

BORNEO PULP

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BANKSTERBOOKS

LONDON - PARIS - BERLIN

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Man has been endowed with reason, with the power to create, so that he can add to what he's been given. But up to now he hasn't been a creator, only a destroyer. Forests keep disappearing, rivers dry up, wild life's become extinct, the climates ruined and the land grows poorer and uglier every day.

Anton Chekhov

Uncle Vanya, 1897

PROLOGUE

The sweat poured off him as he pulled the heavy body through the undergrowth. It was much heavier than he could have ever imagined, rivulets ran down his arms and onto his hands making it difficult to get a firm grasp on the thick wrists that slipped slowly through his fingers as he pulled.

Stopping to take his breath, he plunged his hands deep into the warm sand, which stuck to his moist skin giving him a better grip. He looked up, to the left and right along the beach, it was deserted; simply the movement of the palms that waved lazily against the tropical sky. He laboured on, there was no time to lose.

He had pulled the body into the dense undergrowth, over a small rise well away from the beach, few people ever strayed that far from the sand, especially at that time of the year. He paused and looked at the body, it lay like a giant turtle or some other aquatic creature slumped down on the ground, helpless...and dead.

With an effort he pulled off the soiled trunks and then the

wristwatch, he looked carefully at the body...no rings or chains. The sunglasses were back on the beach. He stood back letting the undergrowth spring back into place, pushing the vegetation with his foot to make sure the body was well covered.

He then made his way back to the beach, pulling the shrubs and plants into place where his path was visible, smoothing over the tracks in the sand. With luck nobody would come that far along the beach for days and there was even less chance of them going far into the thick vegetation.

He recalled what Colonel Supramanto had told him: in the tropics putrefaction sets in almost immediately after death; left in the open the body would be black and bloated, almost unrecognisable within twenty-four hours. If it was not soon discovered, the heat, insects, and land crabs with their powerful claws, would quickly do their work.

Wading into the sea up to his chest, he washed off the sand and sweat. He still had time to change his mind he thought as he looked out over the warm sea.

A hand touched his shoulder, he started violently.

‘Mr Axemann, Mr Axemann!’

He was trembling as he turned his head...trying hard to get his orientation. There was a pretty girl, she was wearing a flower coloured sarong and a purple orchid in her black hair. Who was she...he struggled to gather his thoughts; a prickling sensation of fear took hold of him.

‘Who...what?’

‘Mr Axemann, I sorry, you must fasten your seat belt we’re going through a turbulent zone,’ the girl said smiling softly. He could make out the dim lights of a plane’s cabin.

Yes! That was it; the panic quickly subsided as he took hold of himself. He had dozed off, but even in his sleep he could not get the terrible images out of his mind. He looked at his watch; it was seven o’clock in the morning Indonesian time, almost fourteen hours since he had left the body on the beach.

‘Bring me a Scotch and soda,’ he said hoarsely to the hostess pulling himself up in his seat and grasping around for his seat belt.

Then he realised only another couple of hours or so remained before the flight was scheduled to arrive in Zurich.

‘Sorry make that a coffee,’ he said forcing a smile and trying to appear as normal as possible. He would need a clear head on arrival; it was not the moment for whisky. As soon as the ‘Fasten Seat Belts’ sign went off, he would wash and shave; look respectable, that was it.

He peered through the window into the dark, there were no clouds, he realised that it must be the jet stream bumping the huge plane about. As he numbly gazed into the night sky he thought back to his first meeting with Brodzski in Paris.

Chapter 1- A DOOR OPENS

John Ennis parked his Citroen V6 on the quai du Point du Jour. He could see the hoarding indicating Nautique Croisière, a Parisian company specialized in river cruises. That evening a cruise and private diner party had been organised aboard a luxury bateau-mouche, *Chante le Vent*, along the Seine and through the heart of the historic city.

The day had been hot, very hot. It was half past eight and the temperature hung in the low thirties. The sun still shone fiercely through the broad leaves of the plane trees that lined the banks of the river.

The evening traffic had been very light. It was near the end of August and most Parisians were enjoying the last days of their summer vacation, sunning themselves on the beaches of the Mediterranean or Atlantic coasts. As for the foreign tourists, most were flopped out in their hotel rooms recovering from the day or preparing for dinner.

As Ennis wandered across the quay, he saw there was no hurry, he was early as always. Martti Kivikoski was standing there at the foot of the gangway, chatting to one of the early arrivals. Through the broad windows of the boat Ennis recognised two of the girls in charge

of the evening's organisation.

He had been invited to the dinner-cruise at the suggestion of Tapani Hakkala, President of the Finntech Group, a Finnish multinational. John Ennis headed Finntech's sales and marketing in its French HQ.

Following the restructuring of the company, he had found himself in suspended animation. Finntech had progressively become bigger and richer, but somehow, Ennis had been forgotten in the last of the endless reorganisations of the group.

He had returned from his holidays the week previously to the grim realisation that he was not part of the new organisation. There was a lurking feeling that it would be another of those turning points in his life. He could not avoid the depressing thought that his career was beginning to seem like a long story of jumping from one uncontrollably complicated situation to another, created neither by his design nor choosing.

Ennis tried to comfort himself with the thought that he had little to really complain of; after all it was the luck of the draw. He would survive, as he always had survived the waves of change that seemed to sweep through business and industry in regular cycles.

He nevertheless felt that time was catching up on him. His forty-third birthday had just passed and lasting success seemed to be as elusive as ever. Ennis was a good talker, good at convincing people with new ideas, the result was that he did not know how to refuse a challenge, and as a consequence found himself parachuted into a series of impossible no win situations.

Forty-eight people had been invited to the dinner cruise on the Seine. The restaurant of the Chante le Vent was arranged with eight beautifully laid out tables, five to the quayside and three to the river side. A cocktail table was also set out with drinks and canapés, against one of the long windows overlooking the river.

As he stepped down into the restaurant, he saw Marie, Laxell's assistant. She put a drink into his hand and elatedly described the events of the day outlining the evenings programme. She had been given the responsibility of making the detailed arrangements for evening and was both nervous and excited. Laxell had sternly insisted

that it was not an everyday event that such elevated personalities be invited together to Paris by the group and warned there should be no hitches.

Glancing up through the boats window, Ennis saw the green diplomatic number plates of a large black chauffeur driven Volvo. It slowly descended the ramp to the quay and turned in a broad semicircle towards the gangway. He made a sign to Kivikoski, it was the Ambassador. Almost at the same moment up on the main road, where he had parked his car, a blue coach was just pulling in.

The 'boys' had arrived, just like a works outing. Boys was not the exact word; their average age was over fifty, whilst the doyen of the group was certainly in his seventies.

They were the boys from Finntech. They included important shareholders and their representatives, CEOs, presidents and vice-presidents together with honoured guests including the Ambassador of Finland in France and even more distinguished the Mayor of Helsinki who had deigned to join the outing.

Many of them looked a little worse for wear. Einari Laxell had zealously organised the programme with a breakfast call at five thirty that morning. One part of the group had spent the day visiting the cellars of Cognac and the other had been guests of the Mayor of Beaune, nearby to one of Finntech's recently acquired manufacturing units, conveniently not far from the good tables and vineyards of Bourgogne.

Looking at them, there was no doubt that they had all indulged to a large measure in sampling the famous wines and spirits of those regions. In spite of that, they were still in relatively good form, ready for the next round. Ennis knew a few of them personally; others he was familiar with from photographs in the company's news magazines, the rest were unknown.

With momentary stiff Finnish formality, they shook hands, announcing their names, one after the other, then quickly headed for the cocktail table.

Tapani Hakkala arrived. His face was red from the heat and wine, and with the fixed look of worry that he often wore. Ennis suspected that he was uneasy with the heavy responsibility he held as a high

executive officer of the company, he would have been no doubt happier amongst his old colleagues as a simple engineer, but force of circumstance had projected him upwards, just as Ennis regretted he himself had been pushed sideways.

The quay slowly slipped away and the boats air-conditioning struggled with the unusually high temperature. Through the noise of animated talk and clinking glasses, he chatted with Tapani. Small talk about one thing and another. He had decided he would wait to see if his own personal position was brought up.

‘So John, the reorganisation is taking time, people will have to be a little patient!’ He placed his drink on a table and lit up a Marlboro.

Ennis waited, letting him develop his ideas, slowly, as Finns often did.

‘As a matter of fact I wanted to see you to talk over a couple of things, but unfortunately this doesn’t seem to be the place,’ he said with a weak smile, pensively glancing around.

‘Let me think, when will you be in Helsinki next? Is it possible to be there in the second week in October? Yes, that’s best, October. Look, call my secretary tomorrow and confirm that date.’

‘Okay, that’s fine with me, I’ll call her tomorrow,’ Ennis replied forcing back the questions he would have liked to ask.

‘So, that’s that! Let’s enjoy our evening,’ Hakkala said looking out the window. The boat surged passed the Statue of Liberty and glided into the shadows of the Pont de Grenelle.

The meeting with Tapani Hakkala in Helsinki would be his last opportunity. Ennis supposed that he had at least been lucky on that point. He had worked closely with Hakkala some years previously. They had spent many long evenings drinking together on business trips, but that was before Tapani had arrived at the heady position of president, in a company of many thousands of employees.

The Finntech Group was Finland’s leading forestry products and engineering conglomerate, a sprawling multi-national with it’s headquarters in Helsinki. Ennis was based in their prestigious Paris offices where he was one of their many overseas specialists.

Some days later, he received a fax from Hakkala confirming their meeting in Helsinki. His feelings were mingled with the doubt that it

could be some kind of thank you and farewell, a final kiss off. Perhaps, he imagined, Hakkala had preferred to do it personally, for old time's sake. It was true that they had maintained a friendly but rather distant contact, in spite of Hakkala's high rank. He visited Paris a couple of times a year, taking time to lunch with Ennis, or a few beers together, talking over business trends, common friends and company small talk.

The Finntech Group head quarters were situated behind the 19th century Russian style, domed, Lutheran church, in the heart of Helsinki. It was about ten minutes by taxi from the Inter-Continental Hotel, over roads and tram tracks covered with frozen snow. The temperature was minus fifteen degrees centigrade, unusually cold for mid-October in Finland.

The weather could not have been very much worse, Ennis thought stepping out of the taxi, his thin-soled leather shoes crunched and slithered over the snow-covered pavement. The sharp icy wind crept around every corner of his Burberry, as he cautiously negotiated the icy flight of steps, up to the modest door on the side of a conventional and unimposing mid-seventies office building.

Ennis announced himself at the receptionist's window. It would have been more in place in a railway station ticket office, than the entrance to the head office of a multi-billion dollar group.

He took the lift to the seventh floor, leaving his hat and coat in the lobby where the staff and visitors shed their heavy winter coats and over shoes, he then reported to Hakkala's secretary, who announced his arrival.

'Hello there John! Come in, take a seat, not too cold for you I hope?' Hakkala said with a large toothy grin, amused as always at the discomfort of a southern European in the harsh Finnish winter.

Hakkala was a tall man, like many Finns. He chain smoked Marlboro, Ennis sometimes thought that he even looked like a Marlboro man. He was in his early fifties, a rugged serious face, perhaps a little long, with his eyes set a trifle closely together.

His office had an imposing conservative style. The furniture dated from the beginning of the twentieth century, in rich deep red

mahogany. It had been inherited from one of the companies that had been absorbed. It was heavy, very heavy, designed for a long dead Nordic capitalist, well before the days of Scandinavia's democratic socialism, equality and hyper-taxation.

Hakkala's secretary reappeared holding a silver tray with a fine white bone china coffee pot and service, and a plate of Danish pastries.

'Have some coffee John, you look like you need it!' he said laughing and standing up to pour the coffee. Ennis squirmed in the deep leather armchair, adjusting his tie and patting his hair into place, not yet sure whether to look happy or serious, trying hard to look relaxed.

'There's been a lot of changes hasn't there?' Hakkala paused and then with a questioning smile said, 'How are people taking it?' He had often used Ennis as a sounding board following changes in the organisation.

'Well, most people are pleased with the changes,' he replied cautiously, trying to avoid looking at him too long in the eyes and stretching for his coffee, which Hakkala's secretary had placed on a low table by his armchair, almost out of arms length, forcing him to reach out in a precarious fashion.

Hakkala continued his general line of conversation, asking about different persons that they mutually knew, as they sipped their coffee and ate the pastries.

'So! I understand that you haven't been fixed yet in the new structure?' he said leaning back.

'No.' Ennis replied, feeling even more uncomfortably, shifting in his seat.

'Do you know Brodzski?' he paused and then added, 'Antoine Brodzski of Papcon?'

'Yes,' Ennis replied hesitantly, surprised at the question and change of subject.

'Well?'

'No, not really, I mean I don't know him personally, you know, I've met him on different occasions, at conferences and trade fairs. Apart from that just by reputation,' he shrugged.

‘Do you know about his project in Indonesia?’

‘Yes, well...at least I understand he goes there quite a lot, most of his business has been in Asia, in the developing countries out there. I believe he’s making a feasibility study for an Indonesian project’

‘That’s right,’ he paused, drawing deeply on his cigarette and appearing to reflect. ‘We’ve been contacted by the Banque de Berne, whom we know well, they have proposed that we participate in a consortium with Brodzski, to develop his project.’

Ennis listened to him, uncertain of what he was leading to, or how Brodzski’s firm could be linked to his own situation.

‘Well,’ he said, not without some gravity, ‘we have decided that we are interested in this project, since the South East Asian region is an important area for our group.’

He then paused, looking at Ennis rather intensely for a reaction, Ennis waited, he sensed that it was wiser to let Hakkala develop his idea and not interrupt his train of thought.

‘As you know John, the Russian economy is in trouble! In the past, some years back now, we had as much as thirty percent of our business from them, just recently it’s dropped to almost nothing though now it’s beginning to show some signs of picking up! That’s why we’ve developed a policy of diversification in recent years, buying into companies in the European and North America.’

Ennis thought to himself impatiently, this is all very fine for a lesson in economics, but what’s in it for me?

Hakkala looked at him, as if he were weighing him up, he seemed to take a breath, Ennis sensed that he was coming to the point, it was a critical moment.

‘As you know John, in our new organisation unfortunately there is no ready made place for you at the moment!’ he said slowly and paused.

Ennis felt his heart sinking, an acidy taste gathering in his mouth, he wondered what he meant by moment.

‘However!’ he paused again, carefully tapping the ash from his cigarette into a crystal ashtray. Ennis felt as though his heart was in his mouth. ‘We need a man, to look after our interests, in the consortium that is to be formed for Brodzski’s Indonesian project!’

Ennis held his breath.

‘John, you’re experienced in that region of the world, your knowledge of our industry and with the French would be an important factor for our involvement and success.’

Ennis felt an excitement rising in him, an exhilaration, a confusion of thoughts flashed through his head, he was saved and not only that, he was being offered a challenge that was worthy of his talents and experience. He felt recognition and gratitude towards Tapani. He had been plucked from a very uncertain future.

Suddenly, snapping out of his revelry, he saw Hakkala looking at him seriously, waiting for a response.

‘What do you think?’ he said placing his both hands flat down on the on the table in front of him, fixing Ennis with a frown.

Ennis waited, it was the moment to say something intelligent, his brow knit with concentration but there was blank, no inspiring ideas came out.

‘If you are asking me to handle this business, I would be very pleased!’ He finally blurted out, and as that was all he could muster, there was nothing else he could do but put on his best look of seriousness and confidence.

‘Good! I thought that it would please you,’ he said smiling broadly as though he was pleased with himself. ‘We have in principal allocated a budget, it’s all in this report together with the project outline, Kalle Punkari will go over that with you when we have finished here. One important point, you will have full responsibility and will report directly to me, and only to me, no matter whoever else in the company becomes involved.’

Ennis nodded taking a mental note of Hakkala’s words.

‘Our object is to ensure Papcon’s success, their success is our success, your role is to work with them as though you were one of them, following Brodzski’s directives.’

Ennis had wondered if he was not embarking on another impossible task, but he pushed the nagging idea from his mind; in any case whatever happens he now had breathing time.

‘Another point-I hope that you don’t mind-but you will be located in Papcon’s office, it’s on avenue Matignon in Paris, that was agreed

with Philippe de Berne, very nice according to what I've heard... expensive,' he added with a slight disapproving frown. 'You'll be introduced to Papcon next week, on Wednesday morning in Paris, after you've spoken with Philippe.'

He stood up and stretched out his hand in a slightly melodramatic fashion.

'Good luck John, don't hesitate to contact me if there's any problems. By the way I'd like you to make me a monthly report, no copies, just between us.' Then curiously he winked.

That's it then, Ennis thought to himself, as the fear of rejection was already slipping away and he reflected over what Hakkala had told him of his new role. In fact he had told him very little, he would have to do some serious digging for background information before he met Brodzski, it would look better if he was armed with the right answers to his questions and avoided any subjects Brodzski disapproved of.

Five days later Ennis met Philippe de Berne, at the headquarters of the famous Banque de Berne in Paris, on boulevard Haussman, not far from the Opera Garnier.

After a brief discussion with the aristocratic banker, he was introduced to Louis de Montferrand, who was responsible for the banks day-to-day relations with Brodzski's firm.

De Montferrand explained to Ennis that he looked after the Papcon account and also a company they had formed jointly for the development of the project, Indopap S.A., in which Banque de Berne held half of the shares. They were also leaders of the embryonic banking pool, which would have the management of the loans necessary for the project financing.

He announced to Ennis that a lunch appointment had been fixed with Brodzski at Le Boeuf sur le Toit, nearby to Papcon's offices.

In the taxi, de Montferrand filled him in on Brodzski's background. He confirmed what Ennis had already checked out, he was a young sixty four years old, born in Algiers, the son of an army engineering officer, member of an old French Jewish family. His ancestors had immigrated to France from Middle Europe shortly after the French revolution.

Brodzski was the President and principal shareholder of Papcon, an engineering firm that he had created, specialised in the development of forest industries, mostly pulp and paper mills, for the third world countries. He had a most persuasive personality and promoted his business by convincing investors to join him in the extraordinary opportunities that he alone had the exclusivity, through his privileged relations with presidents and ministers. He offered his investors vastly profitable contracts in the potentially rich and unexploited regions of the world, where raw materials were abundant and free to those who had the foresight and courage to take up the challenge.

Ennis, like many others had been, was almost mesmerised by Brodzski in that first meeting, as he enthused over the potential of Indonesia, responding to Ennis's own genuine earnestness. Ennis saw in his eyes the glow of a deep force and for a moment he suspected Brodzski held an almost fanatical belief in his own destiny, that he would seize at any price, but Ennis was too elated by his own enthusiasm to linger over the significance of that.

Brodzski, with an eye on Finntech's participation, had little difficulty in deciding Ennis would make a good member of Papcon's team; that he could work closely with himself and Christian Axelmann, his right hand man and financial director.

Ennis for his part felt an instant rapport with Axelmann, who struck him as sincere and open minded, a person uninterested by petty details, at ease and sure of his own success.

Papcon's offices were what Ennis had often aspired to, when compared with the spartan Scandinavian model that he had become familiar with. It was pure luxury, oriental carpets, mahogany and leather upholstered furniture, paintings and tapestries decorated the walls and corners. His own new spacious office overlooked the avenue facing the Champs Elysee gardens.

The Barito River was one of the huge broad muddy streams that drained the Island of Borneo, running from the high mountain range in the north and emptying into the Java Sea, just beneath the equator. The Indonesians called their part of Borneo Kalimantan, from the Javanese meaning River of Precious Stones. The Barito ended it's

journey to the sea in one of its five provinces, South Kalimantan.

It had not been easy to find a decent map of Borneo. However, Ennis finally tracked one down at the National Geographical Centre on rue Boetie, off the Champs Elysee. The map was rudimentary, very rudimentary. He had scrutinised it very carefully for a good couple of hours on his desk. It was as if by peering at the green contours of the map he would discover Borneo's secrets. He wondered what it held for him. He had the strange premonition that his life was about to undergo a profound change.

During those first weeks at Papcon, he got to know Brodzski and his business and finances. He was relieved to learn that they had solid financial resources, for at least two or three years and their standing in the industry was good.

Ennis soon became aware that the Barito project, as it had been named, was to be the culminating point in Brodzski's life work and ambitions, it was to be the vehicle that would bring him the recognition he craved, felt was his due, and deserved. Ennis suspected that nothing would stop him from achieving his goal.

Almost nothing could be seen through the window of the Garuda DC9, just the greyness of the clouds that swept by and the rain that streaked across the glass in horizontal lines. It was the peak of the rainy season.

They were still at an altitude of a two or three hundred meters as the plane made its final approach to Bandjarmasin airport. At that instant Ennis was not at all convinced they would get down in one piece as the plane was violently buffeted by the wind.

Some minutes later the aging DC9, was slammed with an unusual force onto the runway by down-shear. They felt their survival was nothing less than miraculous, though they hoped and supposed that Garuda pilots took that kind of weather in their stride.

The plane taxied to a jumble of low wooden and concrete buildings, splashing through the vast expanses of water that had accumulated on the runway and parking areas. Clouds of steam rose from the tarmac nearer the buildings, which were built on slightly higher ground and where the heat of the sun, which had made its

appearance was quickly drying off the rain.

As they stepped out of the plane, they were hit by the heat and humidity. It was just before midday local time, they had lost an hour travelling eastwards to Borneo from Jakarta, into another time zone.

They were both a head or so taller than the average Indonesian, with considerably paler complexions. In their Jakarta hotel there had been quite a large number of Europeans, but in Bandjarmasin airport, as they glanced around, they realised that they were probably the only specimens in the town.

Axelmann in his disparaging manner could not avoid remarking that it was not unlike the Parisian Metro in summer. They made their way around the puddles, through the milling crowd of disembarking passengers and ground staff, to the arrivals entrance and baggage claims area.

It was a gigantic free for all; the bags, which were being dumped through an opening in the wall, were set upon by a horde of porters, passengers and their friends.

Ennis looked up through the open window, the sky was already clearing, heavy grey clouds clung to the summits of the nearby hills and smaller white clouds drifted slowly through the treetops on the slopes like fog patches. A mysterious calm seemed to reign on the densely forested hills. On a red laterite road just beyond the perimeter of the airport, a couple of Toyota Landcruisers could be seen slowly bumping by. It was evident that beyond the momentary scramble in the airport, life in Kalimantan had not the same urgency as in Jakarta.

The passengers departing for Jakarta were already making their way out to the same aircraft, which would soon leave for the return trip. The link with Jakarta and the rest of the world would be gone; Ennis was filled with a strange feeling of isolation; he really was at one of those distant frontiers.

Borneo was an almost mythical island. Even at the end of the twentieth century, little information filtered in or out to the world at large. What happened in London or New York was irrelevant; to the local Dayak population those cities were on a distant planet.

Ennis suspected that if anything went wrong, then it could be fatal; a car accident and we'll probably die of gangrene, or God knows

what else before they can get us back to civilisation, he thought to himself grimly.

Glancing sideways at Axelmann, he saw that he also was a little pensive. 'What's his name again?' he asked looking over the heads of crowd.

Ennis did not reply, the crowd around the baggage had started to disperse, it was time to collect their own bags, which were already about to disappear in the hands of two slight but wiry looking porters, who shouted something which was incomprehensible in the general hubbub.

Ennis made them urgent signs to wait. He went outside to the parking area, where a collection of minibuses and four wheel drive vehicles stood waiting. Their drivers lingered nearby, several of them whom he supposed to be taxi drivers, made signs to him.

'Shit there's nobody here!' he mumbled half to himself and half to Axelmann, 'We could take a taxi to the hotel but I don't even know what it's called!'

'We could go to the Forestry Departments office?'

'Yeah.'

'Mr Ennis! Mr Ennis!' a voice called. He turned around, and saw a relatively tall, bucktoothed, wiry haired Indonesian. He was dressed in a tan coloured, government official's safari suit, with brass emblems on the lapels of the open shirt collar. He held out his hand limply.

'Selamat datang! Welcome to Bandjarmasin!'

They shook hands with the newcomer.

'I am Sucipto, from the Forestry Department. We have been informed by the Ministry of your arrival and have made arrangements for your trip,' he smiled.

They felt relieved; they were not stranded after all. He led them to a Nissan microbus, winding his way through a dense colourful crowd of travellers arriving at the small airport. They were Moslems, as were over ninety percent of all Indonesians, leaving on their first leg of a long pilgrimage to Mecca.

The pilgrims were accompanied by their friends and relatives for that important and personally unique event. On their return home, their respective status, as members of the community would be

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