Guafeng's parents, Fu Kai and Frances Fong were given rooms in his personal suite and nameless secretaries rounded off the list.

The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries meets with a lot less fanfare than it did since its creation in 1960, now the members confer in a low key and highly secured site; thanks to terrorism, still everyone is deeply engaged with its agenda and the host city becomes awash in VIPs. The Greater Sino party made up one of the largest contingents, but the biggest was that of China's Ministry of Energy and Petroleum headed by the austere, imposing Ju Yao Ping. Ju had been given a starring role in this session's proceedings, he will give the key note address summing up the events of the past 12 months and what the organization can expect in the upcoming year. Still Guafeng was the person most people wanted to meet, and he did not disappoint. He gave ample time to trade publications for interviews and photo ops, he debated the attendees in the hallways and salons of their hotel and urged the assembly to adopt a updated

energy conservation platform. As a general rule, the conference used the host's language when issuing formal communications but, Guafeng used every chance he got to practice his broken english; which had a charm all it's own and made for great copy and unintentionally drew one more favorable comparison against Secretary Ju.

With all the wonderful enticements of the Austrian capital; the museums, parks, historical sites and rococo architecture, his family choose to sit in the visitors gallery observing the summit. It was only when Guafeng insisted that Fu Kai accept an invitation to tour the AEIOU – the Austrian Cultural Information System's office that she and her in-laws deviated from OPEC's proceedings. Regarding of the world's preoccupation with unstable crude prices, the conference closed on schedule and Greater Sino's president decided to take a two day break do some sightseeing and shop for gifts at Mariahilferstrabe, Vienna's longest retail avenue. Not withstanding a crowded appointment calendar, Guafeng made sure that he had at least one hour with Frances to review grammar and pronunciation, they sit across each other, she holding cards illustrating pronouns and adjectives, he trying to decipher accordingly. Guafeng had grown quite fond of his plumb, proper tutor; teasing her over trivial topics made her smile once in awhile, then she returned to the task at hand. He laughed to himself over her responses, but knew he had to take her as seriously as she takes herself. In many ways Frances reminded him of his wife, not physically but temperment wise and like Fu Kai her intellect captivated other like-minded persons. Conducting two workshops outlining the need for increased

refining capacity, especially in America and the Far East was Carlborg Andersen, now the most sought after consultant in the oil business, his private firm handles work from, of course the Chinese, Indonesia and Malaysia in Asia to West Africa and Alaska, but he has negative assessments on Russia and it's economy, 'If only they could do a fourth of what the Chinese achieve', was his oft repeated lament. Steadily he has built his enterprise and amassed an immense fortune, calculated to be a billion U.S. dollars, and because of this prosperity OPEC had offered him numerous opportunities to recommend direction or useful advice. The extensive investments made by Carlborg in China made leaders in fields other than oil to seek his assistance in managing the regulations of Chinese laws, and He wanted to make a sales pitch to Guafeng after the conference.

Sitting at a coffee shop with a picturesque view of the Stadtpark, the two men meet to discuss business.

"You're looking good and are handling things well". Carlborg said.

"Yeah.., you know.., it's a tremendous amount of effort, can't do it without good people around you". Guafeng replied, sipping his coffee. "Fu Kai and her parents are just finishing their spree.., I told them to pick up things for the gang".

"That's thoughtful of you, hey listen.., I have an attractive idea I want you to know about. Last month I had a lunch with some friends involved in high tech, software to be exact". Guafeng took a bigger gulp of coffee and motioned to the waiter for a refill.

"There's this company called 'Total Access'.., it's made up of relatively unknown, but real smart individuals, they have the financing and want to have a presence

in either Shanghai or Nanjing, they came to me knowing my familiarity with Chinese government operations and, well, my reputation with Greater Sino”.

Guafeng smiled and nodded.

“Anyway, I know you recently acquired commercial property in Lao Tung district, we would like to lease some of it for a assembly plant.., and we will be manufacturing just the kind of equipment Greater Sino will be needing to make ‘Tai Ching’ produce at maximum efficiency.., you could become a partner with interest”. Guafeng nodded more then spoke up.

“Interesting, of course I’ll help in anyway I can but, the labor market has gotten a lot tighter, there’s no idle skilled workers.., everyone is overwhelmed.., before I left I opened a new training center for construction and carpentry apprentices”.

He continued, “I bring this up because there is a growing list of excellent projects, fully funded, land granted and permits completed, just nobody to build the damn things.., there are thousands of people moving to the cities everyday, they’re just country folk with no formal employment experience and we have no place to keep them”. Carlborg listened, his head resting on his fist.

“I tell you Carl, the next big community issue I want to deal with is the housing crises, and here’s where you can help.., it would be a big boost to have you on my committee for affordable housing”.

“I’d be honored”. Carlborg promptly responded.

“Fantastic, you’ll really make a difference, I’ll send information to your office when I meet with Shanghai’s Mayor and I want to meet the management of ‘Total Access’. Nothing more was said about business as the meal they ordered

arrived and Frances Fong was stepping from her taxi, her arms loaded with packages.

Bai Li rushed through her lunch break getting her nails done, picking up a few personal items so that she and Linda could attend a businesswomen's seminar that evening. She hadn't forgotten the possibility of starting a business of her own; creating a cosmetic line and her transfer to the environmental concerns office of Greater Sino turned out to be a disappointment, so far. There was very little to do for and for all practical purposes the staff consisted of herself and a clerk, Eric Sabol and another American scientist were away most of the time and she realized that she had no real understanding of modern environmental, conservationist law or principal. As the months went by, she resurrected her dream of concocting beauty products and finally built up the courage to speak seriously to Linda for support and start up money. In the few short years of Greater Sino's inauguration, Bai Li has undergone her own inner conversion; confident and now extroverted, cosmopolitan and most importantly, experienced, she has completely moved out of Guafeng's shadow and isn't afraid to take the risks that she's more or less comfortable with. The daring and calculated gambles she shared with Sino's president taught her that nothing is out of reach if you try hard and long enough, and since meeting Nova America's admirable female executive many new and exciting venues came into focus and reached out to her as well. There was a few more errands that needed tending to before going home and getting ready for the evenings event, jumping on and off her cell she was expecting a call from her doctor regarding an ear infection;

she'd been swimming at her complex's pool trying to increase her exercise regimen, and the nurse finally rang to tell her that a prescription would be waiting at a pharmacy.

"So take a tablet every 4 hours until gone and one more thing , you're going to have a baby.., Dr. Yung got your blood test back this morning, congratulations".

Bai Li stopped dead in her tracks.

"Bai.., hello.., did we get disconnected"?

Bai slowly stammered.

"What did you say"?

"You're pregnant, let's schedule an visit for next week".

"Wait.., hold it.., are you sure"?

"90% worth.., that's why the doctor wants to see you, are you okay? Dr. Yung always tells his patients their condition upfront..,but everything looks okay, other than the infection.., there isn't anything wrong is there"?

Tears squeezed through Bai's tightly shut eyes.

"No, no, I'm a little surprised that's all..,thank you so very much.., I'm so lucky..,I'll call you tomorrow.., thanks again".

She slowly walked to a bench and slumped in her seat, she ignored the chiming of her cell, perplexed and confused; she was always so cautious and was with Guafeng almost exclusively, and he insisted on prevention, but she'd been spending a lot of time with Chuck Manning, he was so kind, generous, well educated and unmarried; who is the father? Now she got nervous and queasy, she grabbed her shopping bags and headed for the mall exit. Reaching her

street she noticed Linda waiting; she arrived early, Bai's the car pulled to the curb and Linda opened the door.

"Hi.., I'm early, is your cell off"? Linda asked

"Ah, no.., I just got a bunch of long calls, good.., we can take our time getting ready".

The women kicked off their shoes and relaxed, chatting over minute trivia, Bai kept her cool and considered if she should mention her secret to her friend, her mind was swirling and she felt her body jumpy, struggling to stay coherent, she really wanted to lie down and think in silence. Sometimes she just caught bits and pieces of Linda's conversation.

"Shouldn't you be changing already"? Linda asked.

"Yeah, why don't you pick something out for me while I grab a quick shower".

Rumaging through Bai's closet Linda yelled, "So, have you seen Chuck lately"?

From the northwest of China, it's open plains and fertile grasslands producing the metric tons of wheat, maize and millet to feed the Chinese appetite for noodles and flour for baked goods, this earth is also the home of cattle ranches and hog farms yielding almost a quarter of the country's beef, pork and lamb and manned by the heartiest, most rugged of China's sons. Centuries of living in this hard land have created the taller, larger boned Chinese; fairer of skin with more Asiatic characteristics. Chuck Manning watched as two busses disgorged their human cargo at the athletic field of Shanghai University, the young men lined up, under the scrutiny of their coaches, exalted and apprehensive, standing erect listening carefully to instructions and introductions,

they all considered themselves very lucky to have heard of the recruitment before the managers were inundated with thousands and thousands of applicants.

Once orientation was over and the players sent to their dormitory, Chuck accompanied the investors, both western and domestic, to inspect the site for the new municipal stadium, that would be the arena to display the nation's first football team. The investors were optimistic that once the American football game would be exposed to the public, its popularity would explode. The long term goal is the creation of a feasible league; because expenses are so minimal in China, a very small outlay of cash would be needed to launch this venture, and if the football craze never materialized a new source of players for the U.S. would certainly come into its own.

Various government agencies had a considerable interest that the game of football be given encouragement to grow, China would love to dominate a sport so closely identified with America, for the obvious reasons, plus the added commercial potential of national wide franchises, again on the American model. Manning had long recognized that opportunities in China was virtually unlimited and he was one of an increasing wave of foreign businessmen trying to secure lucrative contracts and build companies. Already the number of non-chinese multimillionaires was grossly under counted, perhaps the central government did not want the populace to know the true number of outside business people who made immense sums of money in the Chinese economy. He also sincerely enjoyed living in such a remarkable society, the sheer novelty of having a hand in the rapidly changing scene, going from a strict communist state to a major

capitalist system, not to mention the liberalization of social standards; the expansion and assortment of the entertainment industry, the fostering of consumerism and its effect on the young, tolerating religious observances with native beliefs and alien faiths, and just more freedom to think differently.

Unfortunately accompanying all this change and opportunity was increased pollution, specifically from heavy industry and auto emissions, new freeways are under construction leading in all directions and one of those took Chuck and the investors to the site for the new mega Shanghai Stadium. It would be larger than any in the U.S., seating up to 100,000 spectators and containing luxury seats, state of the art interior and exterior video screens and the world's largest retractable roof. This list of firsts would have to wait until a ramshackle village could be torn down. Pulling off a dirt road, close to a busy dry goods store, the western investors huddled as Chuck began his narration of the project's objectives. "Here would be the beginning of the parking lot and bus terminal.., a shuttle service will whisk you to the closest portico opening into the stadium. A major 6 lane highway will allow for an efficient flow of vehicles entering and leaving the entire structure". He went on to describe the 50 concession stands, four club lounges and fourteen elevators, the listeners loved every word and applauded spontaneously.

The Chinese businessmen all present had some kind of tie to the Ministry of Commerce and Economic Affairs, one particular middle aged gentleman named Kung Lai, had lived in London, worked in the People's Republic Embassy and became one of the founders of the Shanghai Stock Exchange. Chuck had a

passing knowledge of Kung and didn't think highly of him, rumor had it that he wanted to charter a new bank, when the deal fell through, due to unexplained reasons, he joined a joint partnership that eventually established the exchange.

"Mr. Manning, a word with you please".

Chuck smiled, graciously extending his hand.

"I think the work that you're doing on behalf of Chinese athletics is quite commendable".

"Why thank you, it's an honor to be of assistance Mister.."?

" Kung Lai.., we met a few times in Beijing.., awhile ago".

"Yes, yes,.., I remember now.., you're in finance, right"?

"Correct, and you had your hands full with intellectual property disputes".

Chuck smiled again in agreement.

"Well then, are you managing as legal counsel.., protecting the fledging team and players"?

"I will render advice when applicable"..Chuck responded.

Kung continued, "Ah yes.., some of the young men approached me regarding a certain solicitation.., ah.., pertaining to rest and relaxation. I discussed this need with my associates and they agreed that it was not unreasonable".

"And what is it"? Chuck inquired.

"Ah.., yes.., it is our joint belief that since the men are so far away from home, family and friends.., there is a real concern over loneliness.., and the tremendous burden placed upon them may lead to despondency".

Chuck felt that something big was coming down and he wasn't sure he was going

to like it.

“With that being said, my associates and I believe the players should have access to..., well..., companions”.

The American lawyer stood dumbstruck, then threw his head back laughing.

Kung looked annoyed, “Mr. Manning, I assure you..., I’m quite serious, we know these boys well enough to know that once they feel comfortable and start making money.. they will look at enjoying themselves..., it’s human nature and we did promise the families that we’d look after their sons”.

There was an awkward pause, then Chuck asked, “Why bring this up to my attention, certainly you and your associates could handle this subject on your own..., I mean..., you do know much more people than I”.

“Very true, Mr. Manning and we intend to do most of the arranging, however, we feel that it would be best if a westerner, respected and familiar with our culture, be the face as it were..., you Americans have so much more experience with sex scandals involving professional athletes..., if there were any controversy you could easily say that you provided funding for the team for recreation..., what the team managers did with the money was completely out of your hands, which is absolutely true, it is a matter of simple accounting to hide this activity among the myriad of responsibilities that you have to look after”.

Chuck’s mind was still a whirl when a retired American university coach approached with some questions.

“I’ll call your office on Thursday”. Kung concluded.

Tianjin municipality is another industrial center located in the north,

growing rapidly, showing all the signs of making money in the manufacturing sector. Because of its preeminent position as China's number one shipbuilding yard, Tianjin was chosen to construct Greater Sino's off shore oil platforms. For months Pu Chow and Hotu negotiated with steel producers to ensure a steady supply of the metal and with help from the government, ship fabrication projects were cancelled or set back anywhere from 3 to 6 years. This caused a great deal of resentment but, Pu Chow defused the criticism via promises of providing low interest loans, cosigned by Greater Sino, to those who were put out. He didn't have to bother though, once Beijing issued its directive, that was that. Because of the demand for iron ore used in steel production, efforts at the mines were doubled, workers were pressed into mandatory overtime and companies sent headhunters into small villages hoping to seduce the unemployed to take on a career in mining. But the pressures were building; long hours, absence from home and worst of all, unsafe working conditions. Just as the commencement ceremony for 'Tai Ching' was being planned at the Tianjin shipyard, a horrific explosion ripped through a mine at the Qilian Mountain range in Qinghai province, trapping and eventually killing 310 miners. The rescue squads swung into action using heavy earthmoving machinery to bore into the collapsed shafts, this proved to be an exercise in futility as the mines are some of the deepest in China and were ill supported due to inadequate reinforcement. As emergency assistance flooded Qilian, details of the tragedy trickled into the media and, accordingly the Ministry of Information enacted regulatory 'protocol' that limited the time spent reporting the accident to three minutes and no live coverage. This

practice coupled with the perilous, neglectful state of the mines incited a workers' strike that spread through the whole of Qinghai, the chain reaction of the halt in ore processing had obvious complications and Beijing sent the military to restore order. The workers felt that somekind of bargaining was in the cards once the soldiers arrived; how wrong they were, those who acted as 'ringleaders' were arrested immediately and a command was issued that the miners return to work in 24 hours. When this failed to motivate the strikers the army opened fire on the barricaded camps, allowing riot police to occupy and restart mining operations without the former employees. All that was reported regarding the takeover was that the government forced the mines open, discussions with the dissident workers were ongoing and a reiteration of the pay scale and fringe benefits enjoyed by the miners. Nothing was said of the bodies being blown apart by artillery and the thousands severely injured for life, for all practical purposes the strike was portrayed as a single, localized affair and the instigators as greedy, unpatriotic and corrupt.

All this seemed a world away from Tianjin and the large red canopies spread over the VIP seating and stage, declaring Greater Sino's intention to build China's largest off shore oil platforms. Of the invited guests none was more esteemed than Han Shao Zhang, President of the People's Republic of China, it was something of a rare occurrence for the Chinese President to step out of his private, regulated existence in the Forbidden City and attend a business event, but such is the level of interest by the central ruling committee that President Han, accompanied by 50 high ranking officials, including Secretary Ju Yao Ping,

preside over the launching ceremony. Contrasting with the drab gray of the yard, neon colored banners emblazoned with Chinese characters bespeaking of good fortune, double happiness and long life fluttered in the ocean breeze. Guafeng opened the event, thanking the honored guests for their attendance and candidly delineated the objectives of 'Tai Ching', boasting how sound China's engineering competence has become, and cited the infant space program as another example of progress, he expounded how this project and many others that are following it will make the nation the greatest it's ever been in it's long, glorious history.

A hired orchestra played the national anthem ahead of Secretary Ju introducing the elderly Chief of State. The applause grew louder as the President rose from his chair and smilingly walked to the podium, his tall frame barely leaning on an ebony cane that the seventy-nine year old statesman used to steady his gait, he reached into his breast pocket and unfolded a single page speech then motioned with his hands for quiet. Many of his fellow countrymen have nothing but praise for their leader, his ten year administration accentuated the need for technical research, higher education for the masses, improved communication, transportation and municipal infrastructure and warm diplomatic relations with all. Hailing from the city of Shenyang, Han Shao Zhang was one of many children, his father worked in contruction for various foreign consessions and he learned it's rudimentary techniques before being sent to vocation school to become an electrician. With the upheaval of the 1930's and 40's, young Han found himself a member of the Shenyang Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, a

close ally of the Chinese Communist Party. Despite this relationship Han had many friends in the Kuomintang, there is even a photo extant of him and a group of men listening to Chiang Kai-Shek speak in Shanghai, this could have grown into a cozy situation, but the 1937 invasion of Manchuria sparked intense anti Japanese sentiment in the future president and this contempt was directed at the Nationalist forces due to it's preoccupation with battling the communists instead of making the defeat of the Japanese its number one priority. Rising through the ranks, Han eventually became a commander first class under Chou En-Lai and stood a few feet away from Mao Tse Tung when the chairman declared the birth of the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949.

The sacrifices and emotional fervor of the war years were nothing compared to the revolutionary zeal that the communists were going to use in pursuit of their version of an utopian society. A 'landlordless' system of property ownership was to be instituted by making peasants join 'producer cooperatives', where labor, tools and materials were shared among the farmers, this policy known as the Agraran Reform Law enjoyed some success; inpart to a run of good growing seasons, but the organization of the co-ops were clumsy and confusing, there were dangerous shortages of equipment or fuel in some places and a wasteful bounty in others.

Many could see how resources were being squandered yet no contradiction found it's way to Mao's ears, and his sway over the party apparatus increased. Difficulties with Krushchev provoked an ambitious new plan titled the 'Great Leap Forward', the thrust here was to do in a decade what took the Russians four times as long; the

overwhelming collectivization of labor into strict communes, who's only purpose was to spur industrial output, especially the production of steel.

By most accounts the effort impressed the outside world with the vigor and determination of the Chinese Marxists and the ability of the Chairman to mesmerize the populace, however regular indoctrination was necessary as Han Shao Zhang oft related by way of an interview he had with farmers from Shaanxi Province.

“Comrade Han, please try to understand.., it is not that we are lazy or uncaring of our great nation's future.., I want all Chinese to have a better and safer world to live in.., it is just that I have my family to care for and children”.

In a somewhat strained manner, Comrade Han replied.

“Brother farmers.., these are indeed hard times we live in, I myself spend more time away from my wife and children than among them.., it is part of our allegiance to the People's Republic that we feel pain, real pain, for only in this suffering we will have success for posterity”. He admitted that he did not look at the anguished expressions on the faces of the wives struggling to keep composed, nor did he watch the dirty, malnourished bodies of the children, crying due to illness and hunger; the farmers sadly gave in and boarded a train the next day bound for Anshan. It was after this episode that Han asked for a transfer to the railroad building and maintenance division, but was rejected and he was placed in charge of an apprentice training program for electricians; an obvious choice.

For this position he moved with his family to Fuzhou and acquired special clearance for purchasing trips to Hong Kong and Japan. This was the most

arduous time of Han's early years, as progress was slowly made on various fronts; food production was advancing, industrialization began to show tangible results and, at least in the cities, a sense of rhythm, of reliability and security was taking root, but a new blow was taking aim at the body politic in the guise of anti-corruption and socialist reform; the Cultural Revolution. What triggered the Chairman's onus, who can say, did he see something others did not or would not? Most likely Mao realized that as prosperity took shape, certain interests would become prominent, perhaps displacing some of his authority, or maybe he sincerely believed that the thread of China's socialist fabric was becoming undone and it was up to him to purify the party and in turn the country of 'capitalist, bourgeois' tendencies. It was a time to learn quickly and Han Shao Zhang did just that, capable and intelligent Han built a reputation for getting tough tasks done with the least amount of complaining, this brought him to the attention of the of the ruling Politburo, who assigned him ever more demanding dictums.

On some occasions He did have reservations about orders issued, and 'corrective adjustment' came fast, twice he was severely reprimanded and placed under arrest; he served a seven month sentence, without specific charges, and was compelled to wear large signs and a dunce cap stigmatizing him as a 'good comrade gone astray', but still able to be rehabilitated. After that incident, Han never made another misstep or antagonistic gesture vis a vis the Chairman or his Red Guards. In time he regained favor and trust and began to solidify his own power base so that he became Communist Party leader and

President of the world's most populated nation at the age of sixty-nine.

“Here is one more reason, another piece of evidence that China is a major power, taking care of her needs, planning for greater achievements..., fulfilling a destiny where failure is banished forever”. The president concluded his speech, saluted the crowd and returned to his seat. Guafeng, donning a remote microphone headset, called everyone's attention to the lowest level of the shipyard dock where he stood. Towering over him was a massive crane that will be used to lift the tons of metal to fashion the platforms, streaming from its outstretched arm were braided ropes of a million and one red and orange firecrackers, that he lit to scare away malevolent influences. Like an army of rifles firing in sequence, the sound echoed off warehouses while red, gold and green smoke rose in a huge column and wafted over land and sea. The young executive invited the 500 strong gathering to a lunch buffet; the VIPs housed in a separate enclosure where the paramount leaders could mingle with the titans of Chinese business.

Guafeng worked his guests like a seasoned pro, chatting about with Fu kai and his daughter, they made their way to the secure area and were stopped by a sentry who escorted them to the president's table. There sat the most powerful men in China and they ceased talking when Guafeng and his wife bowed, Fu Kai a few paces behind her husband, the Supreme Leader slowly stood and motioned for those closest to him to vacate their seats. Having made the Guafengs comfortable, the president again took to his chair and gently patted the hand of the year old child.

“La, la, la.., what a precious baby, what is her name?”

“Jai Song, excellency”, Fu Kai proudly replied.

“Oh my.., what a pretty name.., is she a year old?”

Fu Kai nodded.

“ I hope she will grow up to be a beautiful, healthy girl.., like her mother.., and you are.., Fu Kai”?

“Yes excellency, your memory is astounding”.

“Oh, I need reminding like everyone else. Guafeng, my compliments on a wonderful celebration, many, many hearts and minds join me in hoping that ‘Tai Ching’ will be the windfall our country deserves”. As he spoke, he glanced Mao like at the members of the ruling council, in a manner of speaking on their behalf.

“I must say, I am impressed by your capacity for work.., we owe you a debt of gratitude, your efforts to make our country independent of oil imports has immeasurable benefits and ramifications”. The words of President Han could not help but create a atmosphere of jealousy among Guafeng’s peers and the assembled bureaucrats; more so with the bureaucrats, the Chief of State continued with the accolades then allowed others to inject comment. Secretary Ju took advantage of the moment and spoke of figures and percentages reflecting the endless barrels of oil needed for future expansion and how Greater Sino must manage the off shore reserves to meet the expansion.

“As we place dependence on ‘Tai Ching’.., make no mistake.., its input must meet each mark.., each goal at the right date in time, if not, the damage done to the economy would be highly detrimental. Once a designation of amount

and source is declared, that supply cannot waiver..., it is a situation of placing most of the eggs in one basket”. Ju Yao Ping’s words reverberated throughout the group, and Guafeng took umbrage.

“Secretary Ju..., you have seen the figures, verified by your department and independent petroleum producers, I have the impression that you either distrust the data or feel that Greater Sino will not be able to fulfill its obligations”. A slight scowl shaded the secretary’s face for a second, then he retreated into a congenial mode. “ I’m sorry if I have created a misunderstanding, that is not my intention..., needless to say, running the energy and petroleum ministry is a grave responsibility, I have to weigh all actions with a discerning eye..., I want to ensure that nothing will interrupt China’s economic stability”. “Point well taken, Ju”, remarked the President, “You’re concern is greatly appreciated and quite reasonable”. He then lectured the circle on the old theme of making China the number one oil exporter in Asia, whatever animosity was left melted away as the elderly statesman recounted a disarming story about the recent state visit by Norway’s king and his energy ministry.

Cha Bi was amazed at the futuristic looking city Shanghai had become, at least it’s business sectors and upper class neighborhoods. He had only seen old pictures of the metropolis, but to be there in person was a ‘never before experienced highlight’. Eric brought him and a kinsman to the big city to finalize the transaction of turning over the skull for small bill yuan, one hundred thousand dollars worth; if the skull was the real thing. Reaching the building that housed Greater Sino’s Nature and Conservation administration, Shan Yi, who was

taking care of the visitors from Guizhou, laughed as he watched the facial expressions of Cha Bi and company when they rode an elevator for the first time, he lead the duo down a large hallway adorned with beautiful photos of wildlife and scenes of international wildernesses. Waiting for the Chinese peasants were Eric, Do Chi and Dr. Pullman, they had turned the environmentalist's offices into a laboratory worthy of a Mary Shelly novel; yet capable of rendering a accurate decision on credibility.

After a quick rap on door number 36, Eric was soon shaking hands with the illiterate emissaries. Carefully Cha bi placed a square carrying case on the large lab table, undid the fasteners and lifted the lid, his worn hands untied the cords of a black bag and there, gleaming under florescent lights, was the sand colored skull.

The anthropologist stepped forward, picked up the skull, briefly handled it then turned to Eric saying "let's get started". Everyone jolted backward, colliding into one another as the office door splintered apart and police officers swarmed into the room ordering the occupants to fall to the floor, some pounced on the hapless scientists while others seized the remains, confiscated loose items and photographed the melee.

"What the hell"..., is all Eric could say before a gag muzzled his speech. Instanly the contents of the lab were carried off and other security officers appeared with one unmistakably in charge, he gestured at Shan who was picked up and brought before him. "Shan Yi, I am Commissioner Yutai, you and everyone here are under arrest, Please advise Mr. Sabol". Shan Yi did as he

was told. "Please cooperate, we are going to police head quarters", the commissioner added. The men were quickly lead to waiting vans surrounded by security guards, Eric and Dr. Pullman were placed in one vehicle and the Chinese in another, a young police woman helped seat the bound Americans. In a comforting tone she described what would be happening once they arrived at their destination, "You will be allowed to call the U.S. Embassy after questioning", she said in flawless English, "As well as family or business associates".

Eric could see the city pass by through a slit of a window, his mind was grinding information, breaking down the events; how did they know, how much did they know and how much trouble were they in? He was scared and shocked, manipulating simple country folk was one thing, underestimating the intelligence apparatus of the central committee is quite another. He thought of his father, who always supported him, in all his sometimes unusual ideas, he held back tears when he realized how upset and worried his father would become once he heard what has happened. He was also deeply sorry for bringing his old friend and mentor to China to reach for an unimaginable high, only to get thrown into a nightmarish world of government intrigue where you could lose all your human rights. Still gaged Eric turned his eyes to the retired professor sitting next to him, a blank expression was on the old professor's face. There were no sirens, but there was an escort so the convoy never stopped rolling, he noticed familiar skyscrapers and knew they would be at police headquarters with the next turn, "At least they're keeping their word", he thought.

The vans came to a stop after passing two check points that took them

deep into the facility, the back doors swung open and the female officer guided the men through a maze of corridors and deposited them in a typical interrogation room. There were two chairs close to the center of the room and a long wooden table with chairs for three persons, a large mirror fronted the Americans as they were courteously shown their places. Breaking the uncomfortable silence was the loud clang of a steel door, on the other side of the room, being unbolted and three stern looking officers seating themselves at the table. "Mr. Sabol, I am Commissioner Wang, I would like to begin with informing you of the offenses which have brought you before us today. You are accused of grand larceny, illegal financial transactions, inciting illegal and immoral behaviour, criminal trespass, wildlife endangerment and other miscellaneous felonies, these are very grave crimes..., our investigation has followed your contacts with Do Chi, travel to Guizhou's restricted zone, criminal dealings with the fishermen and, worst of all, your actions in effect created a conspiracy that would have caused incalculable anxiety and controversy, not only in China but globally as well. I think you do not even begin to understand the consequences of your conduct. We find it hard to accept that an intelligent man like yourself, well respected, with a well deserved reputation for protecting and enhancing our natural environment ..., would involve yourself in such a shockingly flagrant disregard for law and common sense".

Eric sat motionlessly, staring at the floor. Wang unemotionally continued, "Dr. Pullman, you are guilty of aiding this monstrous scheme, albeit to a lesser degree and perhaps under fraudulent circumstances..., this unfortunate situation

will be forwarded to the prosecutor's office in a few days and like everyone else you may post bail or remain incarcerated. The steel door open again and the familiar female officer entered carrying a phone. "Please make whatever arrangements you deem necessary". Wang concluded. The environmentalist called his father and relayed the turn of events, he was on the phone for about an hour and then stopped to ask what the bail would be? The commissioner responded, "\$250,000 for you and \$50,000 for the doctor". Gilbert Sabol told his son that the money would be there in 40 minutes. Dr. Pullman declined to notify anyone. On the way to their holding cell Eric inquired about Shan Yi and the others, all he was told was that 'they are being taken cared of'. Dusk had fallen and the two were sharing their harrowing experiences over drinks at Bai Li's apartment, Chuck Manning and Linda pelted them with questions, "What the fuck were you thinking"? shrieked Linda, " How could you carry all this through and not, at any point, question your intentions"?

"This was all for science, all of it.., everything! Granted I was the catalyst, but the magnitude of the discovery.., it overwhelmed me and I admit it clouded my judgement". Eric pleaded.

"Clouded your judgement"? Linda cut him off, " I think you're mentally unbalanced.., you're off your rocker.., all this weird, cloak and dagger shit.., it's fried your brain.., only heaven knows how this will reflect on Greater Sino and Nova's image, God..! Not to mention the fact that you may spend many years in prison".. Both brother and sister had tears in their eyes.

"I know, I know", Eric yelled back. Chuck jumped into the fray, "All right that's

enough, what's done is done". Frustrated, Linda stormed into Bai's bedroom. Sitting back down Chuck rubbed his temples saying, "What I don't get is, why the leniency? I mean this is such a devastating affront to the central government.., somethings up here, maybe it's your connection to Greater Sino.., it's hard to say, but this I know for sure.., they are treating you very differently". Eric shrugged his shoulders. He continued, " You posted bail and Richard, you are permitted to leave the country and return when you get your summons! I can't believe it.., I have never heard of this kind of favorable, justice.., clemency..? I don't even know what to call it". Most of the time Bai Li sat hardly uttering a word, this mess couldn't have happened at a worst time for her, she had had told Poo and Linda of her 'little surprise' and then swore them to secrecy.

She was on the floor above watching a video on endangered species when all the commotion began the police set up a cordon that kept the employees put, only after their departure could Bai Li walk through the shambles that her office had become and tremble over what this all meant. She heaved a sigh of relief when Linda called and asked if everyone could meet at her place. Knowing full well how Guafeng would react if he found out about her pregnancy, Bai had come to the conclusion that termination was the best thing for everyone and even if Chuck was the father, they had just met and she didn't think he would propose marriage, she had made an appointment at the clinic. And with all this tumult, she was smart enough to know that she would have to go back and work for Greater Sino's CEO; she was anxious to get her life back on track. Noticing her pensive mood, Chuck made two cups of coffee and sat next to her.

“How you doin”? he smiled

“Okay”...,she was slowly learning english thanks to Linda, who gave her a ‘Learn Mandarin the easy way’ booklet, Bai was mastering the alphabet, and when convenient, was allowed to sit in on tutor sessions with Frances Fong and her sometime lover. When they spent the night together Chuck did his best to explain nouns, verbs and pronouns, and despite her present condition, she was on her way to fluency.

The group cringed everytime the phone rang, and for good reason, at 9:30 Guafeng called, Bai passed the phone to Linda.

“Is it true.., is he guilty”? Linda confirmed the truth.

“ I see, I don’t know what to say..., I’ve been on the phone since three o’clock.., I don’t want to talk to him, I don’t want anything to do with him.., I told the same thing to your father”. He spoke slowly, sadly. Guafeng was shocked by Eric’s downright deception, here was one of China’s largest oil and gas interests enthusiastically supporting it’s environmental and conservation efforts suddenly jarred by an incredible scandal that seemed to happen right under the top management’s nose. He was also hurt that Eric would have such little regard for the sensibillites of his nation’s cultural and national wonders, all what he could do now was prepare for the inevitable story to be reported in the morning news.

“ Linda, do me a favor.., come by tomorrow and pick up your brother’s things.., and tell him I want to talk to him”. Linda muttered a response and hung up the phone.

Early in the morning, Guafeng assembled his executives, ready to issue

some kind of explanation over the 'Sabol Affair'. Amazingly everyone was in for another surprise; Shanghai's major dailies barely mentioned the story, there was an article, two paragraphs long that stated 'a theft ring had been broken which was clandestinely operating out of an office of the Greater Sino Petroleum Company', it ended with an exoneration of the company's executive board and basically blamed the crime on 'lowly individuals who were both stupid and inexperienced law breakers'. The news broadcasts were equally subdued; no more than two minutes of air time was spent on the incident, doling out only the briefest of detail. As journalists began to crowd into Greater Sino's Spartan conference room, its president received a phone call from the Ministry of Information and Communications, advising Guafeng to state the 'truth'; the company had no knowledge of any illegal activities, it is just as stunned as everyone else and to end the interview after five minutes. Guafeng was thrown off guard with the call, yet he regained composure, took his place behind a forest of microphones and solemnly paraphrased the comments from the information ministry. Thanking the reporters for their time, he returned to his office and told his secretary to find Chuck Manning.

Chapter Three

The booming electronics industry in Nanjing attracted Carlborg and his investors to open China's most advanced semi-conductor manufacturing plant, he had partnered with Japan's Machinoba Artificial Intelligence firm and native born Wuhong Wifi computers. Now he planned a gigantic bash to celebrate one

more sign of the non-stop growth of the Chinese economy. The American entrepreneur had heard of the strange goings on at Greater Sino, and like many believed that it was a very small, amateurish group of hoodlums and not connected to Guafeng or any of his close associates. A large section of the new building had been cleared of furniture, so that Carlborg could decorate in a 'Arabian Nights' motif. He had the waiters and waitresses dress in fanciful costumes resembling 'blue genies' and 'ladies of the harem', he went out of his way to call Bai Li and ask if she wanted to join in the fun, she declined saying that since she was back on Guafeng's personal staff, she didn't think it would be appropriate. He understood, but he wanted to talk to her regarding a 'wonderful opportunity' after the party.

Fukai had lay her daughter down for her nap and went to her desk to work on the household mail. She came across Carlborg's invitation and made a notation on her calendar, the event was a two weeks and she would have to wait until then to see her husband. Her thoughts wandered as she picture her handsome spouse, his body resting against hers as they slept and the scent of his hair, sweet and musky, unconsciously she wrapped her arms around herself, Fukai is the kind of woman that rarely complains, is never disagreeable, always carries herself with a gracious air; which is sincere, as she likes people and more importantly, believes that one's life should be an endeavor to improve on society and it's varied conditions. Deep inside she is extremely grateful for the life that Guafeng has provided, wealth and influence to prompt change in the lives of

millions and millions, she has basked in the glow of his achievements, given birth to his child and loves him with all the passion her being can muster. Yet, more and more she feels his absence and has experienced loneliness for the first time in her life. Granted, there are a few distractions from this personal deprivation, motherhood fills her with joy and the thrill of watching Jai Song grow, there is the socializing and occasional travel but, not the close physical presence that she craves, in many ways one would think that she'd be used to living a somewhat separate life from her husband. Ever since they were married, they rarely lived together longer than a few weeks at a time, he was always looking for oil.

Nowadays, not only did Guafeng's schedule keep him far afield, the obligations as the CEO's wife engulfed her family, robbing her of the second most meaningful purpose in her life; her career. Fu Kai had always placed a premium on learning and community service, it vexed her that she had to pass on many lucrative and creative offers such as the expansion of the centralized public school system, modeled on the American version or the federal work force housing program taking shape in China's coastal cities. She resigned herself to the fact that there is a trade off for everything. She heard her housekeeper and Kai Chang laughing over radio call in show, Kai made his way to her study and asked,

"Are you planning to go somewhere soon"?

"Ah.., not quite yet, in fact I'm just about ready for a quick dip in the pool".

"Really, I was going for a swim if you didn't need me.., lets go then".

Fu Kai looked at him with slightly raised eyebrows, he smiled carefully.

“You go ahead, I have a few more letters to open”. She replied. He gave her a sly salute and headed to the pool reserved for residents in their section of the building. The clear, refreshing water tasted sweet and Kai had the pool to himself, he hardly made a splash when he dove in, making gentle yet powerful strokes with his muscular arms, quickly completing a dozen laps, out of the corner of his eye he noticed Madame Guafeng disrobing, glancing around she remarked,

“Gee..., the place’s abandoned”. She silently slid into the water and started her usual routine. Kai Chang paid her no attention, he continued to swim back and forth then climbed out carefully pulling up his loosened speedos. Along sides the walls of the enclosed pool are located small dressing rooms where two or three could easily change in comfort and privacy, Kai disappeared into room 6. Fu Kai lazily bobbed around until a gaggle of kids invaded the water’s surface and she retreated to room number 6. A naked Kai eagerly wrapped Fu Kai in a large, warm towel, drying and embracing her tightly at the same time, opening the towel he slid her out of her bathing suit and caressed her head, gently biting her neck licking her breasts and kissing her nipples; pressing her against the wall he whispered “Shh”, as she softly moaned. Picking her off her feet, he sat her on a chair and sucked on her inner thighs, slowly moving his lips to her crotch, he started to dart his tongue in and out of her, when she suddenly stood, jammed her arms through the sleeves of her robe and bolted from the dressing room. “No, no “she wimppered.

BOOK TWO

Ju's emissary softly knocked on the door that bore the name of Chai Sun. The stranger had carefully prepared for his encounter with the son of Vice-President Chu Teh; how to present himself, what tone of voice to use and especially, how to avoid being threatening or confrontational. There were very specific reactions that he needed to invoke and he was no stranger to the ways of deception. He meant no harm, it wasn't personal, he needed to feel him out, he needed a tool. From the other side of the door came Chai's clear voice.

"Can I help you"?

"Yes.., Chai Sun..? Please may I have a moment with you"?

"You are"?

I'm a friend.., Ming Diu.

"Do I know you"?

"No.., not yet, I would like to discuss your father's death".

Chai peered through the spy view at the medium sized man, who was dressed simply and had an owlish appearance.

"Come in". Chai's apartment was a hodgepodge of models of oil rigs, designs, sketches and photos of oil platforms and pictures of groups of men; some in business suits, others in overalls covered in oil, and rare ensembles of tribalmen in loin cloths, all representative of his many travels. There was the scent of brewing jasmine tea in the air, both men bowed to the other and Chai motioned to comfortable, overstuffed chairs placed to take advantage of the view of Shanghai's bustling harbor.

"Well, what do you have to say regarding my father"? Chai asked. Ming

Diu carefully sat back and folded his hands on his lap.

“Chai don’t you think it unusual that your father died of cardiac arrest while being so close to Shanghai East International Hospital”?

“I have wrestled with this fact since my father’s passing”.

“Did your father have a heart condition”?

“ He had elevated blood pressure, which he was taking medication for, but he himself told me that it was not serious and I believe him.., please tell me.. are you with some investigative agency”?

“Chai, I have been sent by individuals who are very concerned with your father untimely demise and the role Greater Sino may have played in this tragedy”.

A startled look shaded Chai’s tired face.

“What do you mean”?

“What if you father’s heart attack was brought on by over work or business worry”?

“My father had an amazing capacity for work, he enjoyed it, he helped create Greater Sino, he took such pride with it’s development and received ample recognition for his efforts”. Chai responded defensively.

“Oh yes, I’m sure the company appreciated your father’s expertise, his devotion and all that.., still it’s not hard to fall into a pattern of.., shall we say ‘taking advantage’, it happens.., even in the most benign, munificent organizations”.

“Ming Diu, Greater Sino treated my father with the upmost respect and

consideration, they were always cognizant of his welfare, his health” Chai declared, his voice deep and serious.

Sensing Chai’s growing agitation, Ming Diu backed off and tried a different approach.

“ I see, you will agree that your father and Pu Chow was close...”

Rumblings from american producers of high tech equipment were bemoaning their situation of increasing labor costs and shrinking market shares long before Carlborg Andersen’s latest creation, Wuhong Nippon Intelligence. American chip makers were in the midst of a raging war with cheap but, high quality foreign software manufacturers, and Wuhong would struggle for many years, Carlborg knew this, it was very hard to make money overseas; his company would satisfy local demand. He picked up the phone to return a call from Bai Li, she wanted to know what his ‘wonderful opportunity’ was. A few hours later she entered his luxurious suite and was greeted by an enthusiastic secretary who had orders to show her in right away. This was the third office Carlborg had occupied since doing business in China 12 years ago, as he became richer, he brought fancier digs and this time had arranged for private quarters for himself next door.

“Hi beautiful”...he called.

“Hello”, she coyly smiled.

He gave her a peck on the cheek and pulled out her chair.

“Well, what’s new” she inquired.

“Working like a demon..., drink”? He laughed as he uncorked a bottle of

brandy. Bai nodded an acceptance and made herself comfortable on one of the huge leather chairs in front of Carl's desk. She always admired this hard-driving, conservative business visionary, who had made such a difference and created such impact on modern Chinese business practices. He shared so many qualitties with Guafeng, both are large framed men that exude confidence, a swaggering charm and the obvious shrewdness that allows them to spot a deal a mile away. She also thought him attractive.., he is a divorcee who keeps a steady girlfriend and yet still remains close to his ex-wife.

"Okay, let's get down to business my dear, remember at the Wuhong reception I mentioned a great business that you could fit into nicely"?

"Yes.., something like that", she replied taking a dainty sip from her glass.

"Good, it's a liquor distributorship.., isn't that interesting"?

Carlborg smiled and weaved his fingers tepee style on his desk and repeated,

"A liquor distributorsip.., you know, champagne, whiskey, beer, ah.., booze.., you got it right"?

"Yes" .., she got it and slowly realized how big this offer was.

"Now", he continued "There is this company called B.F. Langton, who produces quality whiskeys, rums, various spirits cheaply.., Brad Langton and I are good friends, we've discussed this idea for awhile now and he's very keen on breaking into the Chinese market.., I'm willing to act as CEO, temporarily and them be a consultant of sorts.., you know the procedure", he smiled.

Bai Li nodded in agreement.

"I have been wating for an offer like this but, do you think I'm up to it? I

mean you know what my abilities are like, and I have to ask...why me"?.., is it some kind favor involving Guafeng?

"Oh, I think you understand the fundamentals... You are a chinese citizen...you are aware of government regulations regarding businesses owned by foreigners"? Carl looked straight at her. "You're smart enough to recognize a sweet deal when you see one... besides the decision making will be made by myself, all you have to do is be our spokesperson and help build a strong economy for your country. You'll do fine and Guafeng has very little to do with this venture. When I spoke to him he was very supportive and he said he hasn't seen you in weeks". She demurred a bit quickly thinking up a graceful response.

"Yes, you know what his day is like and I'm in between jobs... well I'm one of his secretaries again but... I would love to start something new... yea, I don't see Guafeng much nowadays and that's fine with me".

Carlborg feigned surprise and went on,

"In a nutshell you'll be shadowing me for the next few months, we'll fly to California where you can see the whole process for beginning to end... it's really interesting, I know you'll get into it big time". Bai brightened and her good mood returned, she lucked out again, once more a golden opportunity dropped in her lap. Things always look better when there are options on the table and lately she felt the sting of failure, and now along with cutting this new path she came to a silent decision, she was going to keep her baby. There was ample money but, more importantly she received her parents blessing in addition to Linda and Mini Poo, all promised to help... she only had to ask.

“So when do we get started”? She asked in a relaxed voice.

“Ah.., next week.., I’ll give you a call on Wednesday and then we’ll fly out in two or three days.., so prepare, you’ll probably be away for at least two weeks.., I’ll make the arrangements for a place to stay..,you’re just going to love it”. They continued with small talk until late afternoon then picked a trendy eatery for dinner.

Frances Fong was used to the stop and go schedule of her employer and as always, she tore up her schedule to accommodate his. This morning Guafeng called and told her to meet at his office per usual and that he’d be a little late. She barely finished her biscuit when he, accompanied by secretaries and close to 12 reporters, barged in amidst camera flashes thanked the media and excused himself due to his work that awaited him, he literally shoved them out of the room using the large double doors.

“Phew... they were like sparros chasing a grasshopper”. He laughed pressing his back against the doors.

“Morning Frances”.., he called out as a secretary handed him a file which he thumbed through and gave a few instructions.

Let’s get started”.., he motioned to Frances and she took her familiar seat across him and spread out vocabulary worksheets on his desk.

“Okay.., let’s see.., when we left off you wanted to learn how to use these terms.., as you can see they expound further on descriptive adjectives”.

Guafeng casually looked at his simply dressed, Christian reared tutor. He softly stood and made his way beside her on the opposite side of his desk, as she

droned on about examples in conversation using the new words.

“So you can use different inflections to emphasis meaning while giving you listeners the chance to comment..., any questions”? She politely asked.

“Umm..., no continue”..., he passively urged.

“Now let’s say wanted to convey a deep seated fear..., of an accident on a marine rig”..., Guafeng silently leaned in and gently kissed his teacher on the lips, it was a spontaneous act, he never looked at Frances in that way and she definitely not his type, he just felt like doing it. A stunned Frances drew back and peered at her boss.

“Guafeng, I sincerely hope that you will not have another lapse in judgement like that again”! Raising her hand she pointed at his custom black leather chair.

“Got it”, he sheepishly replied.

After an hour or so of repetitious exercise, a secretary buzzed announcing the arrival of Mr. Manning and several members of the Chinese National Football team named the Beijing Tigers.

“Welcome Chuck”..., Guafeng spoke in almost pefect, accentless english. “Please everyone help yourself”..., he reverted to classic mandarin as two beautiful women offered tea and pastry from expensive porcelain platters, one of the lovely ladies was Bai Li. The introductions took place and then Chuck got down to brass tacks.

“ Guafeng the Tigers have a complete accompliment of 46 players, the other teams that are just about ready to go are the Shanghai Lions, the Nanjing

Cocks and the Tianjin Dragons. The yet to be named Stadium is almost a quarter of the way finished, the only thing holding us back is the availability of building materials.., as usual however, we expect the opening game to start as advertised in 14 months”.

Everyone smiled, including the burly players who took their cue from their managers.

“There’s one small sticking point I need to bring up”.

“Yes”.., Guafeng replied.

“ Now everyone has worked hard and really pulling together trying to make a success of the league and after hours, the managers encourage the players to get out and relax out on the town.., you know.., catch a movie, shop , whatever... Well, some of the boys.., you know boys will be boys, met up with some women”...

Guafeng’s lip rose in a sly smirk.

“To get to the point, the ladies were hookers, common street walkers, some more attractive than others, and after the boys had their way with them the women demanded a higher fee, which the boys did not have or whatever, so the girls got vocal, made some noise.., some of the boys got scared.., threats were made.., it could have gotten real ugly so we had a long talk with management, the players, their families and the investors. It was decided to .., well to..,”

“Provide entertainment”? Asked Guafeng quizzically.

“Exactly”. Responded Chuck.

“And how do we go about doing this”?

“Well”, Chuck went on. “I know that as a major supporter of the league, you’d be sensitive to our predicament, you have such clout and all involved will follow your lead so that we can get back on track.., so my idea .is., by the way, you’ve heard of Kung Lai the financier”?

Chapter Four

Eric looked out on field after field of undulating wheat, beside him a stack of tourist info and brochures describing the wonders of the Middle Kingdom, he felt he could add a few pages over the events at Guihui’s forbidden lake district. He felt absolutely disgusted with himself, with the government, with anyone connected to, or who knew of the ‘discovery’. Deep in his heart he knew that what he’d done was wrong, it was a lie and that he was a thief, he couldn’t stand himself and was seriously worried that clinical depression was a foregone conclusion, he was traveling alone and wanted to be alone, alone except for misery and guilt.

Commissioner Wang had given him permission to leave the country as long as he agreed to be summoned for questioning, his father had used every contact imaginable in making sure Eric did not see the inside of a Chinese penitentiary and took pride and comfort that his son choose to remain in China and continue to work after all that had happened. The motion of the train did little to calm his forlorn spirit as he had hoped, staring out on mile after mile of bountiful farmland did induce a temporary hypnotic state, but his thoughts always returned to what might have been.., what should have been. Now he was

heading to the city of Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang province and the heart of Moslem China to join an archeological dig investigating Moslem immigration that began around 651 AD, there he felt he could earn redemption, he shut his eyes, leaned back and prayed. He was quietly interrupted by a shapely woman who wanted to know if the seat across of his was taken.

The behemoth continued to grow, to move, to affect..., the incredible Chinese economy reached out in all directions of human enterprise, setting records monthly, reinventing itself by being all things to all people. Hundreds of tons of exports arrived at ports all over the world advertising China's industrial prowess, though some of that attention was not admiration. Those huge export figures was beginning to wreak havoc in the economies of smaller countries, one new area of rapid advance was agribusiness. Chinese farmers, horticulturists and botanists were working at a fevered pace to develop hardier crops with greater yields. Jin Dezhu was considered China's foremost authority in agri-science, he recently addressed a conference in Nairobi highlighting improvements in drought resistant crops, Professor Jin extolled impressive new data regarding genetic engineering in specialized fruit bearing vines similar to passion fruit. The hybrid plants grew swiftly in his immaculate laboratory, their thick trunks supported heartily, dark green stems and shiny, smooth leaves, it's sweet fruit ripened in shades of yellow and scarlet and was in such profusion that the staff could not help but laugh in astonishment. Due to it's bioengineering, the vines needed sparse sustenance; a little water and fertilizer, and according to design it would grow just about anywhere except in subarctic zones.

One peculiar trait of these miraculous plants was its capability to dramatically absorb nutrients through its very surface, its skin had a slight dampness to it, that moisture is an alkaloid coating that breaks down any organic substance that may fall on it or became entangled in its tentacle like vines. Seclusion was essential for this type of experimentation and the terrain of Gansu province provided just the right conditions for the research facility. Walking along the paths that ringed the center that he had built, Professor Jin surveyed its surroundings; everywhere there were stunning views of peaks, plateaus and valleys that the province is renowned for and the immediate area is situated far from public scrutiny, it also grants protection from possible corporate espionage. To be sure competition between businesses can often lead to criminal acts and there had already been attempts by cyber thieves to compromise security at the Gansu research center.

Although all the work done at Gansu was government propriety information, Beijing was carefully conveying patented techniques to new private ventures that were owned and operated by joint Chinese - foreign entities. There was always a frenzy when the government auctioned off potentially lucrative data, eventually Dezhong Botany Science Inc., would be one of China's largest agriculture and farming business interests.

Other wondrous products fashioned by Jin and his staff were 'Super Rice' that needed minuscule care and almost no water, it was the professor's intention to begin cultivating super rice in Africa where China was making its presence more obvious with every passing day, indeed, Beijing had set a definite course of

engagement with the Dark Continent, initiating commercial exchanges and diplomatic recognition. The Chinese farmer had lived in the Central African Republic intermittently and was well acquainted with the chronic food shortages, endless poverty and devastating political unrest that Africa could never seem to eradicate.

From time to time he had been recalled because of his criticism of incompetent, cruel dictators, yet because of his bold and successful approach in dealing with food production, he was always reinstated and given greater responsibility; with the good and the bad, Jin always had a warm spot in his heart for Africa. As time went by he was treated as a visiting head of state, for more often than not, his stays included ever larger funding for food and health care related concerns that Beijing deemed essential for humanitarian reasons as well as making the locals aware of Chinese goodwill. All of these accomplishments naturally increased the professor's profile within the ruling central committee and like Guafeng, he was used as an indicator of China's scientific advancements, now came a special invitation from President Han to be his guest in the Forbidden City.

He would be paying his respects to his president in short order, until then he was instructing fellow horticulturists at a Nigerian University office in the city of Kaduna. Actually, it was mandatory for university students to attend a semester under Jin's tutelage in order to graduate, nevertheless, he was always impressed with the eagerness that the Nigerians displayed with their lessons, and they bombarded their teacher with questions about the Middle Kingdom as well. Jin

reveled in the Nigerian wilderness, it's people, flora and religiousity. Half of it's citizens are devout Moslem, and many welcomed him into their homes and mosques, he also got several offers of matrimony with quaint doweries, amused he explained that he was a happily married man, whose wife is a physician. It seemed not to matter to the Nigerians, they reasoned that he could keep his African bride in her native village and visit every now and then and of course, send money.

It was here that Professor Jin met Great Sino's president during one of those international petroleum conferences, certainly Jin had heard of the most famous Chinese since Mao, and no doubt admired the talented businessman. After a short stay in the capital city of Abuja, Jin invited Guafeng to tour the experimental farms at Kaduna and meet many of the Moslem tribesmen that colored the professor's life there. The three hour drive past pleasantly as the two men chatted about a multitude of topics, escorted by a truck filled with students and armed bodyguards. The heat and dust was hardly noticed by Guafeng, his inquisitive mind noted the arid landscape punctuated by small clusters of thatched buildings arranged around large fire pits and herds of multi colored goats; heads down searching for fodder. That evening Jin treated his guest to a modest feast and interesting conversation with tribal elders who were unfazed by the little army that accompanied the Chinese oilman. Slowly the Nigerians withdrew and the two men were finally alone in the quiet desert night.

“ Well Guafeng, isn't this beautiful? It is often at this time that I write and focus my energies..., weave my dreams”.

“ Yes..., it’s soothing..., such a fascinating place, no wonder you’re here for long periods of time. You’ve done an prodigious amount of work..., you’ve made the Motherland proud”. Jin nodded and rubbed his hands over the crackling fire.

“Oh yes, I too am very proud of the progress we’ve made here, still it will take several of my lifetimes to finish all that’s been started..., my main concern is keeping the projects on schedule despite the political uncertainties and civil upheaval”.

His face looked pained as he looked off into the distance.

“ Any turmoil in the neighboring countries has devastating consequences everywhere else in the region, populations scatter, towns reduced to rubble..., the disgusting slaughter of the defenseless”. Waving his finger in the direction of the Sudan he continued, “That hell in Darfur was indescribable, the news reports did not tell the whole story..., what’s the term..., they ‘sanitized’ it. I was part of the foreign secretariat’s relief response and I could not believe my eyes, refugees, more dead than alive, too weak to speak let alone eat”. His voice grew deep. “There was one settlement where every person over 18 was dead or missing, there was over 200 children in the most filthy conditions”. Jin’s shut eyes were wet with tears. Guafeng too, felt his soul sobbing, without thinking his thoughts escaped, “Man is a beast sometimes..., he hates for all the wrong reasons”.

Jin turned to his young friend, “I understand politics, we all learned humanism and more importantly, the vices of human nature through the Communist party..., but here in Africa..., she never got a chance to work on her issues without interference”.

“With people like you things will change..., don’t you think it’s happening as we speak”? Guafeng asked optimistically.

“Yes, yes..., I hope so, we must not give up. If they would only concentrate on building..., together, regardless of beliefs, ethnicity or clan loyalties ..., it’s so senseless”.

Guafeng stood to stretch his legs and a notion entered his head.

“Funny how bloody the fighting can get, you would assume that they have complete armies..., organized, with infantry, tank corps and so on...”

“Well, they’re not a disciplined fighting force like a national army, they have no honor, but they do have fire power”, Jin chimed.

“Hmm, they don’t manufacture arms do they”? Guafeng asked.

“Oh no, the west supplies their munitions..., Europe, the United States and us”, Jin said softly. “There must be a moratorium on armament sales to these nameless militia..., yes the violence can come to an end or incredibly reduced if the industrial world would cease sales to African war lords..., if and when global opinion gets serious about the mini-genocides here..., this is what must happen”.

The two went on talking as orange embers floated in the air, whipped by a cool desert breeze. “It is time to sleep” Jin yawned, Guafeng helped the elder farmer to his feet and they slowly walked to the guest bungalow, “There is plenty of hot water to shower” Jin encouraged as he made his way to his private quarters. Opening the door for him was a young Nigerian woman who also offered the professor a cup of hot milk and honey.

“Thank you my dear”.

“I kept your bath hot..., ready”? Jin nodded, sipped his drink and started for the bathroom, he removed his clothing and gingerly sat in the large stainless steel tub. “Yawanda, you were hiding weren’t you..? You didn’t want to be introduced to the legendary Guafeng?”

The black beauty shrugged, “It wasn’t important” she replied. She pulled a chair close to the tub and chatted about the day’s events. Yawanda Masubinka was a secretary with the Agriculture Program at Abuja University, her father is a prominent Anglican minister in the capital city and her mother, a teacher, is a Moslem; this made for a very interesting family dynamic, yet she and her siblings are all well adjusted and have struggled to attain a degree of prominence in the country’s oil industry. Despite the difference in their ages, race and culture, the exotic Yawanda quietly admires the dignified, unassuming scientist. She had thought that he would be just another superior with little charisma or color, and she was partially right, Professor Jin was serious and dedicated, scholarly and calm, however these qualities were the very ones that she eventually found irresistible. She had often thought that Jin is so much like her mild father and she was quite aware of the benefits of being with a reknown scientific personage. Her supple body is tall and soft, richly dark with thick braided hair festooned with flamboyant beads and perhaps her most charming quality; a melodious voice. There is fifty years difference in their ages.

After a relaxing soak, he slowly climbed out of the tub, steadied by his female confidant who helped him into his robe, together they walked to the bedroom behind an excited Labrador Retriever. Their bedroom reflected

Yawanda's preference for traditional Nigerian art; exquisite masks of various woods glared down upon the couple and vibrant fabrics rioted across the walls and over the handmade furniture. In one corner masterfully wrought baskets piled high to the ceiling, some in the shape of animals, that were woven so tightly they were waterproof. The bed had been turned down and Jin finished drying himself off before settling under the sheets. Yawanda allowed a sliver of a light to guide her way as she undid her wrap and snuggled close to her elderly lover, he turned to her and pressed his lips to hers. They caressed to the sounds of beasts prowling in the far off brush. With morning's light, Guagfeng left for a unscheduled tour of a medical clinic that was being funded by Greater Sino and would return later that evening. For the professor it was business as usual, "That's it., very good Boki". The professor and his foreman carefully examined a trough filling with water to irrigate a large field of experimental wheat.

"The height of the stalks won't be tall but, the flowers will be enormous..., it should be almost four times the size of present strains". Jin remarked patting his foreman's shoulder. "It will mature in half the time, weather permitting". He added. A man of few words, the tall, lithe Nigerian farmer smiled as he surveyed the acres of green carpet that made up the research 'miracle'.

"Harvest will be ready when"? He asked.

"In seven or eight months". Jin replied.

"I've never seen so much of our land alive..., bountiful like this, it's beautiful, thank you for all you've done..., slowly we will feed Nigeria".

As Boki spoke several trucks careened over the fence and the other workers,

rapid gunfire cut through the air hitting randomly. It seemed as though the moment lasted for hours, everyone had fallen to the ground, those who could moan did.

Chapter Five

Dragon's Tooth restaurant featured the finest seafood on Hainan island, succulent filets of snapper, tuna and native reef fish caught that morning were on the menu by noon and could be prepared to the customer's taste. It's modern art deco design highlighted the romantic views of the miles of beach through the etched glass walls that reached twenty six feet to the ceiling. Ever increasing numbers of affluent Chinese have been flocking to the tropical island with it's coasts of lustrous white sand, natural hot springs, and verdant forests, most of it unstained by human habitation; Hainan is the 'Riveria of China'. Expensive homes of the wealthy sprinkle it's coastline and as elsewhere in the Middle Kingdom new business schemes are turning into reality. Most of the original clans scraped out a living by working in the large plantations or the fishing co-ops that amply supplied Chinese cities and the military with seafood, except when the inconsistencies of central planning caused tons of fish to turn foul. The long history of China recorded scant appreciation for the island; it was considered fit only for exiles.

It's isolation and typhoon prone climate were other marks that was viewed as unfortunate. World War Two had seen the brutal extermination of over one third of the male population because of guerilla resistance. The

Kuomintang took control until 1950 and then the communists came to power determined to find the island's right niche. Eventually the island earned the moniker the "Fruit basket", because the tropical fruit harvests were legend, and like the reap from the seas; bananas, papayas, lychees and mangos found their way to the dinner tables of mainland China, again pending on the availability of air freight.

Zeng Wuzhi came from a family that devoted their lives to the plantations, during the 1980's Hainan became an independent province and was granted the designation of Special Economic Zone which meant that development was to be encouraged through relaxed government regulation, this allowed Wuzhi and other like-minded islanders to invest in land acquisition and business entrepreneurship. Instantly he thought of the visitor industry, his company bought large ocean front parcels and contracted with international hoteliers who would build resorts in and around the southern city of Sanya. Within seven years four major hotel chains had established their brandnames in the 'fruit basket' and for the first time in centuries peaceful armies of immigrants invaded the sunny island to fill the growing local appetite for laborers.

Over a million Americans visit China every year, Wuzhi wanted those visitors to relax at the end their stay on Hainan, to that end he swayed the governor to expand South China Air's routes to service residents of the U.S. West Coast, the airlines was jointly owned by the Hainan Provincial Government. It wasn't enough for Hainan Commercial Realty to own the majority of prime land in the south with all it's development potential, Wuzhi now wanted the company

to move into a new money making venue.

“Beautiful day as usual.., such a clear sky”. Wuzhi pointed out Yalong Bay and at the dozen or so pleasure craft filled with vacationers. “Sand like ground sugar and weather that is the most liveable in all China”. The group Wuzhi was addressing were bespectacled, serious and single-minded in their purpose.

Wuzhi motioned toward the buffet bragging about it’s quality and abundance.

One invitee stood back after the others.

“Everything is going according to plan”. Wuzhi remarked.

“Yes, your presentation is very effective, I think everyone will want to join”.

“I think so Kung, before you know it slot machines, tumbling dice and screaming winners.., we can easily out do Genting and Las Vegas is a mere afterthought, Asians will come here.., it’s cheaper and closer, we’ll be fat, thick and high”.

Both men slapped one another on the back.., his familiar slick backed hair shone in the sun, Kung Lai was making his way back from financial oblivion.

“Wuzhi, I did want to discuss the players coming down in June.., well sometime in the summer. We can have them cavorting in the water, doing a rugged upland hike, dancing, nightclubbing...”.

“Ah ha, just give me the exact dates”.

Kung furrowed his brow and shook his head, “There will also be a large contingent of supporters.., media people, handlers.., other assistants”.

“Trust me, all details well be taken cared of, just give me the numbers”. Wuzhi stated with a wave of his hand. The Businessmen continued with strategy of how to persuade Beijing that gaming was the perfect fit for Hainan’s future, there

would need to be some arm twisting but, the facts were startling; countless Chinese wanted to gamble, Macao's casinos could scarcely keep up with the demand and that was just the national demand, millions of foreign tourists would come and try their luck, partying during the day and gambling in the star filled night.

Dwarfed by spotless aluminum vats holding hundreds of gallons of wine Bai Li listened intently, steno pad in hand, jotting down facts and figures in her native mandarin. Her party reached large twin doors that automatically opened to the bottling and packing line, she watched as the bottles marched beneath a device that resembled a cow's udder, a huge cow's udder, and in five seconds was filled with a light zinfandel then instantly corked and spun to apply its label before being carefully inspected and boxed via human hands. Carlborg Andersen was going to make an offer to purchase the venerable St. Lucien Vineyards for Chinese liquor mogul Pen Xiong, who already had a 20 percent share in China's national liquor sales and he had agreed to Bradford Langton's terms for merger which would lead to the creation of Kuang-Shui Limited, which roughly translated meant 'crazy water'. The new enterprise will be headquartered in the city of Qingdao adjacent to P. Xiong Distillery in the Rizhao district.

Bai Li loved California, its fast paced economy and fascinating people reminded her of Shandong and Jiangsu provinces, but it was the state's varied geography that mesmerized her the most; playing in the snow in the morning then sunning oneself poolside in the afternoon was sheer delight. She

frolicked in the high priced boutiques of Bel Air and attended business seminars at night as Carlborg instructed and she met mid-western and southern farmers who grew the hops, ryes, barleys and corn that are the fundamentals of whiskey making, she strained to catch the farmer's words spoken in a nasaly twang or sensual southern drawl and they were charmed by her graceful manner, hit or miss English but, mostly her striking beauty. Carefully she collected information about the liquor business as she shadowed Carlborg everywhere he went. She had always thought of him as the classic, globe-trotting, billionaire, which of course he is, but with her new vantage point she saw the other side of the man with the shrewd mind. She came to know a fairly simple person, unpretentious, a family man who is active in his children's lives; during this visit Bai Li had met his two college age daughters and former mother-in-law.

It was a wonderful trip, productive, informative and pleasurable and it ended in Sacramento where Carlborg held discussions with politicians and Bai Li mingled with their spouses. At the same time the city was host to a seminar on indigenous Chinese religious practices and how growing numbers of Chinese are becoming more observant, Bai Li knew that she would know many of the attendees and at the last minute she decided that she wanted to go. It was a sold out event, but with one call from Carlborg she was catching a taxi and was on her way. Sure enough, there were many familiar faces and she fluttered about from table to table until a stern voice called out to her.

"Bai Li, how nice to see you..., what are you doing here"?

She recognized who it was and turned with a greeting.

“ Lee Song Min.., what a surprise! How are you”?

She clasped his hand in western custom.

“You look terrific my dear.., you’ve put on a little weight perhaps? It looks good on you”. She blushed.

“You look great as well”. It was no gratuitous rejoin, Guafeng’s father retained his distinguished good looks.., tall like his son with gray hair.

“Are you on vacation”? he asked.

“Oh no, it’s business.., I’m working for Carlborg Andersen now, he arranged a partnership involving liquor and spirits imports, it’s quite a big proposal”.

“Liquor.., I see..”, disapproval darkened his face and Bai Li knew that look, she attempted to change the mood.

“ And you are here for”...? She asked.

“ I too have a different post if you will.., I’m on the Ethics and Human Concerns Council for the Sciences.., you’ve heard of our new, increased duties since the improper allegations at the Ministry of Justice”?

Bai Li nodded, though she had vague knowledge of the scandal.

“ It appears that several high court judges have issued prejudiced rulings, assertions of bribes, sexual misbehavior.., various counts of misconduct”.

Lee Song Min spoke with his accustomed brevity as he slowly recounted the facts and episodes that led to his appointment to the ethics council.

“So I persuaded the other members to authorize this event.., since our nation does so much with California, it was easy to find sponsors here and the

California university system was eager to join in, we all wanted a sincere effort to see how we can rejuvenate our traditional religious principals and morals and to have it here so we can have a western perspective. At any rate with all this prosperity washing over our nation, many have fallen by the wayside; people are having a difficult time judging right from wrong..., if the increasing level of corruption continues it will pose a serious threat to the stability of the country, social order will crumble and the party will not stand for that”.

Bai Li had often heard Lee Song Min pontificate on social and cultural issues, interestingly as China became wealthier, he became more strident in defense of morality and family values.

“It’s disgusting how some Chinese are living their lives..., the council reviews appalling testimony, accusations of depravity, greed, sexual wantonness..., it makes life unnecessarily hard..., all these illegitimate births..., by young, poor women, how sad..., how embarrassing for the family”.

Bai Li broke into a slight sweat.

He continued, “And the judiciary is inundated with paternity suits..., claims by women, denials by the men, innocent infants crying in the halls..., what are the courts to do..., is this the road China is headed down”?

Lee shook his head in frustration.

Bai Li timidly cleared her throat and spoke up.

“That is such a sorry picture you’ve painted Father Min, I think you’ll agree understanding and patience will be of the greatest help in situations like these..., after all we’re all human..., people make mistakes”.

She looked around and faked recognition of a elderly woman who appeared to be waiting for her.

“I must say hello, please take care of yourself Father Min, keep your work load manageable”.

“Yes, yes Bai Li., it’s too bad those young girls can’t be as responsible and proficient as you., you’re setting the appropriate standard for the women of China”, he briefly grasped her hand as she withdrew. She approached the old lady and muttered an excuse over mistaking her for an acquaintance . Bai Li’s hands were wet and cold, she walked out onto the garden loggia, down the stone steps and finally stopped under a huge cottonwood tree, she glanced around around to see if anyone had noticed her, clutching her breast she tried to calm her heartbeat. With all the excitement of business and new jobs, her own financial position and more importantly, her family’s approval, she had emotionally dismissed the social stigma of being an unwed mother, deep down she had also felt that the old social norms did not apply to her because she was much richer than the average Chinese and the people whom she knew but, Lee Song Min had jolted her back to the reality that her friends and associates would naturally comment and she better prepare for the inevitability.

She smoothed her hair and gently tugged at her dress when she spied a young couple holding hands, making their way to a large fountain playing in the muted light. The girl was oriental too, slim and shapely and Bai Li smiled to her self, her lithe figure had changed little, she had no girth, no bulbous anything; she concealed her condition well and she took small satisfaction that Lee Song Min

had not detected the truth, she would deal with any criticism later and while walking back to the gathering the thought of having her baby in the U.S. crossed her mind.

“Bai Li, Lee Song Min told me you were here”.

Now here was a voice that Bai Li wanted to hear.

“Hey, I thought you were in D.C.”?

“I was.., the meeting went well and then dragged and I figured ‘what the hell’, my nephew’s birthday is Tuesday so I caught a flight home and here I am”. Linda gave her a warm hug.

“How’s the booze business”?

“It’s happening.., how did you know I was here”?

“Oh, I got a invite from Guafeng’s father to be part of a panel.., I couldn’t make the discussion, but I wanted to check out the event”.

The women chatted away until the bells from a large grandfather’s clock chimmed and reminded Linda of a secret announcement.

“I almost forgot.., you’ve got to promise you’ll act surprised when Mini Poo tells you”. Bai Li raised an eyebrow.

“Mini Poo’s getting married”!

Xing qi dong was one of the new restaurants that opened in the Greater Sino Tower, it was favored by Fu Kai because of it’s delicious breakfast buffets and private dinning rooms. Madame Guafeng preferred breakfast meetings, she believed the morning time was best for work and she loved to serve a hearty meal to ‘set everyone on the right foot from the start’. In the late afternoon the

bar opened to a horde of businessmen, their clients, associates and cronies, Guafeng often held court in the large solarium and usually closed the place.

Xing qi dong meant 'work week'.

It was at one of those breakfasts that Chai Sun made the acquaintance of Kai Chang. The son of the former vice-president of Greater Sino had slowly taken his father's place in asinmuch as he could. He did have a back ground in scientific application, but his true inclination was the world of social studies, travel and international relations. Still he realized that his place was with Guafeng, at least until the foreseeable futureand he nonetheless found the work very stimulating. Kai Chang was no longer family chauffer and houseboy, Fu Kai recognized the potential risk to her marriage and found a new place for him with the help of her mother-in-law, in a mid-management position in the Shanghai Tourism Bureau, yet he was kept on a retainer with Greater Sino mostly as a way for hime to have additional income.

Together the two collaborated on company projects concerning information dissemination and other public relations. They went out, meet at parties, meet other people. Close in age and family upbringing, their friendship grew and Kai often comforted Chai Sun over the loss of his father. The pair made a quick trip to Guangdong to evaluate a hot spring spa in the city of Zhongshan, Guafeng wanted to organize a retreat for Indonesian oil executives and at the same time, visit an sonar products plant that he wanted to acquire in nearby Xiaolan.

A major renovation welcomed the men that featured two new wings

flanked by exquisite gardens and pathways that led to four outdoor baths restored to their original and natural rock basins. The entire spa was redone in a modern style comparable to tasteful southern California architecture; lots of glass, stone and warm woodwork. They were given a tour of the living quarters and dining areas, then served lunch before giving in to a much anticipated soak in one of the private baths. The cloudy mineral water reached a temperature of 103 degrees (40 centigrade), and due to filtering had only a slight mineral scent.

The men gingerly stepped in, slowly lowering themselves in the steamy, cloudy water. Each rumbled a moan of pleasure as they settled into comfortable inclines; nude, arms and legs spread in the gently rolling liquid. The quiet interval was broken when Chai Sun remarked how good it was to come to the thermal springs for rest and relaxation.

“ I wanted to spend more time with my father at places like this..., just the two of us or maybe my brothers, we’re all workaholics..., getaways like this are awesome”.

Kai murmured a response as Chai Sun continued.

“ He loved to vacation with all of us, we’d go to rivers and the mountains and talked about traveling in his retirement ..., too bad”.

Kai opened his eyes and moved closer to Chai Sun”.

“You’re father was proud of you and your siblings, that was more than enough to provide him all the contentment in his life”.

“Yes, I know, I know..., he was so good to me, he was always there for me..., he was the best father a man could ever have”.

Chai broke down and started to cry, Kai Chang reached over and held him, trying his best to soothe his sorrowful friend. Chai returned the hug and their nude bodies became entwined, Chai rested his head on Kai's shoulder and Kai Chang whispered into his friend's ear. Chai Sun turned to thank his buddy when Kai tilted his head and gave Chai an amorous kiss. Both men tightened their hold and silently swirled in their bath.

The following day the men meet more of the staff, worked out in the gym and enjoyed the complete spa experience, they didn't discuss their moment of surrender and carried on as they always did. Unwinding in one of the large outdoor springs at sunset, the topic once again turned to Chu Teh. They were the only bathers at the far end of the spring, Kai Chang was leisurely bobbing, diving and doing the backstroke from end to end chatting with the other nude bathers, unless designated otherwise the baths were segregated according to gender, so there were only naked men and their male children, splashing in the steaming water.

Chai Sun was finally prepared to leave the final phase of mourning for his father, that special feeling of peace and acceptance was replacing that terrible sense of loss. He had shared with Kai Chang most of his thoughts regarding the events of Chu Teh's death, except his meeting with Ming Diu.

That strange encounter that afternoon, boarded on the surreal; out of the blue this unknown someone, slightly scary, slightly courteous and slightly obtrusive, asking questions yet knowing much. Chai dismissed most of the odd conversation apart from the mention of the time of death and when the medics

finally arrived. In Chai Sun's mind, Ming Diu had cast menacing conjecture over Pu Chow's friendship with his father. Suddenly Chai Sun stood and hurriedly called "Kai".

Chapter Six

"It's nicknamed the rice bowl", Chuck laughed to a group of reporters inspecting Shanghai's newest attraction, the Shanghai Taikong Coliseum. The massive silver and white expanse was set to open in early spring and the city was agog with excitement for its first athletic event would be an exhibition game between the Shanghai Lions and the Beijing Tigers, two of the seven teams that made up the embryonic National Football League of China. The American lawyer led the media through its main entrance, a cavernous archway where several mini-carts waited to take them on a tour of the groundfloor amenities.

"Let's go to center field first", he suggested. The acoustics of the building was such that the motorized carts sounded like a panzer division streaking through the Low Countries.

"We can sit an additional 10,000 people on the 'floating mezanine'..., and watch this", he added motioning over his head everyone glanced upward at the ceiling to see the intricate geometric design magically pull apart, like an egg breaking from the inside. It was an engineering marvel that allowed natural light to fill the mammoth interior, it took twelve minutes for the retraction and it was remarkably quiet.

The group hopped back into their carts and headed for the plush VIP boxes high above the astroturf. Built in the southeastern sector of the city, the

edifice claimed 50 acres of land that was once the homes and farms of the poor who had lived there for generations. When the municipal government appropriated the 200 million Yuan for construction, the earthmovers and bureaucrats moved the occupants overnight to areas that became the new city outskirts. It wasn't a mass deportation but an orderly, though rapid, 'location reassignment'. Families were given a reasonable stipend, moving assistance and in some cases, employment offers, still easily half had no place to live and they in turn swamped the city's homeless and health care resources which was always in dire need of funding infusions. At its worst, the convergence of all the aggravations, hassles and emotions exploded in violent demonstrations and street riots. The authorities had no alternative but to crack down, quell the rioters and scramble to come up with solutions to the habitual housing shortage. Both the Federal Work Force Housing Program and Greater Sino's makeshift committee on housing had accomplished little due to a variety of reasons, but the two causes that stand out most was the lack of political will to provide money and the swift pace of immigration from central and western China. The communist party recently adopted the new fashionable theory of supply and demand; the workers will demand homes and the government would supply the dwellings.

This arrangement succeeds best when there is a fully integrated economy like the U.S., the European Union or some Asian countries like Japan and Korea, who have had unfettered free-market systems in place many, many years; and even then during times of economic downturn the masses revolt due

to lack of options, justice or patience.

However, the People's Republic was in the very gray area inbetween centralized socialist planning and capitalist natural selection. And the average Chinese did not know where the nation's economy stood in relation to the extremes. By this time the Chinese upper and middle classes numbered around 200 million, they are for the most part well educated and well informed, with the latter being the more important factor. It now became much easier to see and hear how the 'other half' lives. This created a certain resentment and indignation by those who toiled and those who enjoyed the results thereof. Those upper classes deemed themselves to be the 'Americans of Asia', equal to Americans, if not superior. Like the Americans of the 1800's, they embraced a native form of 'Manifest Destiny', it was powerful, popular and on the increase. And along with that sense of providence came the rise of consciousness regarding the less fortunate, like the nouveau riche, nouveau cuisine and art nouveau, now in China there would be nouveau philanthropy. The more disenfranchised of society began to accuse the central government of hypocrisy claiming a superficial adherence to Marxist thought while allowing gross inequities common to the China of the Manchus.

Large crowds would periodically gather at various plazas throughout the city, calling on officials not to forget the millions who were creating the 'Chinese Economic Miracle' and lived in squalor. Among the hundreds of minor organizers who led the demonstrations was Gan Shubo, a high school language teacher who was appalled at the living conditions of many of her students. An

eloquent speaker, she galvanized the young parents to make 'noise' and flood city hall with invitations to come to 'tea' at their deprived hovels. Shubo's fiery words made her something of a heroine and eventually the members of the Standing Committee turned their weary eyes in her direction. She did have a following though, people in high places, the philanthropists for one and now one very important person wanted to know much more about her, the Chairman of the Chinese Communist party; Han Zhao Zhang. President Han knew the value of what the right kind of public relations can do, he realized the conceivable harm that Gan Shubo and the pro-housing elements could unleash on the nation, he was far too experienced to let this matter go untended for long. He did admit to a certain admiration for the fervency of the activists and the fierce resolve of Shubo, in his lavish study he silently handed her file to an aide and beckoned to another. Back in Shanghai the mayor and members of the city council announced a new land grant plan for another residential suburb south of the gleaming Taikong Coliseum.

The upper classes became more confident that China was finally on its way to reclaiming its ancient place as the land of the super being, a place of mysteries and incredible distinctiveness; many felt that if you went to America, it would be like visiting Europe, if you saw Latin America again you would have a strong European-Christian experience. Due to their uniform religious beliefs, the countries of the Muslim more or less resemble one another and are relatively recent institutions, many of the smaller Asian countries are very westernized, though with a heavy Chinese persuasion. But China was a country like no other,

it is a world in of itself..., neither east nor west, it is everything and everything different. Perhaps the only land that could remotely claim a similar exceptionalness like the middle kingdom was the Dark Continent.

Unflattering scenes like the housing shortage hurt the ego of most Chinese, many wanted to hear only the positive effects of modernization, besides the lack of housing a new area of conservation was rearing its ugly head; the worsening state of the natural environment. More and more international coverage on the country's dying rivers, toxic soils and stinking air made some of the celebrated Chinese cringe in embarrassment, it was something that they had to face and own up to. The literati began to beat the drum loudly, really reaching out to the public with informercials and recycling drives in the 10 largest 'gold' cities. Those are cities that have populations close to ten million and have a gross domestic product of around a trillion yuan, cities that boasted high earners and educated residents, these were target groups that would form the foundation for an environmental lobby, again based on the American Sierra Club or the Audubon Society.

"The exhibit is sold out..., for the next three months, the look on their faces..., just awesome". Jetting on a flight from Rome, effusively recounting the wildly received showing of Chinese art at the Palazzo Barberini, Pu Chow glowed as he handed the phone to the other members of the large entourage that included Guafeng's mother, Wigi Aiyang. The artifacts were rarely seen, even in China, so their tour generated an incredible buzz, a special time slot was reserved for members of the Italian government and corporate sponsors. Pu Chow had

extended a tremendous amount of his personal time in assisting the Ministry of Culture and Greater Sino had sent a handsome check to help defray expenses and garner some publicity. The exhibit would visit only three European capitals before heading to America and the oil executive would rejoin the tour when it arrived in New York. He now possessed an staggering collection and official brokers license to actively trade with art dealers all over the world; he was building a separate reputation as the finest connoisseur of Chinese art. When the phone made it's circuit with the other passengers, it returned to Pu who picked up where he left off.

“ I had a splendid time, just splendid. I even had a chance to see the country side a little..., with a exclusive guide”. He continued to describe his sojourn through the region of Tuscany. Amid the throngs who turned out to welcome the Chinese delegation was a wealthy partroness who arranged the large garden reception at the palazzo, although no longer young, she was graceful and vivacious and was an authority on Etruscan antiquities. Part of the ultra-rich who had the added cachet of being Austrian nobility, the baroness occasionally dabbled in conservative politics and was rumored to be a neo-fascist, she helped broaden the appeal of the Catholic lay organization Opus Dei and for six years served as her country's ambassador to the Vatican. Her private life resembled that of the ascetics she got to knew so well during her regular retreats at the many historical abbeys all over Europe. She used her wealth to buttress right-wing causes and became an honorary republican at the 1992 GOP convention. When as a college student, she entered the teaching field and

requested a post at a parochial school in Saigon, now known as Ho Chi Min City. Nothing pleased her more than when the children progressed with their studies, she loved it when they sang at mass and learned to play western musical instruments. She deeply believed in the tenants of her faith and was not one for sensationalizing scriptural revelations or circumstantial intereptions of so called prophets like Nostradamus. She had a strong mind, big heart and a practical approach to life, she had hated the old communists of China but now waltzed with the new boys in Beijing. The rise of radical Islam together with the heightened secularization of European society caused the growth of a determined reactionary movement, the Church of Rome was the best known proponent for turning the tide in this threatening, nebulous time. Traditionalists and the establishment had no intention of permitting 'change in extremis' without a fight and reason and one of the most ardent warriors was the Baroness Sabina Von Rauslicht.

After the first hectic days of events and galas, Pu Chow contacted the Chinese embassy for assistance in arranging to see some of Italy's famous archeological sites like Paestum with it's remarkably well preserved temples of Hera and Poseidon, he also wanted to tour Herculaneum before returning to China. " Please..., I'd love to take you to Firenze, Sienna, Livorno..., we can stay at my daughter's farm..., it's just lovely". The baroness opined. " Thank you for the generous offer, but I want to visit southern Italy ..., Campaigna. Are you headed down there"? He playfully asked. " Perhaps, but have you been through Tuscany"?

“No, I’d prefer the Magna Gracia before any other place”.

“How long will you stay in Italy”?

“No more than two more weeks”.

“ Ah..., that’s plenty of time to enjoy the ruins and have a short vacation”.

Pu Chow was taken aback by the baroness’s interest, did she have an ulterior motive? Eventually the enigmatic Chinese accepted the hospitality of the aristocratic Austrian and together the two set off in a deep green Ferrari GTB convertible. Of course there is a ‘Mrs. Pu Chow’, a small and quiet woman who worked at the Xinhua News Agency, she is submissive and prefers to remain in the background; few people knew her.

The temples had their predictable effect on it’s first time visitor, Pu Chow walked around the pillars, ambled along the stone foundation and held interesting conversations with the archeologists working with universities both national and from abroad. All the while the enchanting Austrian regaled him with scandalous stories of the wealthy European class she was born into. The ghostly remnants of Pompeii thrilled the oil executive and he was allowed a special treat; donning on an oxygen mask he accompanied a team of researchers into a hewn out passage filled with noxious gasses and gazed at perfectly preserved mosaics that have laid undisturbed for two thousand years.

A jeep ride up the slopes of Vesuvius completed their adventure before a short, restful stay in Tuscany. Whisking along the quaint countryside, the couple reached their destination at dusk, the aged but fully restored farm house that belongs to the baroness’s daughter, the Contessa Madelina di Griacchi di

Paolantonio. The Contessa was not at home but, her housekeeper prepared the main rooms and asked the guests if they had any particular needs before bidding them good night.

Violet streaks faded to black when rain clouds clustered upon one another and rain fell while Pu Chow and the baroness settled down in their well appointed quarters. Although there was all the necessary modern conveniences; the three hundred year old stone and mortar building retained its rough wall surfaces and crude tiled floors, its heavy window shutters, frames, interior woodwork, even huge ceiling beams had been completely replaced. All the furniture is handmade and the machine made tapestries gave the dwelling a very medieval touch. The rather small kitchen gave way to a large living room with fireplace, the numerous unorganized bedrooms were consolidated into three suites with their own baths, outside a covered porch ran the whole length of the open courtyard of the L shaped house.

Hot from his shower, Pu Chow returned to his room wrapped in his robe, sipping his tea. He sat down on a wingbacked chair where he could view the farm and watch the lightly falling rain, he began to make mental notes of things he needed to do when he left the country; he had to schedule a business meeting in Kuwait, and once back in Shanghai he had his usual check up with his heart doctor. He had a pace maker implanted a year ago prompted by, as he recalled, Chu Teh's passing. Thinking of his old colleague, he smiled, frowned then stared out into the wet night. What his feelings were, no one could say, did he flash back to that day in his apartment? Was there an untold story of deceit?

Thunder rumbled softly in the distance breaking his train of thought, he returned to ticking off future tasks when Sabina approached fresh from her bath, holding cups of hot spiced wine.

“Here’s something that will relax us”. She said.

He sat up in his chair and took the cup in his hand.

“Nice scent.., grazie”.

Daintily she reclined on a nearby chaise lounge, with a barely audible yawn, she stretched her arm and reached for his hand. Pu closed his palm, turned and kissed her hand.

“I’ll be in China in November.., I told you this didn’t I”? She asked.

“Yes you did.., you, Madelina and a group of friends”.

“Correct, they’re friends and artists”. She emphasized, “ They’re young and talented and China will provide inspiration, amazement.., optimism.., they’re so looking forward to this trip”.

Pu nodded in agreement and watched her as she described the itinerary. At 67 she looked ten years younger, her honey colored hair complemented her still attractive features, she admitted to cosmetic surgery but stressed that she just did a ‘little work around the eyes’. He found her sensual and was flattered by the attention by someone of her stature. Sitting at her feet he touched her knee and slowly ran his hand on the inside of her thigh, she became silent as he untied the belt of her robe and lowered his head to her loins, the baroness moaned, her body experiencing a rush of sexual satisfaction, she slowly opened her eyes to see that the rain had stopped replaced by faint twinkling stars.

