

Dick Plays in Drug Traffic

Richard Avery

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Foreword

Greed, murder, betrayal, terrorism, drug trafficking and good, old-fashioned treachery make for an exciting, fast-paced adventure story set in the Golden Triangle. It's simply all the nasty stuff which brightens our otherwise dull lives, making them interesting and worth living.

A vendetta is being played out between two archenemies who've vowed to kill one another without mercy or remorse. Bad blood didn't begin to describe the animosity between them and one was destined to die a horrible, painful death at the other's hands.

Retired special agent Dick Avery heads to the Triangle to capture or kill his nemesis Kris Amar and end the blood feud once and for all. Either outcome would do, but he much preferred killing the bastard to bring things to a swift conclusion. He thought Amar wasn't worth the government's time or money to prosecute and incarcerate. In other words, the powder to blow him to Hell was the most economic outcome.

Amar is a ruthless, cunning adversary who escaped both justice and Dick while in his native India. He's now smuggling drugs to support his brethren fighting the holy war in the Middle East and elsewhere in the name of Islam. Nothing will stop him in his self-righteous crusade to defeat the heathen Americans and their sycophant lackeys.

For Dick, the animus runs much deeper, more personal than a geopolitical or religious struggle for hearts and minds. Amar has tried to kill him several times before and, fortunately for Dick, was unsuccessful. Not surprisingly, he has no sense of humor when his life and Uncle Sam's honor were being threatened by a drug dealing, Islamic terrorist bent on jihad.

Please follow Dick Avery's adventures as he travels the world for the State Department's Diplomatic Security Service and upholding truth, justice and the American way.

As always, may God bless you and our great nation!

Very truly yours,

Richard M. Avery III
Special Agent (Retired)
Diplomatic Security Service
U.S. Department of State

Fearsome Memories

Chapter 1

I'll never forgive or forget what he did to my friend. Vengeance is not only the Lord's, but mine as well. The murder was brutal: a cold, calculated execution to be exact. I would be His instrument to kill someone who badly needed to die an agonizing death. And it would be up close and personal so I could watch the life force fade from his eyes.

Kris Amar, wherefore art thou my old foe, my nemesis and my ultimate destiny? I almost died several times by your hand when we last met in India. There is a score to settle, one I suspect is deeply shared by us both. *Olly, olly oxen free, come out, come out wherever you are!* Our new game is about to begin in earnest. Well, geographically speaking, not exactly in earnest, but rather in the heart of the Golden Triangle.

Amar is many things in one, complicated persona: Islamic extremist, terrorist kidnapper, mujahedeen warrior, Thug assassin and head Dalit at the largest crematorium in the holy city of Banaras, India.

We met a few years ago when I was dispatched to India by my former employer, the Diplomatic Security Service, to investigate the kidnapping of the U.S. ambassador's daughter along with the eldest daughter of the former president of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai. Luckily, I was able to safely rescue the girls from Kris's clutches, but unable to capture or kill him. He escaped unharmed and vanished from India; his whereabouts unknown, at least until now. That's the short version of the hatred between us. We both need to bring things to closure and that means one of us will die.

Jersey interrupted my sketchy reverie and impure thoughts of revenge with his snotty dismissal of my proposal. Oh, oh, our meeting was starting out on a sour note, a flat one to be sure.

“Richard, you know what you’re proposing is a boondoggle, plain and simple,” Jersey responded to my opening pitch. “It won’t fly with me, my friend. I simply won’t approve your asinine, harebrained scheme. It’s much too dangerous and fraught with too much potential for political fallout. You’re wasting your breath and my time with this one. It won’t happen.”

Jersey Briggs was my nominal, notional boss, at least in my mind, but I suspected not his. He was the Director of Investigations and Counterintelligence, Diplomatic Security Service, U.S. Department of State: yada, yada and more yada, ad nauseam. It was the same position I’d held before retiring, and I didn’t enjoy the fact that I was now humbly groveling before my replacement. We were often butting one another’s head like two rutting rams during mating season and this time was no different. I always seemed to get his goat.

Maybe it was because counterintelligence was an apt description of Jersey’s mental prowess. His often inane decisions and equally absurd actions were legendary among the rank-and-file of the organization. He’d survived in the position because he kissed the butts of his superiors and they seemed to enjoy the experience. However, he often had to be spoon-fed solutions by his subordinates before swallowing any of their pabulum. And that’s what I was trying to do at the moment. I hoped he’d choke on the stuff, but only after giving his approval for my trip.

“Think of it as a junket then. That artful word is politically correct and will fly with big suits in the building,” I replied with a more-or-less straight face.

In the Foreign Service, it was all about the phrasing and parsing of words to one's advantage. The packaging was often more important than the contents.

"It's all a waste of time and money in my opinion and my opinion still counts for something around here," he said, without looking up from the document I'd given him earlier.

He was too vain to wear his reading glasses in front of anyone. God only knew if he could read the text; much less understand it, although that might be a good thing in this case since I could easily fill in any blanks.

The document was a collection of intelligence snippets about the whereabouts of Kris Amar I'd collected from current and former colleagues over the past year or so. They all suggested the same thing: Kris Amar was now living in the Golden Triangle, probably in Vientiane, the capital of Laos, just across the Mekong River from Thailand. Moreover, the reports strongly hinted he was actively engaged in the drug trade. I had a hunch where the profits from his illegal enterprise were going, straight into the coffers of the Taliban and its al Qaeda masters in Afghanistan and Pakistan

"So, what do you expect to achieve on an all-expense paid junket to the Triangle?" Jersey mumbled while still scanning the report. "We don't have an extradition treaty with Laos and I sure as hell won't authorize a trip to that Commie country. You'd be vulnerable with our government unable to bail you out if the Laos decided to play hardball. The political fallout would be too great if you dick things up, as you occasionally do. Immunity or no immunity, I won't agree to you going into Laos on what's likely to be a wild goose chase. I think it's a waste of Uncle Sam's money."

I'd anticipated his question and had a good answer which nicely played into Jersey's overly inflated ego and his disingenuous concern about squandering taxpayer money.

“Two million U.S. dollars is not chump change in my view,” I responded while staying mute about my purported screw-ups. Sometimes discretion and diplomacy were the better parts of valor for wiseass agents who served and protected our nation.

“What are you talking about, Richard?” he asked in return. His question indicated he didn’t remember what was in his own job portfolio. This was no big surprise given Jersey’s self-induced absentmindedness.

“If you recall, Kris Amar has a two million dollar bounty on his head, dead or alive, per the Terrorist Rewards Program for kidnapping the two girls in India. I’m surprised you don’t remember since your office administers the program on behalf of the State Department.”

Jersey actually blushed and nodded his head indicating he did remember, but only after I’d reminded him of the fact.

“Why pay out the money to some scumbag snitch for ratting out Amar? Informants typically are not the most upstanding citizens to begin with. Why not avoid that scenario and save the money? If I’m right, I won’t have to step foot into Laos to capture the guy. He will come to me in Thailand and once he does, the Thai authorities will arrest him and we’ll extradite him to the U.S. to stand trial,” I explained, hoping he would realize how good it would make him look to save his department all that money. They were all about getting big bangs for their bucks.

“There’s already a U.S. arrest warrant out for him and Interpol’s issued a Red Notice for his detention and deportation to the U.S. Our extradition treaty with the Thais will complete the process; a neat, sweet and discreet deal. So, we’ve got the necessary paperwork in place already. It’s a slam dunk, boss,” I added so that he would understand that all he had to do to look like the hero was let me do what I wanted.

I used the word boss to indicate I was still a servile supplicant and in no way a threat to his illustrious, illusionary career. He always appreciated my submissive behavior in his presence and I never disappointed. I could step and fetch with the best of them these days when I badly desired something in return. Okay Jersey, throw me a damn bone for Christ's sake!

“Just think, Jersey, of the kudos you'd garner if we're successful. Two million bucks saved, terrorist-cum-drug dealer apprehended, justice served; not to mention the fat performance bonus you'd receive for pulling off such a brilliant, audacious plan.” I purposely used the word we're to draw him into ownership of my proposal.

I could tell I'd hooked him at that point. He closed his eyes and sat back in his chair, contemplating what I'd just said. His mannerisms and body language were dead giveaways. Thank God Jersey telegraphed his thoughts and feelings without the slightest bit of encryption since those tell-tale signs made him much easier to read and manipulate.

He hemmed and hawed for awhile and finally said, “Okay Richard, let me think about it and I'll get back to you when I'm ready.”

I'd been dismissed without any fanfare or gratitude for my plan to enhance his stature in the eyes of his superiors. It was vintage Jersey and nothing more. He simply couldn't share the glory with a fellow colleague, much less the agony of defeat. It just wasn't in his nature to do so and I understood the phenomenon well; sometimes much too well for my own good.

Forty minutes later he called and gave the plan the green-light. I suspected he'd made a quick call to his superior to get his boss's approval along with some bureaucratic cover if things went south. He assiduously avoided any negative blowback on his reputation and career like the plague. However, Jersey could be especially decisive when it came to self-aggrandizement and

calculating the number of sugarplum fairies dancing in his head. Delusions of grandiosity knew no bounds among the Foreign Service elitists and Jersey Briggs was certainly one of them.

True to character, Jersey's parting words were: "Don't embarrass me Avery," before correcting himself, by saying "the department." I hung up the phone, laughed, stubbed out my Marlboro and rolled over on the sofa for a well-deserved nap.

Priming the Old Pump

Chapter 2

Prepping for my trip called for a reeducation exercise so I was up to speed on the illegal drug situation in Southeast Asia. In my case, it was sorta like preparing for the final, school exam by reading an abridged copy of Cliff's Notes. It had been some 15 years since I was assigned to the embassy in Bangkok and I suspected much had changed since then. It turned out I was correct. Propping my laptop against the pillow on the bed, I surfed the internet for a brief overview of poppy cultivation in the region.

I finally found what I was looking for, but it was a bit difficult to decipher since I'd forgotten much of my limited ESL vocabulary over the years. Oh well, I still picked up some relevant tidbits and committed them to memory. Here was the gist:

"From the early 1950s until 1990, when Afghanistan's opium production surpassed that of Myanmar, most of the world's illicit opium originated in mainland Southeast Asia. This is partly because the region's rugged hills and mountains, heavy monsoon rains and lack of transport infrastructure have long protected rebel armies and illegal opium poppy cultivation from the writ of central governments and anti-drug agencies. Myanmar's turbulent political history and internal wars since its independence in 1948 also contributed significantly to Asia's long reign as the global leader in illicit opium production, since the opium economy and the war economy clearly nurtured one another."

"After decades of expansion in the Southeast Asia region, the illegal opium poppy cultivation eventually receded during the early 2000's, from an estimated total of 390,000 acres across the region in 1998 to just 60,000 acres in 2006. In that time, cultivation almost completely disappeared in Thailand (with an all-time low of 388 acres cultivated in 2006) and seriously decreased in Laos (an all-time low of 3,950 acres in 2007) and Myanmar (an all-time low of 53,100 acres in 2006). However,

poppy cultivation in Southeast Asia subsequently rebounded between 2006 and 2010, increasing by 70 percent to an estimated 102,000 acres today. A number of factors explain the regional production rebound, including uncompensated opium suppression, rising opium prices, more favorable weather and resurgent conflicts in Myanmar. As a result, Myanmar remains the world's second-largest illicit opium producer, with most of its poppy cultivation taking place in Kachin and Shan....”

At least I was on the right tract for a change. The take-away message from the article was that Myanmar was now the big kid on the block when it came to opium cultivation in the Triangle. It trailed Afghanistan by a wide margin for the top honor, but not too shabby on its own merits. Moreover, the adjacent countries still played key roles in facilitating the distribution of the stuff abroad. At least that fact hadn't changed over the years.

I knew it was a dangerous thing, but a little knowledge was all I had to work with at the moment. The brief, background information had nothing to do with finding Kris Amar and everything to do with looking and sounding knowledgeable in front of my future colleagues. Perception, rather than substance, often carried the day in the State Department.

Regardless, too much dry verbiage, along with too much White Zinfandel, was making me sleepy

Early the next morning, the clanging of alarm bells startled me awake. There was no time for the usual horseplay with my laptop, I had a plane and one very bad boy to catch!

Siam Unbounded

Chapter 3

The two-legged flight from Washington-Dulles to Seoul and then to Chiang Mai, Thailand lasted over 17 hours, including the layover in South Korea. I was authorized business class given the length of the journey and that took some of the sting out of the experience.

I was familiar with Thailand, having served at the embassy in Bangkok for two years as the Regional Security Officer, aka Security Attaché, aka Diplomatic Security Service Special Agent-in-Charge, aka Security Weenie. I answered equally to all titles. I also stooped to conquer with the best of them in those days. So much so, I was now recognized as a federal bureaucrat in good stooping by my esteemed colleagues.

My beat covered our diplomatic missions in Thailand, Laos and Myanmar. Within Thailand, I supported security operations and programs at the U.S. consulates in Chiang Mai and Udon in the north and Songkhla in the south of the country. So, I had a pretty good sense of the political and cultural landscape. And they were excellent ones to work in since Thai and U.S. relations had been close and cordial for many decades. Moreover, the situation was ideal for what I had in mind with regard to Kris Amar. There would be no quarter given or received the next time we'd meet.

Lack of sleep and the time difference let me sleep soundly for the next 11 hours without interruption. When I woke, I was still groggy, but I put on my light beige, leisure suit, buffed my black wingtips to a high gloss and headed for a meeting with Dennis Williams, the consulate's Regional Security Officer. I knew this was Denny's last assignment before retiring. He was pretty much free to choose his spot and he picked a great one to end his career. We were sworn-

in together at the State Department on the same day and had been close buds ever since. Misery loved company, I guessed.

We vied with one another for promotions over the years since the Foreign Service was and is a competitive system where rank or grade level is vested in the person and not the position like the civil service system. It's similar to the military in that regard. Denny eventually won out because I retired early at age 44 with 23 years of service. I did so because I wanted to work in the private sector in a senior, corporate security position. And I did, spending many successful years working for several, large organizations.

Now, of course, I was given scutt-work and shit jobs Jersey Briggs occasionally threw my way. Just scraps from the table as he liked to say. Those were his terms for what I'd call dangerous assignments. However, I was the initiator of this particular gig so I had no room to complain whatsoever, nor did I.

I greeted Denny with a traditional Thai wai, putting my hands together as if in prayer and holding them above my head to signify that he was the senior, honored one. He laughed and gave me a more business-like wai by holding his hands at chest level.

"Well Khun Dickey, you saved face with that bit of comical shtick. I see you haven't lost your sense of humor, a few hairs maybe, but not your ability to make people laugh."

It'd been about two years since we last saw each other and we spent the next 40 minutes or so talking about families, friends and gossiping about the service and world affairs along with the meaning of life. Not surprisingly, we didn't come to any definitive conclusions about the latter topic. I drew a complete blank on that one.

"You've got a sweet deal here Denny. Retiring in place in Chiang Mai prior to official retirement was a coup," I teased. "Many of our colleagues are envious as hell of your plum

assignment since quite a few end-up in the pits of this world. A number of them are already in line to take your place.”

“I have no doubt, but it’s not all sunshine and roses as you recall from your earlier days, Dickey. Remember the annual Songkra Water Festival? You have to be careful for three days each year so you don’t get shot with squirt guns or bombed with water balloons while walking or riding in the open-air tuk-tuks. Everyone is fair game during the event as you recall. There’s danger lurking everywhere my friend,” he said, laughing as he spoke the words.

“Seriously though, we had a scare about a year ago to the effect that remnants of Khun Sa’s rebel mercenaries might be mounting an attack on the consulate due to the DEA’s interdiction efforts in the Triangle. We temporarily relocated the satellite DEA office here to Bangkok for a couple of weeks as a precaution. It turned out the intelligence was bogus, probably disinformation from the traffickers and nothing more. However, that scenario remains a continuing concern.”

“By the way, how did you get that arrogant asshole, Jersey Briggs, to fund your travel here just so we could see each other again?” It seemed we both held Jersey in the same, high disregard.

“I was copied on the DS channel cable about your visit, but it had scant details. So what’s up, my friend?”

“It was purposely vague,” I replied. “I had an official obligation to notify Vientiane, Chiang Mai and Bangkok that I’d be working on their turf as a matter of protocol, but didn’t want to include too much detail in order to avoid tipping my hand.”

“I’m not suggesting anyone would intentionally leak information. But you remember the old adage about the State Department, *it’s the only ship that leaks at the top*. The hull’s not in much better shape in my opinion.”

“You’re right of course, Avery. Things aren’t always shipshape at Mother State to stay with your wishy-washy, nautical theme,” he chuckled. “Loose lips sink--whatever. So what’s up, I ask again.”

“Do you recall my investigation of the kidnappings of the two girls in Delhi? It was a couple of years ago.”

“Yeah, sure, of course, Jersey undeservedly received a lot of attaboys for your work on the case. You did a great job in recovering the girls unharmed.”

“Regardless, I think I have a good lead on the whereabouts of Kris Amar, the kidnapper. That’s why I’m here, to run him to ground and capture him. He’s a badly wanted bad boy, a terrorist with a reward on his head and now a drug trafficker in the Golden Triangle. That’s why I’m here and I need your help to locate and capture him.”

“Okay, what do you need from me? Whatever it is, you’ve got it.”

“Thanks, Denny. I really appreciate your support. Here’s what I want to get started: your local investigator for a few weeks, a loaded Smith 60 revolver, a one-time code pad from your safe and a meeting with the senior DEA agent here.”

“Oh, is that all Dickey?” he shot back.

I hoped I wasn’t asking for too much, but I desperately required those things if I was to be successful in my hunt for Kris Amar, the Death Master of Banaras.

“Look, I can easily arrange for all of those things except for Chi, my senior, Foreign Service national investigator. He’s my right arm and go-to guy for dealing with sticky situations

with the Thai authorities. He retired from the National Police as a colonel and we picked him up. He spent his entire career working the northern tier of Thailand, with many years as an undercover agent working against the druggies. He later commanded police districts in the same areas as he rose through the ranks to become a top police operative.”

Denny was right about the enormous value of an experienced Foreign Service National Investigator to a Regional Security Office. They typically were hardwired to the host government’s police, security and intelligence services. That fact, coupled with their understanding of the local scene and superb investigative skills, made them invaluable assets. I understood Denny’s unease in detailing Chi to me.

“How about compromising? Give me Chi, but if you need him for another case, I’ll return him without whining. Do we have a deal?”

“Dickey, you silver tongued devil! Still the negotiator, diplomat and horse thief I see. OK, it’s a deal as long as we understand that if I need him, he high tails right back here ASAP or sooner.”

With that, Denny punched the phone intercom and summoned Chi to his office. Less than a minute later there was a polite knock on the door and a Thai gentleman of indeterminate age entered the office. I always had difficulty gauging the ages of people, Asians in particular. No, they all didn’t look the same or any other racist nonsense. I believed it had something to do with genetics, making them appear younger than their actual age.

At least that was true in Chi’s case. With his many years of service with the Thai National Police, he had to be at least in his mid-fifties, but the man standing before me appeared to be ten years younger. His short crew-cut added to his youthful appearance.

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