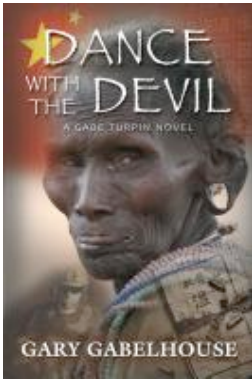


DANCE
WITH
THE **DEVIL**

A GABE TURPIN NOVEL

GARY GABELHOUSE



DANCE WITH THE DEVIL is a metaphysical thriller about cultural anthropologist Gabe Turpin who, while on holiday in Kenya with his adult daughter, comes between SEAL Team Six and Somali pirates. DANCE WITH THE DEVIL tells a story of ruthless mercenaries, Chinese Tong overlords, spies and international puppet masters, planning a nuclear attack on a U.S. Carrier Strike Group-all challenged by a college professor, a Maasai diviner, and a geriatric spymaster.

Dance With The Devil

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PROLOGUE

Mogadishu, Somalia: October, 1993

Kato Fang's camouflage-painted face wept beads of sweat as he watched the smiling Somali rest the knife blade on the first joint of his little finger. The Somali's left cheek was packed full of khat, the stems from an indigenous plant that was the drug-of-choice for the warlord's army. Fang saw the Somali's bloodshot eyes narrow at the smoke rising from a cigar sitting in a Blue Boy butter can on the table.

The lazy oscillations of the ceiling fan in the room of the Continental Hotel barely disturbed the dust and smell of fear and death that hung in the air along with the cigar smoke. Fang, his face beaten and bloodied, listed in and out of consciousness, listening to the Black Hawk rotors beating in the air seemingly in time with his heart. Gunfire popped and echoed outside in the shell-shocked streets and urban canyons of Mogadishu.

Delta Force operator and U.S. Army Master Sergeant Kato Fang was bound to a chair, his arms tied securely to the rough wooden table that sat in front of him. There were no patches or labels on his BDUs and he carried no I.D. nor did he wear tags. In the room of the hotel, Fang was certain of only two things: He was going to be tortured and he was going to die. There was nothing else left in his life.

Less than an hour before, Fang and his chalk of Delta had rappelled out of a Black Hawk helicopter onto the street beside and a block up from the Olympic Hotel. Their intelligence had it that the warlord who

was the target of this "grab-and-go" mission was having a meeting in the Olympic Hotel. As Fang had secured his gear after his fast-rope into the street, the com bud in his ear had reported new HUMANINT that had the target at the Continental Hotel—just a few bullet-pocked doors down from the Olympic. The high-value Skinnies were now supposedly meeting at the Continental—not the Olympic as originally reported by their eyes on the ground. Fang and his chalk were, typical of multinational military operations, dealing with conflicting intel. Fang and one other operator were ordered to sneak and peek, and clear the Continental. Clearing the hotel did not go well, although they did find the targeted Skinnies to be there...along with a gang of heavily armed fighters hopped up on khat.

Almost lazily, the Somali leaned forward over locked elbows and bore down on the knife. The blade thumped against the wooden tabletop. Fang growled and grunted as his little finger gave up its life on the table, and casually rolled onto its side. Blood flowed freely over the tabletop and began to stream onto the floor. The Somali torturer placed the glowing tip of the lit cigar on the stump of Fang's little finger. Amidst the smoke and smell of his own burning flesh, Fang screamed. But he could barely hear his own scream over the explosion of the RPG and the turbine whine of a mortally wounded Black Hawk helicopter as it crashed in the street outside the hotel.

Unperturbed, the Somali warlord sat on one of a few chairs that littered the room. He studied the American soldier with interest. *These American soldiers had incredible equipment and were physically*

quite impressive, thought the warlord. *But they are like giant robots who don't have the hot blood of war in their gut.* Unlike this American soldier, the warlord had carried a weapon since he was ten years old, and he had killed his first man that same year. Using a panga, he had gutted and bled the older man like a goat. The ache of hunger and the heat of tribal hate had forged the warlord. Now, and in the stale and warm air of this hotel room, he was on the verge of finally finding his reward for such a hard life.

"We may have no more time to play your games with our American friend here," said the warlord, in English more for Fang to hear than the Somali torturer. "Perhaps it is best to either kill him quickly, or let him find his death in the street."

The Somali torturer looked up from his work, as his smile suddenly masked over with the sullen look of a child denied a sweet.

Another Somali burst into the room of the hotel. He shouldered an RPG and sweat and dust covered his gaunt face. He wore a shemagh around his neck, and could be no more than sixteen or seventeen years old—a seasoned war veteran in Somalia.

"General!" shouted the young man, conscious of the danger of interrupting the warlord at such times. "Fayad demands to see you now! I told him that you could not be disturbed, but he insists that..."

Suddenly, a middle-age, Middle-Eastern-looking man smoothly slipped from behind the RPG-toting Somali. Smiling, he offered his hand to the warlord. The man was dressed in a well-cut linen suit and tie, although the tie was loosened around the shirt's sweat-wrinkled collar. The suit had obviously been worn for more than a day.

"General, I do regret the intrusion here," said the man as the warlord refused to accept his handshake. Slowly, and without losing his smile, the suit let his arm slowly drop to his side. "But I must insist that you join me now, and leave. We cannot guarantee your safety here. I have a safe house just..."

The warlord interrupted.

"Mister Fayad. Your timing is ill-chosen. Given that our arrangements have been a bit...a bit complicated you could say, I fear you have caught me at a..." The warlord paused and looked around the room at the torturer, Fang and the corpse of another American soldier who lay beheaded on the hotel room's bed. "You've caught me at a compromising moment, Mr. Fayad."

"Not as compromising as being captured by these CIA mercenaries," said Fayad with a chuckle. "We got a bunch of 'em just right down the street. More on the way I'm sure. Seriously, we gotta go General."

Fang studied the suit through swollen, sweaty eyes. Definitely a Westerner. Definitely one of those slimy, suited snake bastards used to doing business standing in the blood of more honest men.

"Mister Fayad," said the warlord. "We are nearly done here. So, could you perhaps...give us a moment? I will join you downstairs straight away."

"As you wish, General. But understand that I have already seen more than I want to see here, and if you...complete your work, and I am asked about it... Let's just say it would complicate our...our agreement. Dump the body and turn the other out into the street with the beasties. Let them finish what you've started. That way everything is...deniable."

"I will consider your advice, Mr. Fayad," said the warlord. "I will see you shortly."

Fayad still wore a smile as he turned and left. Fang could hear him walk down the hallway, and clomp down the stairs. The hotel room was quiet now, except for the automatic gunfire and heart-beat rotors of helicopters swarming over the streets of Mogadishu.

"It is fortunate for you that my man, here will not be able to show you his true skills," said the warlord to Fang. "A pity, really. Why, unlike with your friend there..." the warlord said, pointing his chin at the headless corpse laying on the bed, "we haven't even had a chance to get to know each other."

"Who's the suit?" asked Fang through split and swollen lips. "Is he your master? Does he have his little Somali dog on a leash?"

The warlord's eyes grew dark and dangerous, and a pulsing vein rose on his forehead as his glare became icy and feral. Then, just as quickly, a wide smile grew over the sharp features of the warlord and his body relaxed along with his temperament.

"Why, he is with your American State Department. He is indeed, an important man. And I am working with him and your new president—Mudane haan ka imid Arkansas: the senior man from Arkansas, as we call him. Together, we have begun to form an important alliance."

Despite it was probably buying him time, Fang hated what he was hearing.

The warlord now stood over Fang and seemed to enjoy his lecture to the Delta operator.

"Unlike your CIA and its mercenaries who wish us dead or imprisoned, your President understands the advantages of helping me with my work here in

Somalia. Why, your President, through Mr. Fayad has even arranged for my son to go to one of your fine American universities! Yes, already we are allies...and friends."

Fang felt a pit in his stomach. This Somali warlord was playing the U.S. Government off itself, and U.S. soldiers were dying in the process. The U.S. military mission in Somalia was extensively run by the CIA's, Special Operations Group, using Army Rangers and operators from the 1st Special Forces Operational Detachment-Delta—Delta Force. The inter-agency schism was legendary in the U.S. Federal bureaucracy—the Executive Branch with its State Department on one side, and the CIA with the Department of Defense on the other. Both sides often stepped up to sell each other down the river.

"So, our own government made sure we got it wrong," said Fang as he spit as though to clear the taste from his mouth. "Our own people sent us to the wrong hotel to pick you up," said Fang as he looked up at the warlord through swollen eyes.

The warlord laughed out loud.

"Yes, my American friend. Regrettably for you, that is true. And as you can see, we were waiting for you, hoping that you would be punctual...which you were. Thank you."

"Fuck you wog," said Fang using the colonial N-word as he spit again.

The warlord laughed, ignoring Fang's disgust, and continued his lecture. "Your government is most concerned that I stay safely out of the clutches of your CIA, but they were good enough to allow my people...a bit of recreation. The fighters of Mogadishu will enjoy punishing the American soldiers who come

to bother us in our own home. Now, we will send a message that you are not welcome here. But trust me, America does not have the belly to fight our war. You will be leaving our country soon, my American friend."

The automatic gunfire had lessened, and the sound of helicopter rotors was gone. In the far distance Fang could just barely hear the soft growling of vehicles slowly grinding through their gears. Then he began to hear the crowds of people roving in the streets outside the hotel. Over the human din, ululations rose from a crowd finding their blood lust.

Suddenly, the warlord collected up some papers into a portfolio and assessed the room like a crime-scene investigator.

Fang watched and listened as the warlord, speaking Somali, addressed the torturer as, "Ali," and made motions for him to toss the body of the headless soldier out the window and onto the street. He opened the window and Fang heard the growing crowd noise punctuated by rounds of gunfire. He could smell the diesel and wood-smoke that was Africa. But here through the open window onto the street, Fang could also smell burning human flesh nauseatingly mixed with the burning rubber of old car tires—the black smoke used as signals that guided the warlord's soldiers to the fighting in the post-apocalyptic ruins that was Mogadishu.

The warlord smiled at Fang, as the necrotic corpse of urban Africa bled its rot into the room.

"My American friend, I must bid you farewell. I truly would have liked to get to know you better. I will leave you in the hands of my man, here. Nabadeey. Goodbye my friend."

The warlord loosely strode out the door leaving Fang and the Somali torturer with the corpse. Fang watched as the torturer, Ali, walked over to the bed and forcefully levered the corpse—lunging back, dragging the body off the bed and onto the floor. With some difficulty, the skinny Somali lifted and shoved the body across the floor, up and over the window sill. Grabbing the soldier's boots, he canted the body over the sill, and toppled it into the street below. He walked over to the chair that was adorned with the soldier's head. The Somali put the Protec helmet and goggles back onto the head and carried it over to the window in both hands. He let it fall to join the corpse as the crowd noticed the new playthings that came from the second floor of the Continental Hotel. The human cacophony seemed to feed itself, and with the crowd high on khat, and driven on by their domination of the world's largest military power, the fighters of Mogadishu whipped themselves into an unholy frenzy of death and desecration.

In broken English, the torturer looked at Fang, smiled with rotten, ragged teeth, and said, "You play now."

Ali, with the help of another Somali soldier kicked Fang down the stairs where he sprawled, floating in and out of consciousness. The two Somalis opened the front door of the Continental Hotel and physically threw Fang out into ADIG ROAD. Knots of young fighters with AK-47s, RPG's and pangas roamed in packs as others careened through the streets on converted Suzuki trucks with .50 caliber machine guns mounted on their vehicles. Most were high on the

amphetamine hallucinogen, khat, and insanely howled at the moon as it rose out of the Indian Ocean.

Fang crawled toward the wreckage of a shelled-out Combi bus. What was left of its interior and headliner was still burning and smoke hung over the vehicle almost hiding it from view. As Fang crawled over the dirty street, he saw the downed Black Hawk helicopter, smoldering and pieces of the craft litter-strewn across the street. Full of pain, Fang found refuge in the burned-out combi and wedged himself under the tireless vehicle. He feared being trapped, but with the coming of darkness, the instinct to hide grew within him.

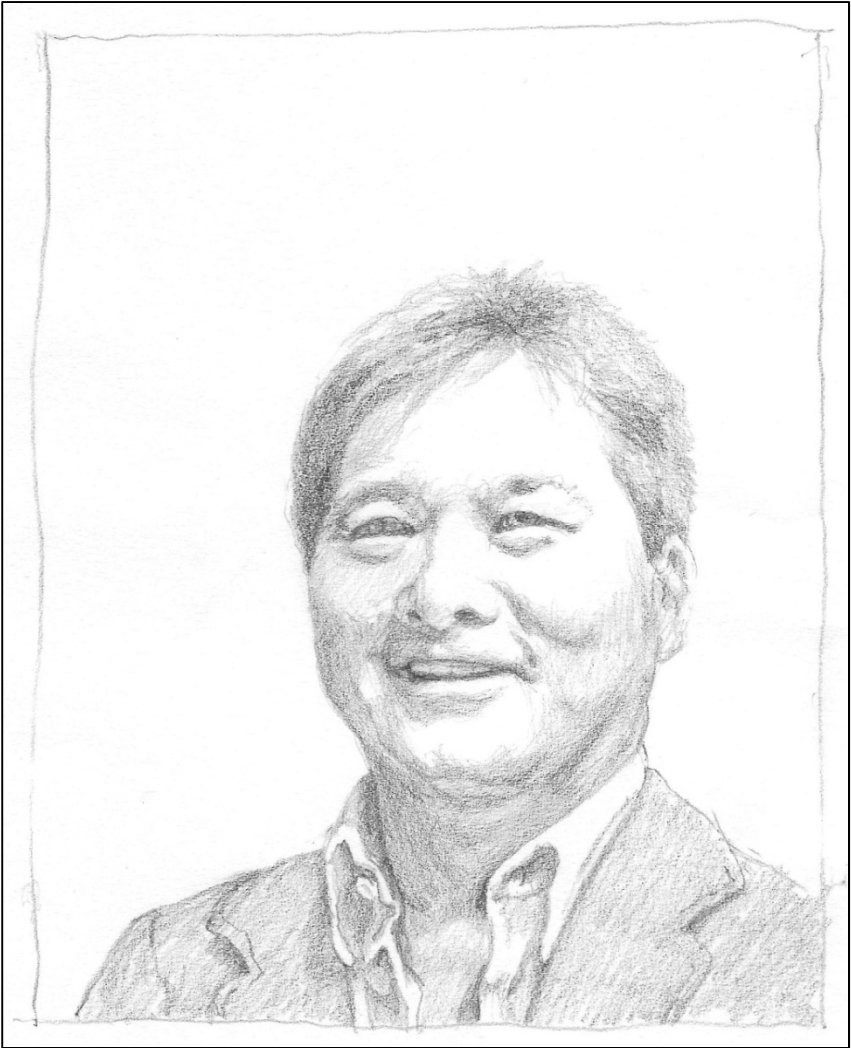
The street soldiers had, just minutes before, pulled the pilot of the Black Hawk, alive, out of the wreckage and hustled him down the street with wild ululation. Fang watched as another gang of Somalis pulled the burnt corpses of Army Rangers and Delta Force operators out from the wreckage. As he watched the Somalis dismember the corpses and start to drag them through the streets, Fang knew that somehow, Hell had come to earth.

Fang shivered in the dark as the hyenas moaned and growled. They had ventured away from the City dump where they normally scavenged. The hyenas found a carrion feast of human blood and burned bodies left from the ill-fated raid and rescue. Their nailed paws scratched against the tarmac streets as they crept closer to Fang, who was still wedged under the smoking combi. Their voices whooped and moaned as the pack of devil dogs fed on the human body parts and viscera. The streets were deathly quiet now save

for the sound of the strong-jawed hyenas snapping bone and noisily slurping and gobbling up human remains.

A lone radio played somewhere in the ruins of Mogadishu where Fang lay hidden. The tinny, African Samba beat of King Sunny Ade repetitively echoed in the night as the hyenas moaned. Fang could still hear an occasional rippling or popping of automatic gunfire echo within the city.

Master Sergeant Fang was well beyond all human endurance. He had died from the pain and fear hours before, despite his heart stilled pumped blood, and his bruised and battered eyes still looked out into the night. He was afraid beyond all fear, and hurt beyond the most grievous suffering now, for he knew he had died in the Continental Hotel, and had already gone to Hell.



CHRIS CHING

GARY L. GABELHOUSE



GABE TURPIN



MALINDI TURPIN

CHAPTER ONE

Indian Ocean off of Lamu, Kenya

The Liberian freighter, *Beluga*, churned off the Coast of Kenya, its turbo fans methodically thumping and pushing the ship away from the rising sun in the East. Its blue hull was accented by two white, thirty-thousand ton cranes that rested over the hull of the ship like a giant Lego toy. Its last port had been Karachi where they had loaded a shipment of farm equipment—tractors, and irrigation systems. The captain glassed the Kenyan coast, anxious to make port in Mombasa later that day.

Two miles to the east, the fishing dhow slid through the waters as a dozen Somali pirates scurried like rats over the deck of the mother ship, and into two long and narrow skiffs—the pirates' attack boats. The twenty-four foot skiffs were narrow craft equipped with twin OMC outboard motors. The pirates were well armed, some carrying RPGs and others newer AK-47s. Each boat also carried a Stinger missile in case of threats from the air, which were becoming more and more common. The pirates appeared much better armed than most. Also, their military-like organization was heads and shoulders above the normal rag-tag fleets of desperate, soulless men high on khat.

As the Somalis skittered into the skiffs, an Asian man stepped out onto the deck of the dhow, shouldering an RPG. The Asian was dressed in a cheap and torn kikoy shirt, stained, cotton pants and wore Bata sneakers—shoes of the Third World. He wore no hat, and the African sun glistened off his sweaty, round and bald head. He was well under six feet tall,

but powerfully built. He had a barrel chest and large muscles in his arms and traps. Although he was built like a bear, he moved like a cat. He casually climbed down into the first skiff, and released the tethers, leaving the long, narrow craft drop off and peel away from the wake of the mother ship. The twin outboard motors moaned into life and the pirate attack boat, with the Asian in the bow, leapt toward the freighter like a flying fish. The second skiff chased behind.

The Asian in the bow of the attack boat held out his left hand as he shouted over the OMC motors. A pair of binoculars was retrieved from the gear box at the rear of the skiff, and from hand-to-hand, crawled up the craft, and into the Asian's hand. The Asian focused the binoculars on the freighter as he held them in the four fingers of his left hand. The pirates skated across the morning chop of the Indian Ocean, closing on the slow-moving freighter.

As the skiffs powered down just out from the freighter, the Asian lay down his binoculars and held the RPG in both hands, sighting it at the Freighter's control room. The grenade whooshed from the bow of the pirate skiff, and over the gunwales of the freighter trailing a line of smoke. The grenade entered the front window and exploded inside the white control room perched over the freight and deck holds. Black and orange fire belched out of the windows and doors of the control room, killing the captain and two other communications and engineering crew. Grappling hooks were rocketed from launchers in the pirate skiffs, and like a simian, the Asian man climbed the line up and over the gunwales of the freighter. He was followed by seven Somalis from the first boat, and eight more from the second boat which had also

launched a grappling line. Fourteen Somali pirates and an Asian—all carrying automatic weapons—advanced down the deck of the ship, corralling all the remaining crew of the *Beluga*. The crew appeared to be weaponless, and seemed willing to cooperate with the pirates.

The Asian slung his MP5 over his shoulder as he studied the crew. They were a mix of European, Middle Eastern and African sailors found on any freighter flying Liberian colors.

"Which one of you is the crane jockey?" asked the Asian in American English.

A pot-bellied Greek sailor wearing a sweat-and-grease stained tank top stepped a half pace forward and raised his right hand at the wrist.

The Greek spoke in Mediterranean-flavored English.

"I am that man. Please. No shoot. We will do what you want. Take what you want. We do not care."

The Asian summarily leveled his gun and double-tapped an African sailor with an almost lazy calm. The African leaked arterial blood and cranial fluid onto the freighter's newly-painted white deck. The Greek stepped back into the knot of remaining seamen as fear shone in his dark eyes.

"That is just so you know that we're very serious. And since we're here in the Dark Continent, it's no big loss. This country's got too many wogs already. No one will miss this one."

Fear now gripped the remains of the crew.

"Zorba—you, the Greek. Get your ass behind that crane. I need to lighten your load a bit."

The Asian walked down the deck and stopped in front of a container that was the last one stacked level with the deck of the Beluga.

"Pick this one up real gentle like, Zorba! Sit it down where I tell you! Let's get your fuckin' crew in gear, boys. Or do I have to shoot another one of you as a reminder?"

The crew, along with the Greek crane operator hooked up and lifted the 30 foot long cargo container out of the hold and placed it where the Asian pointed—right beside the edge of the ship on the port side deck toward the bow. The Asian walked around and opened the container's side door and waved for assistance.

The Somalis held guns on the crew as they worked. There was a bit of confusion as to who should go to the Asian and help unload the metal container.

The Asian yelled at the pirates. "Three or four of you! Get your skinny-asses over here! Work it out who guards the crew and who comes to help!"

The Somalis selected the work crew who ambled over to the Asian and his container.

"Get this crate out of here, and onto the deck!" shouted the Asian to the pirates. Seeking their escape from this hot-tempered Asian American, the Somalis started to chew some khat to settle their nerves.

They all hefted on the wooden crate along with the Asian Mzungu. They slid the long and narrow wooden crate out and onto the ship's deck. The Asian got some wide cargo straps and had the Somalis lift first one end of the heavy crate, then the other. The Somalis all grunted and strained at the weight of the crate and its contents, finally having to lever the crate off the deck using long steel bars. Two heavy straps now cradled the crate.

The Asian leaned over the side of the freighter and saw that the pilots of the two skiffs had almost completed their riggings. Using prefabricated lightweight steel beams, the pilots had turned the two long skiffs into a large catamaran, with a strong skeleton of lightweight-yet-strong steel scaffolding rigged between the two open hulls. The ship was exceedingly stable, and could accept a relatively large load onto its framework and carry it secure with the preset sling webbing of the framework.

The Asian walked over to the Greek crane operator.

"Now, pick that crate up and put it on the frame of that catamaran! Lower it gently. If you fuckin' drop this crate, I will spend a week killing you! So just do it and save me about how hard this is. Just get it done or die slow and hard."

The crane operator began to blubber as he operated the crane and lowered its long, narrow package over the side of the Beluga and over the bobbing catamaran below. Tears streamed down his face in fear, and his belly jiggled with his sobs. The crate, marked *Irrigation System*, dangled over the slate-silver of the Indian Ocean, as the scent of jungle and fresh-water river rot wafted across the sea. The crew held its breath. Even the Asian looked on anxiously as the crate loomed over the make-shift catamaran that rose and fell in three-foot swells. As the crate gently kissed the steel scaffolding, the Greek laid his head on his arms and cried like a baby, crossing himself, and offering prayers of thanks to the heavens. The crew, and even the Somalis cheered. The Asian, smiling broadly, watched as the two pilots

of the newly-crafted catamaran secured the crate with the sling webbing.

"Keep the middle of the crate clear of slings," yelled the Asian through cupped hands. The cat pilots signaled their understanding with okay hand signs.

Still smiling, the Asian walked over to the crane operator and offered his hand.

"Well done, Zorba! Well done, indeed!"

The Greek was cautiously smiling now. He began to bask in his accomplishment, and looked to his fellow seamen as if to share in a great victory.

"Get out here on deck and give us a little victory dance, Zorba," said the Asian.

The Greek crane operator now began to dance—and it appeared he could dance well, as it seems could all Greeks. The man now snapped his fingers and stepped precisely and with great emotion. He was even humming a tune that was picked up by the crew.

The Asian raised his MP5 and shot the Greek crane operator twice in the head. The Greek's brains and cranial bones exploded out of his forehead, sending bone, blood and tissue spraying across the deck of the freighter.

"Kill the rest of them!" he ordered the Somalis.

With their mission nearly complete, and high as a kite on khat, the Somali's casually lowered their AK-47s and riddled what was left of the crew. The crew fell into a bloody heap on the deck of the Beluga.

The Asian and the pirates slid down the lines and let the dead freighter drift away from the catamaran craft. The Asian scampered across the steel scaffolding to the crate carrying one of the pry bars from the freighter. He carefully loosened boards, and reached down inside the crate. He pulled out a Leatherman

Tool and appeared to be working on something mechanical within the crate, as the catamaran bobbed in the swells, with the four outboards still idling. The freighter Beluga listed away from them, drifting toward the Kenyan coast.

The Asian looked up from his work and shouted, "Time to go! Back to the mother ship—pese-pese!" his Swahili urging them to do so quickly. The jury-rigged catamaran evenly glided across the swells back east to the large fishing dhow.

Less than a half hour later, they pulled up alongside the mother ship. As planned, the Somalis crab-walked across the scaffolding and up onto the large dhow. The Asian leaned into the crate and secured something smaller than his fist and secreted it into a small, greasy canvas bag. He climbed off the catamaran and onboard the dhow and went to the stern of the ship where he had stored his military duffle bag. He opened the duffle and grabbed a large bag. He took the bag to the captain of the pirate mother ship.

"As we agreed," said the Asian. "And since it was so well done, I have given each of you an extra thousand dollars U.S. as a bonus." He let the bundled bills tumble onto the captain's chart table. The circle of pirates greedily eyed the fortune in greenbacks. As the Somalis looked at their money, the Asian, unseen, tossed the small canvas bag into the corner of the dhow's deck among other bags and weathered boxes. The Asian then, with a smile on his face, raised his MP5 in his right hand, and a Glock-30 in his four-fingered left hand. "Now, we're all going our separate ways, gentlemen. So, everyone play nice. Salama, my friends. Salama."

The Asian backed down the deck and onto the catamaran. He was cautious and was watching for anyone to go for their weapons. The Somalis went back to looking at all that money lying on the table.

"You heading back to Mogadishu?" asked the Asian of the mother ship's captain.

"No. We are heading straightaway to Malindi. We will spend some of this money, Sahib. We will drink a little and fuck a little, too. Salama my strange mzungu. Peaceful seas."

"And to you, my rafiki. Peaceful and profitable seas."

As the fishing dhow headed toward Malindi, on the Kenyan Coast—just thirty miles North of Mombasa, the Asian shouted to the two catamaran pilots. "Ras Ngomeni as planned rafikis! We'll all drink our fill of banana beer at the Harambe Bar tonight!"

"I'll drink White Cap, thank you," replied one of the pilots—a tall African American named Odell Terry who had been an NYPD Detective before the Asian had found him. It was hard to age the man, as the years held in his eyes were in conflict to a physique that seemed that of a young man. Terry was an old school Judo player, who had never known better than to quit training.

"You drink that swill?" joked the other pilot. "Hell, if you're drinking beer in Kenya, it's gotta be Tusker, man!" Although the other pilot was similarly dressed in the Third World rags of a Somali and looked a bit like a Luo, he, too was an African American named Johnny Pitts. Before the Asian found him, Pitts was a training officer for Detroit PD, who was a champion marksman, and was an advanced black belt in several martial arts.

Sergeant Johnny Pitts was a one-man SWAT team in Motor City...before going to work for NYPD, and for the Asian.

The catamaran smoothly glided toward the greenish brown stain of the Kenyan Coast. The Asian was pleased with the mission, thus far. The warlord and corrupt Pakistani General had come to terms and the package had been successfully liberated from the Mirpur Khas Air Force Base. The package, riding on a commercial truck out of Tando Allahyar got to the docks of Karachi with no problems. The bribes had been successfully made to and accepted by the Captain of the Beluga to take on the "irrigation system" without question or inspection, and place it within the freighter's hold where it would be readily accessible. The freighter's next port was to be Mombasa. It now floated silently off the Kenyan Coast, shifting with the currents. Onboard were only the ghosts of its crew.

The Asian grabbed a satellite phone from his duffle and waited for the phone's signal connect. He dialed up his partner and friend, Chris Ching. Ching was one of the managing partners in Nine Dragons, LLC—a hedge fund that backed a number of enterprises that were exclusively within the security and military contractor sector. He held the phone in the four fingers of his left hand as the Kenyan Coast grew larger and more distinct on the horizon.

"Chris!" the Asian shouted over the buzz of the outboards and the wind noise of the sea. "Chris! Fang here to report all operations are go!"

The pleased and friendly voice, although thousands of miles away sounded clear and strong in the Sat phone.

"That is great news, Kato," said Chris. "Outstanding! Where are you right now?"

"Just a few miles offshore from Ras Ngomeni," replied Kato Fang. "Where are you? I hear car horns, and sirens all the way from there!"

"I'm stuck in traffic backed up at the Midtown. At least I'm in the open. This is a great connection. But hell, the FDR is a goddamn parking lot, and I have places to go. Putting up with this crap is why I get the big bucks, Kato," said Ching with a laugh. "You get the tick off the dog?"

"Affirmative. Picked that tick off, no problem, and gave it to another dog."

"Good. No problems at all, then?"

"None whatsoever, my friend. Just enjoying this cruise off the Kenyan Coast."

"Go ahead and enjoy it as I buck traffic getting home. The wife and I are going to a Julia Haltigan concert down in the Bowery tonight. She's the next Norah Jones according to the wife."

"I'll be drinking banana beer and watching lepers dance for beer at the Harambe Bar in Ras Ngomeni," chuckled Kato. "Odell and Johnny are good company, though, and maybe we'll find us a tender little Nubian princess to relieve our burdens."

"I'm on a plane tomorrow. Guilin," said Ching over the street noise of the city. "Meeting with Grandfather to finalize our plan."

"Nice. Haven't been to Guilin since I was a little kid," Fang said as he looked toward the shore—steering the catamaran toward the south side of the cape. "Gonna make time for any boat rides? You know what they say about the Li River, there: Where Heaven touched the Earth and stayed."

"Actually, Grandfather and I will be discussing our matters on a bamboo raft between Guilin and Yangzhou. We will take tea at the Yangzhou Mountain Retreat after our cruise."

"Good work if you can get it, my friend. While you're floating in Heaven on Earth, I'll be here in the belly of the Beast...dancin' with the Devil."

"Be careful with the locals. And keep an eye on that irrigation pipe. It cost a lot of money, and we can't find any more right now. Traffic's starting to move, Kato. I'll call you in the morning your time tomorrow before I leave for Guilin. Great news, about the package, my friend. Give my best to the crew."

The connection was ended and Kato Fang watched the heat shimmer off the sands of Ras Ngomeni on the horizon. He grabbed his binoculars and focused them on the abandoned, San Marcos Platform that squatted like an oil rig off the coast of Ras Ngomeni. He smiled as he studied the old launching pad for the Broglio Space Port, used in the 1970s and 80s to launch satellites by the Italian Space Agency. *Perfect*, he thought as the sun and sea seemed to levitate the missile platform over the silver waters of the Indian Ocean.

Malindi Marine Park: Malindi, Kenya

Through his diving mask, Gabe Turpin watched the Helmet shell tumble and roll back and forth in slow motion over the spit of sand between the coral heads. He floated twenty feet over the prized seashell, breathing through his snorkel as Angel and Butterfly Fish darted around the coral. Gabe watched a school of Batfish arc through the water as their yellow-and-

black-striped bodies floated upright at attention. Further down below, by the Helmet shell, a large Parrot Fish grazed, and powdered coral with its powerful beak-like mouth.

Gabe relaxed, and let the ocean rock his body in its primal embrace. He had decided to give himself a special sixtieth birthday gift and booked a three-week vacation on the Indian Ocean Coast of Kenya at Malindi. He needed this respite from academia as he had spent the past three months continually refereeing budget and turf wars at the University of Nebraska where he was a professor of Cultural Anthropology. Gabe was an explorer of the mysterious and sometimes dark sides of religious ceremony, and sacred practice, thus earning him the nick name given to him by his students: *Dr. X-Files*. Gabe had studied and researched everything from the neurobiology of Indian Naga Baba mountain ascetics to the VMAT-2, or God Gene activity in the Yamabushi mountain warriors of Japan. For decades, now, Dr. Gabe Turpin had earnestly cast about his search for ceremony that put humanity in the presence of their gods.

Gabe's large, six-foot, four-inch frame cast a shadow over the meadow of sand below as he snorkeled over the reef of the Marine Park off from Malindi on the Coast of Kenya. Despite his barrel chest had traveled a bit south, Gabe still had a powerful build maintained by his time on the dojo floor, teaching and training Karate and Aikijujitsu. His thinning hair no longer obscured his underwater view, or broke the seals of diving masks as it did when Gabe had long curly locks in the absence of character. Gabe had snorkeled on this same reef for the first time in

1972. At that point in his life, he was a curious youngster on his first anthropological field expedition studying the Nkidong divination ceremony of the Maasai Tribe. Having been born and raised in a poor neighborhood full of hooligans and desperate single parents, Gabe had never even seen an ocean before, let alone swam in one. But unlike most of his hoodlum friends, Gabe had two amazing parents who instilled within him the need to escape the old neighborhood and all the despair that came with it. His father had told him he should somehow get free to travel the world, because no one could ever take that away from him.

Ten years later, and as a dutiful son who listened to his father, Gabe had found himself traveling across Africa. Having just become a legal adult able to travel alone, it was the first time he had been out of the American Midwest. In that African year he saw landscapes and life vignettes of nearly painful beauty. As well, he saw the underbelly of the Dark Continent, full of hunger, disease, danger and death. He had experienced Africa in all its splendor and squalor. And in doing so, Gabe had become a part of a world that most would never see. He grew comfortable in a simple life defined by what he could carry on his back and the never-ending horizons of exotic and impossible beauty. After that year in Africa, he would never again be able to go back to a life that was comfortable and normal. He had become irretrievably lost to the world of cold and heat, hunger and fear...where corpses littered the post-card beauty of an African sunset, and death was as casual as a late-night yawn.

Late in that year, Gabe had sat in a dusty lane in the backwaters of Malindi, drinking tea poured for him out of a tall brass urn by a bearded Sikh. Muslim calls to worship floated on the air as dhows with their shark-fin sails set out for the evening's fishing for Jack Mackerel. Children and goats milled around him as he sat there, burned dark as a Somali, dust in his beard and his Third-World eyes shot with red, squinting in the setting sun. It was then he realized that he was so...comfortable. He was comfortable in a world that a year ago, would have been beyond his imagination. He loved the gentleness of the town, its people, and the ancient vistas of sea and sand. And as he drank down his chai, he knew two things: He knew that if he was ever going to leave this land, it would have to be soon. And he also knew that if he were to ever have a daughter, he would name her...Malindi.

And now, forty years later, Gabe once again snorkeled over the same reef in the warm waters of the Indian Ocean. He hung suspended in time and space as his grown daughter, Malindi, swam up beside him and cast a second shadow on the sand below.

Malindi tapped Gabe on the shoulder and motioned toward the Helmet shell on the ocean floor. She signed that she was going down to retrieve it. If it was without an animal inside, it would be a good treasure earned, and a touchstone for memories of a magical day of snorkeling off the shores of her namesake.

Malindi's strong, young body shot down through the water toward the shell. She was a natural athlete, and maintained a solid level of fitness into her thirties. And all this in the face of four knee surgeries and other fractures from her love of Rugby. Although her hair

was a dark auburn now, and despite the aging of her face and the establishment of her womanhood, she had changed very little from that fiercely aggressive, compassion-filled, red-headed, soccer star that owned her father's heart. Malindi was fierce, independent and tough as nails. But she cried at the misfortune of others and had a heart the size of a rugby ball. She was a perfect embodiment of both mental toughness and compassion. She was a drop-dead gorgeous woman with a magical light in her eyes.

Gabe watched his daughter pluck the Helmet shell from the sand and kick toward the surface. Over his own breathing through the snorkel, he could now hear the high-pitched hum of outboard motors coming from offshore. He could also hear the deeper moan of an engine sounding closer to where they were snorkeling. He looked forward through a school of ribbon fish and saw the shadowy hull of a large fishing dhow coming straight toward their small dive boat anchored only twenty or thirty yards away. The dhow careened at the last moment and barely missed their dive boat, and continued its run right toward the shallower reefs and the beach.

Gabe saw a body splash into the water less than ten yards from the dive boat. The man frantically swam toward their boat and started to climb into the small craft. Then, Gabe saw the all-too-familiar bubbled trails of gunfire rain and rip through and around the man. Gabe watched as the body slumped, fell back into the water, and began to leak blood, and trail viscera. He watched as bullets literally blew apart their small boat, and what just seconds before had been a

small dive boat was now riddled wood and debris that littered the ocean floor in the shallow water.

Gabe looked as Malindi cautiously swam to the surface toward him, obviously having seen the nearby carnage. She swam to him and he held onto both her shoulders, looking down into her mask. Gabe could see fear and concern in her eyes. He motioned that he would surface and look around.

Gabe slowly surfaced and spit the snorkel's mouthpiece out and looked out of his now foggy mask as he tread water and assessed the area for threats. The underwater silence of the sea was replaced by the sounds of large-caliber gun fire and racing outboards that Gabe saw, buzzed like hornets over the water. Everything was chaos on the surface of the Marine Park, as Gabe's attention was drawn by the sound of a huge crash as the large fishing dhow piled onto the reefs just off from the beach where it ran aground.

Gabe watched as a half-dozen men dressed in the rag-tag clothing of fishermen, abandoned the grounded dhow. A few of the men carried weapons as they ran barefoot across the hot sand. They turned to return fire and it seemed the muzzles of their AK-47s were pointed directly at Gabe and where he tread water. Suddenly, Malindi surfaced not three feet away—between him and the beach. She was looking at him through her dive mask with those big hazel eyes.

"Dive! Now!" shouted Gabe, as both he and Malindi sucked in air. Gabe grabbed his daughter's shoulder and pushed her underwater with him. Both dove down to the sandy bottom and leveraged their bodies under coral so they could remain safely underwater without exerting themselves. The coral was sharp and scraped away skin as the ocean currents moved them back and

forth in the water. They crouched on the sandy bottom looking at each other. Small streams of bubbles escaped their pursed lips and spiraled to the surface. Gabe noticed Malindi still held the Helmet shell in her hand. The Parrot Fish continued to eat the coral like a huge cauliflower, as a bevy of reef fish played under the mayhem above them. Gabe checked his dive watch. They had been underwater for nearly a minute, now. He made hand signs to surface. Gabe placed his hand on his daughter's shoulder as he pointed up. They surfaced very slowly, Malindi trailing below him. Gabe's head broke the surface and he gasped, quickly blinking the saltwater out of his eyes.

The beach was strewn with the dead bodies of the fishermen. Their weapons lay harmlessly around them in the sand. Further down the beach, another fisherman kneeled in the sand, his hands clasped on top of his head. The fishing dhow listed on the beach, rocking back and forth as black smoke belched out of the dead craft. The only sound was that of the surf and sea birds.

Gabe let go of Malindi's shoulder and allowed her to surface. She sucked in a lungful of salty air and was looking at Gabe with the wide eyes of a child. Then, Gabe saw her look over his head, behind him, as she tread water. She began to cry.

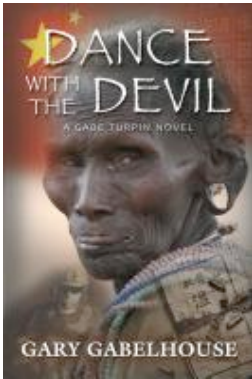
Gabe quickly pulled his mask down around his neck and turned in the water. He found himself staring down the muzzle of an MP5 submachine gun. He continued to tread water, knowing to dive could get them both killed. He slowly looked up. The muzzle of the weapon did not move despite the rise and flow of the sea. Behind the gun, was a camouflage-painted face that stared intently down the scope line, and right

into Gabe's eyes. The spec ops warrior leaned over the bow of an assault raft and crouched there like a piece of spring steel.

DANCE WITH THE DEVIL



JIMMY McCANN



DANCE WITH THE DEVIL is a metaphysical thriller about cultural anthropologist Gabe Turpin who, while on holiday in Kenya with his adult daughter, comes between SEAL Team Six and Somali pirates. DANCE WITH THE DEVIL tells a story of ruthless mercenaries, Chinese Tong overlords, spies and international puppet masters, planning a nuclear attack on a U.S. Carrier Strike Group-all challenged by a college professor, a Maasai diviner, and a geriatric spymaster.

Dance With The Devil

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