

The Belly of the Beast is Book II in the action-packed Jungle War series and picks up where Chasing Romeo- The Jungle War left off in this exciting Vietnam War related saga of Lurp/Rangers in combat.

The Belly of the Beast: Book II in The Jungle War Series

By Kregg P.J. Jorgenson

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BOOK II IN *THE JUNGLE WAR* series

The cover art is a detailed illustration. At the top, a dark steamship with multiple masts is seen on a turbulent, grey-blue sea. Below the ship, a large, dark, rocky island dominates the center. On the island, a white dragon with a fierce, striped face and a long, curled tail is depicted. The dragon's body is covered in intricate scales and patterns. In the lower right foreground, the profile of a man's face is shown in silhouette, looking towards the dragon. The overall color palette is dark and moody, with shades of blue, grey, and black, accented by the white of the dragon and the ship.

The Belly of the Beast

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Chapter 10

Li was the furthest away from the tunnel, but the first to reach the heavily damaged entrance.

The brush that hid the entrance behind the dirt mound had been stripped of its foliage in the blast. A quick look inside the entrance had Li swearing under his breath. The explosion had all but collapsed the tunnel with heavy rock, packed clay, and was slowly bleeding dirt. There was room to crawl but not much and not all that far in. There was also no sign of the New Guy or Darrell. Li didn't have the tools to attempt a rescue but he, at least, was going to try.

"Call it in and set up a perimeter as best you can!" he said to Daley. "I'm going in."

Taking in a deep breath he crawled up and over the mess as far as he could go, and then wildly began digging out the broken rock and piles of dirt trying to reach the two trapped Lurps. Loose dirt was spilling down from the ceiling and the few support beams that remained were creaking and threatening to give.

Even so, the Assistant Team Leader managed to clear away enough of the debris to find the FNG that had followed Thomas inside. The New Guy's right leg was twitching where a good size chunk of splintered wood from one of the support beams had speared the hamstring. More splintered wood and bamboo spears were sticking out of his back and shoulders. He was face down in the dirt, so Li turned it to the side to give him room to breathe. He was badly injured, wheezing and groaning, but he was still alive.

"I found one!" he yelled back over his shoulder to the others outside the small tunnel. Li tried pulling the New Guy free by his LBE harness, only the injured Lurp didn't budge. He was trapped under heavier debris.

"You're gonna be fine, Dude," lied Li. "Hang in there. We'll get you out of here."

The New Guy's eyes were open, but nothing registered. He was out of it but not out of danger. Li brushed and scraped away more rock and dirt from the New Guy's outstretched left arm, and soon found the reason why he couldn't free him. The arm was trapped beneath a giant slab of stone.

The only thing that had kept the hand and arm from being severed was the grenade launcher the New Guy was carrying. When the boobytrap exploded well above him and the ceiling collapsed, the *Thumper's* thick barrel and stock bought the hand and wrist some crucial space when a large slab of heavy stone came crashing down. The weapon was crushed, but not the New Guy's hand. Using his bayonet, Li dug beneath the damaged M-79 to free the trapped hand. The *Thumper* was a write off. It couldn't be salvaged. Broken as it was, it would never fire another round, let alone make for a good club, so he left it.

"Hey you! New Guy!" Li yelled over his shoulder again to the other FNG who was sticking his head inside the crawlway. "Gimme a hand!"

"It's Sanchez," said the other FNG making his way inside the tunnel to help.

Li nodded. "Yeah well, grab his ankles, Sanchez. I'll grab his LBE. On three, we pull!"

Li did a quick countdown and together the two hauled out the injured team member from the triggered cave-in.

"We got'cha, New Guy!" Li said as the two Lurps pulled him over behind the small dirt berm.

"Norse," whispered Sanchez, tilting his head towards the injured Lurp.

Li nodded, again. He got it. "Norse? Listen to me! Listen to me! You're going to be fine. You hear me, dude. You're gonna be okay."

Only the Private First Class who'd only been in Vietnam for less than a month didn't look or feel okay. His back and thighs were peppered with splintered wood and bamboo from the support beams. There were countless small cuts and bruises, and he was bleeding from his mouth, nose, and ears that suggested possible internal injuries. Still, he bought the lie. He had to.

"Roll him on his left side," Li said, shifting Norse over just enough to check for more wounds and fortunately finding none. The back of the new guy bore the brunt of the damage from the explosion and the cave in.

To the second FNG on the team who now was a name to him, he said, "Sanchez? You got the Aid Bag?"

"Yes, Sergeant."

"It's Specialist, *Braw*," said Li. "Get it and bandage anything that's bleeding on him." Leaning in closer to Sanchez so Norse couldn't hear what more he was saying, added, "Leave in any of the big pieces of rock or wood splinters. We don't need him bleeding out on the mountain."

"You call in contact and bounce our QRF and a Medevac?" he said to Daley as he began removing his LBE web gear.

"Done," said Daley.

"Alright then. I'm going back in to look for Darrell."

Daley almost said, *'you think that's a good idea?'* but caught himself and nodded instead. It was an unwritten rule. Rangers don't leave other Rangers behind. It was a noble sentiment but rules like that in combat weren't always doable. Still, it was the trying that made all the difference.

"Roger that," he said and handed the radio over to Sanchez as he dug into his rucksack and brought out a Claymore.

"Monitor the radio and cover me!" he said, before scrambling out to set up another anti-personnel mine while rolling out more wire from the one he had set near the path the NVA had taken up to the O-P. He placed the additional Claymore just to the left, but ten yards back from the top lip of the path.

The three mines made for a good defense from the front and sides where the bulk of the threat would come from. In theory, a Claymore covered a sixty-degree area for one hundred yards, fifty being the more reliable number, given the big rocks and surrounding jungle. The anti-personnel mines would take care of the trail head and anything immediately to the left and right of it. When the last anti-personnel mine was set, he quickly covered it in bunchgrass and leaves to hide it from view. Then he slowly started unwinding the charging line back to where Sanchez and the wounded Ranger were down behind the cover of the dirt berm. He passed the charging line of the Claymore over to Sanchez who was surprised he was given the task.

"Plug it in and stay ready," he said to Sanchez. "How's he doing?" Daley tilted his head towards Norse who was moaning on the ground.

Leaning into Li he whispered so the injured soldier wouldn't hear him. "Not good."

Daley nodded and noticed the empty Syrette of morphine pinned to Norse's boot.

"You gave him morphine?"

Sanchez nodded. "One shot. Pinned the empty to his collar."

"Good," he said and then patted Norse on the left leg. "Hang in there, Norse. The medevac's on the way. We're going to get you out of here."

Turning his attention to the makeshift perimeter he was satisfied with both the cover the rocks provided as well as the placement of the Claymores. Looking around he nodded at the steep drop off to their left. Unless the NVA had their own mountain goat squad then there was little to no worry about an attack coming from that direction. No, it would come from the trailhead, back the way they came, or worse; from what he didn't like when he looked above them. Twenty, maybe thirty feet up was an awning-like overhang of trees and rocks. If anyone came at them from above, then they were fucked, even if Sanchez, the frightened looking FNG, hadn't realized it yet.

Sanchez had good reason to be frightened. If worse came to worse, their only option, if help didn't arrive before the NVA did, would be to abandon the dirt berm and move inside the tunnel to fight it out. There they would hold off any attack while being trapped in what Daley thought would be a very small Alamo.

"The QRF's on the way," Daley said, maybe to reassure Sanchez and maybe just to reassure himself.

As all this was happening Li was back in the tunnel as far as he could go, probing and pushing on the solid block of stone that had trapped Norse's hand and had blocked the way. There was no give to the heavy stone and no moving it aside. More loose dirt was spilling down above him and threatening a second cave in. In the limited enclosed space, the surfer could feel both a rush and a

sense of panic coming on. It wasn't claustrophobia as much as it was an understanding that like being in a tube, it all could collapse and wipe him out at any moment. Still, he kept digging around the massive stone with his knife to find Thomas only when he dug the knife deep into the rubble several new clumps of dirt began falling on his back and head.

"*Ta ma de!*" he said, swearing in Chinese, covering his head until the falling dirt had settled. It was fucking shit because with the cave in and the threat of more collapse he knew there would be no getting further into the crawlway without heavy tools and equipment.

Frustrated and concerned by the steady flow of dirt spilling down and with no room to turn around he inched his way back out.

Daley was there to help him out while Sanchez was seeing to Norse.

"Anything?" Daley asked Li, hopefully.

Li didn't have to answer or shake his head; his crestfallen face said it all.

"What's the status on the QRF and the Medevac?"

"A Medevac is in-bound out of Cu Chi," he said. "They say they're 15-20 mikes out. A QRF from Tay Ninh is on its way as well. They're closer."

"Let's set another Claymore out," said Li. "We may need it."

"We're good. I already took care of it," pointing to where he'd placed the additional anti-personnel mine and then added, "Well, every direction except for what's above us."

He pointed just above them to where the jungle awning was jutting out and over the rock wall. The overhang looked to Li like yet one more wave about to close out over them in what would be the real problem if the NVA took the high ground. They wouldn't have to worry about shooting the Americans. They could simply lob down grenades. There was little that Li and the others could do to cover that except maybe to find a better angle to deal with it, if, before it happened.

"Let's move to some better cover out there and use this as our fallback," he said looking around and finding what looked to be a better defensive position a few yards away or at least one that wouldn't leave them vulnerable to an attack from either the path or from above. The move gave them a little more protection, but not much.

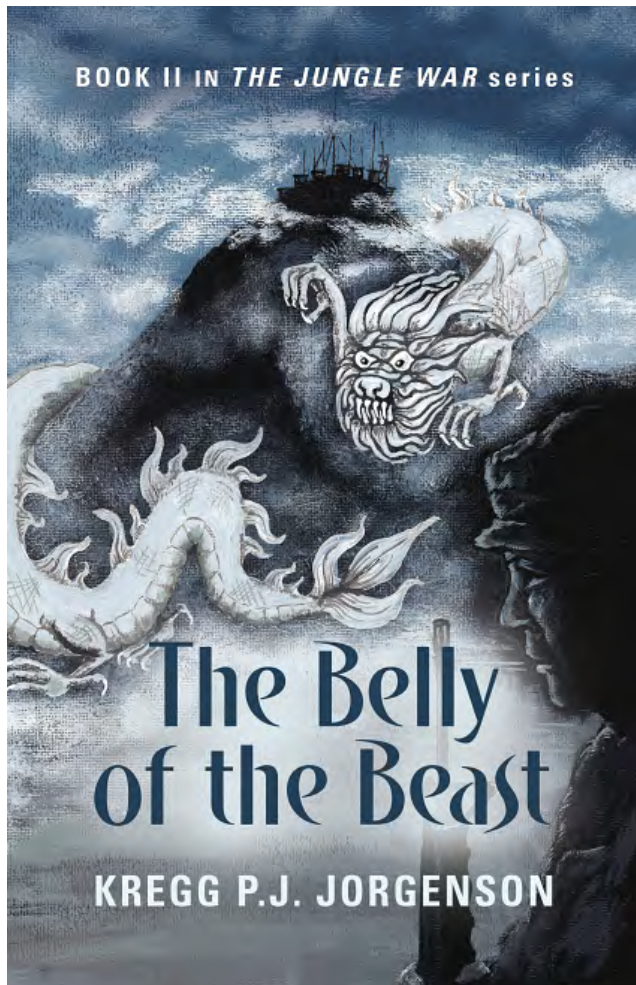
Li took up his rifle and stared down the thin trail that led to the tunnel's entrance. Just over the lip of the path and out of sight, but not out of hearing range, he and the others could hear the enemy soldiers charging up from below.

Li took up the clacker for the Claymore facing the center of the pathway, took in a slow, deep breath, and whispered to Daley and Sanchez, "Get ready!"

Coming soon.

Sweet Sorrow

Book III and the final installment of the Chasing Romeo
Lurp Jungle War Series.



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