

Shadowboxer

(A journey of trust)

**For Linzi, who made me realise there is still
love...**

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He was resting, at last, sitting by the pool in Spain and wondering how it all started. It was difficult to pinpoint the exact time when he became involved in Martial Arts since he had been practising the arts for nearly 35 years.

Mike attempted to recall the exact reason for entering this strange world of fighting. He supposed it began when he was around 12 years of age. He had been out with a friend walking down a farm lane, late in the evening, when an older lad approached them. They side stepped but so did he, blocking their path.

The lad produced a knife and demanded they do whatever he instructed. Mike was scared but said “No!, I am trained in Karate!” This was a bold attempt at lying since the nearest he had been to any martial art was watching “The Man from Uncle” an early 60s television programme.

In a state of confusion and bewilderment that a boy of 12, 3 years his junior, could know anything about martial arts, the bully nervously said “If that’s so then break that piece of wood in two. He pointed to a piece of wood 18 inches by one inch by half an inch. The bluff had been called. What to do? Picking up the piece of wood, Mike gave it to the bully. “Hold onto this very tightly” he said. The bully gripped the wood and Mike studied it for a moment. “Well?” said the bully. Mike raised his right hand over the wood two or three times then (as in the films) let out a loud cry and split the wood in two with the edge of his hand! To his surprise his hand was intact and unhurt. “Now, how would you like to be hit that hard?”, the bully ran off leaving the two boys alone. His friend was mesmerised by the event and needed nudging to get his attention, “How did you do that?”, Mike smiled and walked on.

He went home that evening elated. On entering the house he related the occurrence to his father, the adrenaline rush still present made his speech extremely excitable. His father listened, calmed him and said "You were lucky! If he hadn't been a bully you may have had a fight on your hands. He may try again, if so what will you do?" Mike pondered on this and asked his father for options. His father gave him two, either hope it doesn't happen again or learn Karate! Now this was the mid 1960s and at that time Karate instructors in Great Britain were rarer than the proverbial rocking horse

It just so happened that a personal friend of the family was learning and teaching Karate and had attained a brown belt. Mike's father introduced him to the instructor.

The die was cast and the start of a lifetime of training had begun. In the mid 1960s there were probably only 3 people who had attained the rank of first dan (black belt) in the country and compared with the myriad of styles today, there were only two prominent styles Shotokan and Shotokai.

Mike's instructor practised the latter, it being a softer style compared to the hard Shotokan style. The instruction periods were held three times a week from 8 p.m. until 10 p.m. They were extremely demanding, physically, yet strangely rewarding.

It soon became apparent that Mike had a gift for Kata. The performance of set moves which almost resemble a dance. These sets are however, far from dances since they represent fighting many imaginary opponents from varying directions. Katas usually need rehearsing many times before all of the moves can be performed as second nature. This involves repeating each move over and over until they become instinctive. Mike's gift was that once he was shown

a Kata, all the way through, once or possibly twice, he knew all of the moves completely.

He soon discovered that the more he trained the more easily he was able to spot potential trouble and thus avoid confrontations. In fact the only fights he was involved in were the practise sparring sessions in the dojo (training hall). His training suffered slightly as the inevitable school exams' revision requirements restricted his spare time. However, at the age of 18 in 1971 he attained the exalted first dan grade and unfortunately an equally large ego to match!

During sparring sessions he could easily better his opponents and eventually became slightly disillusioned at the lack of new techniques taught beyond black belt level. He could not decide whether this was due to the remoteness of the school's Japanese master or the complete lack of a formalised syllabus. In any event, he entered into work shortly after he was 18, in 1971, and class training sessions became less exciting and important. It was because of this that he started training in Aikido. At that time there were two prominent style Ueshiba and Tomiki. Tomiki Aikido was formed from senior grades in Ueshiba who had become disillusioned with the traditional style of Ueshiba and had wanted more contact, so they developed a sporting version of Aikido which used more sparring than the traditional form. Anyway Mike trained in Ueshiba and after 3 years, became proficient in this martial art (to first dan standard).

He changed jobs in 1973 and was posted to London for some time. It was a strange environment compared to the country towns he was used to, and so he felt quite isolated and alone. He decided that he would attempt to find a martial arts class to occupy the lonely evenings and so it was, by pure accident, that he noticed the club sign on the way home from work one evening.

It read, "Five Pattern Family Fist Kung Fu". Training sessions Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays 7 p.m.-10 p.m.

Now it was around this time that the Kung Fu cinema had become popular in Britain through Bruce Lee. To find a Kung Fu club was rare indeed and his curiosity was immediately aroused. Unfortunately, it was Tuesday so he would have to wait until tomorrow.

The day seemed to drag at work, his job was programming computers and the computer programmes seemed to get more and more complicated and his usual eagerness for work was dulled. Still, at 6 p.m. he finished, picked up his kit bag and proceeded to the new found club.

He waited outside as the class members entered the club, surprisingly few of them, just 8 and what appeared to be a disgruntled instructor who was obviously having a bad day!

The Japanese martial art clubs were usually attended by classes of 20 or more people so he waited longer. At 7-15 he decided to enter the hall. It is usual amongst the Japanese martial arts classes for visitors of any prowess, to introduce themselves and their ranking to the club's instructor. This is just good manners and prevents possible embarrassment if the instructor assumes a novice grade and attempts to teach very basic moves. It is also good form!

On entering the club he was surprised to find the class already changed (into black uniforms) and going through the warm up exercises. He remembered thinking that his white gi (uniform) was going to stand out like a beacon! He nearly left the club at one point believing it to be full of novices since no one was wearing a coloured belt, let alone a black belt. He spent the next 55 mins waiting whilst the

class performed the most exhausting warm up session you can imagine - 6 sets of : 40 sit ups, 40 split kicks, 40 burpees, 3 sets of 40 press ups etc., etc.,.... What should be remembered is that a typical Karate warm up and stretch lasts about 20-30 mins.

Then the techniques started! Twenty minutes of stance work followed by the same of what can only be described as the most bewildering Kata (or Pattern as they called it).

Finally, the practice of set techniques with real striking rather than the pulling of punches. Bodies thudded to the floor as defences were used against attacks. Yet, strangely no one seemed hurt. The techniques used were confusing but effective and so he thought he'd give it a try.

At a suitable point (when the free sparring was about to start) he introduced himself to the instructor stating his styles and grades. The instructor seemed singularly unimpressed with this and asked him if he was any good at sparring! Mike was becoming irritated since he had followed all of the necessary protocols (albeit Japanese protocols) and was used to more respect due to his grades. What's more the purported instructor wore no sign of his own rank nor proffered the information. Mike naturally assumed he was going to spar with the instructor and proceeded to change (on request) into his dazzling white uniform. The instructor asked why he wore his 'Black Belt' during training. Didn't he find it got in the way? Mike's patience was waning and he decided that he was going to have to show the instructor that he was no pushover. I'll just put the pressure on him during sparring he thought.

The instructor asked if he was ready and Mike nodded. "OK then, lets see what you can do to Stephanie!". Mike almost collapsed laughing as a young woman of 18 or so approached him. This was insulting and he said so. The instructor looked at him bemused and stated that if he wanted to withdraw he could and cheerio!

Mike thought about his sudden loss of face in front of the class, after all he had two black belts! He agreed to spar with the girl and resolved to go fairly easily on her. That was his first mistake. His second was in launching the side snap kick to her temple after bowing. He waited to feel the impact with the intention of reducing the force of the kick to just stun her. What he hadn't been prepared for was the grabbing of his groin and being picked up by it and dropped heavily to the floor. Nor was he prepared for the 2 fingers which had followed his back to the floor and lodged between his wind pipe and collar bone. He choked. Stephanie let him up and immediately proceeded to pat him on the chest as if to say sorry. Except that this was no pat, since he felt a mule kick him as the hand connected and he disappeared backward into the wall at what appeared to be 30 m.p.h.!

He bounced off the wall and proceeded angrily towards the girl, this was his third and last mistake (anger) he let fly with a front snap kick only to find her kicking the inside of his thigh before it could land. This, coupled with the previous groin attack sent fire down the inside of his leg and it spun to one side involuntarily and he was turned with the motion of the interception, suddenly, two hands connected with his kidneys and then the backs of his shoulders. He hit the ground with the same thud he had heard earlier, except this time he felt it personally. Mike lay on the floor gasping, hurting and completely confused. What the hell had happened to him? He stayed down, and after what seemed like an hour, took the girl's hand as she helped him up. He crept off the floor in disgrace. Two black belts and nothing! He asked her what rank she was the reply was 'level 3' which, of course, meant nothing to him. He made his apologies changed and withdrew from the hall.

He spent the next few days reflecting on the pasting he had received and replayed it over and over in his mind. He had never encountered techniques like those before. Inside leg kicking, groin grabbing, collar bone hooking and that 'pat' on the chest! How on earth was she able to generate such power from that close a distance?

Now there are only two options open to you when you are made to look incompetent by a practitioner of another style. The option selected, usually depends on the size of the person's ego. You can pretend that your opponent got lucky and that you had a really bad day or you can accept the fact that you aren't as good as you thought you were. If you decide on the former then life goes on as if nothing ever happened. If the latter then you have a choice feel dejected or do something about it!

Mike's ego had certainly been bruised but he decided that the event could not be ignored as though it had never taken place. He decided it would probably be a good idea to visit the hall again and watch some more. So, on the Wednesday after the beating, he returned to the training hall again. The instructor smiled and let him watch the session. After it had finished he thanked the instructor and left. The session appeared to contain all sorts of complicated manoeuvres which were incredibly effective. He still was unable to fathom how so much force was generated from so little distance from the target. Seemingly gentle slaps sent bodies flying away from the defender. He pondered on the session and the fight for days and decided that he would learn this strange art form. So on the following Wednesday he revisited the club once more.

He approached the instructor who smiled at him, yet again, and told him that he had decided to learn this strange system. What happened next hit him as hard as the previous beating. The instructor said to him "That's very gracious of you but I decide who is taught this system and I am not accepting any new students at this time!"

Mike was once again confused and could not understand the instructor's attitude. Any Karate club would be only too pleased to increase their class size to earn more money. This was the second time he had been made to look a fool. However, he asked if he could stay and watch again and was allowed.

During the class he believed he caught the instructor watching his reaction every now and again, but said nothing. The instructor's name was Vic and half way through the training session he demonstrated a technique that he said was being performed incorrectly by the more senior members of the class. This was done once very slowly then once more at speed.

The definition of speed here is difficult, since it normally implies a very fast technique. This was certainly true, but on a level Mike had never seen before. He had, on many occasions, seen his Karate school's Japanese instructor perform combinations of punching and kicking techniques at dazzling speed. He had not, however, encountered this before.

Vic had asked for two students to attack him simultaneously, in their own time. The students waited approximately 30 or so seconds then launched their assault together. The one on the left leapt forward with a backfist combination whilst, at the same time, the one on the right leapt in with a side thrust kick. Mike thought that the speed with which they attacked would find the instructor in serious trouble, except that he was no longer standing where he had been at the start of the attack. Mike had been so interested in studying the attackers' techniques that he had failed to notice the fact that their intended target was standing behind them at the point of what should have been their impact. He had completely missed the instructor's evasive manoeuvre and was angry with himself for watching the wrong subject.

What he did see of the final move from the instructor was two bodies, aided by their own attacking momentum, spinning helplessly towards the floor. The thuds were almost simultaneous as the instructor followed them to the ground and with a palm heel strike each, to their necks stunned both. They were unable to get up since both were semi conscious.

At this point Mike was having serious doubts about joining the style since the “Pacifying Wings” as the instructor had called the technique, had clearly hurt both attackers. In Mike’s previous training he had been taught to control his strikes, not connect fully with an opponent.

It was only what happened next that changed his mind completely. The instructor laid both students on their backs and holding his hand an inch or so from the points on their necks which had been hit, let out a long slow breathing sound. Immediately, both students came out of their stunned condition and stood up, alert and smiling, well almost!

At the end of the session, Stephanie came over to Mike and told him that he had been lucky and that the instructor had never, to her knowledge, demonstrated in front of a non class student before. Vic, however, would still not let him join the class!

The visits to the class became a regular occurrence for Mike, on a Wednesday evening, and the more he watched the more fascinated he became. After 5 more visits Vic called him over and asked if he still wanted to join. Mike jumped at the opportunity and Vic asked him to change. “You won’t be needing any belt though!”

The system today has the following grading structure :
Sashes : White, Yellow, Orange, Green, Blue, Purple, Brown, Junior Black, Black, Senior Black and Master.
Each Sash has to be earned by a grading - even White.

At that time the system was split into 3 Grades - White, Black and Master. Each Grade was split into levels - 7 of white, 3 of black and 2 of Master. Each level was decided by a grading where the student had to perform set techniques for each level in order to pass. On average, the gradings took one day per level. So a Black sash grading typically lasted 8 days! To attain the privilege of the black grading took, on average, 8 years of at least 3 sessions per week! This was going to be an uphill struggle he thought! No wonder Vic was so effective.

So he began. The first thing he remembered from lesson one was the exhaustion he felt after the warm up exercises. How the hell was he supposed to carry on training and learning after an hour of exercising? Yet, he did. He learned how to fall properly (not difficult after Aikido - but different) and how to unlearn his old method of punching and kicking.

This system is based around five animals hence its name "Five Pattern Family Fist" these are : Dragon, Crane, Tiger, Leopard and Snake. The first punch he learned was Dragon Punch. This was quite different in execution from the Japanese snap punch -Tsuke since the fist is held vertically instead of horizontally to the floor.

The basics passed into intermediates and then into seniors. Six years of re-education had passed and he became quite adept. So much so that Vic had started to use him to demonstrate advanced techniques on. A rare (but painful) privilege.

During the course of his training many people had left due to lack of staying power, interest or relocation. He had remained with the class core along with a friend, Ian. They had trained together from the start and had sparred regularly experimenting with new techniques. He had to admit that when it came to speed or form Ian was the better. Vic used to taunt him with various comparisons in performance and style. The day eventually came when both he and Ian were selected for their Black Sash grading. This involved retaking all of the other sash colour's gradings (if one was failed you were reduced to that sash colour!) and finally the Level 1 Black.

There are a number of techniques required to be performed and endless patterns for this grade. The final part of the grading, not practised today, was kong sau. This is easily described as full contact sparring with no rules, or as Vic liked to point out you can hit anywhere above the soles of the feet!

Kong sau was then first encountered at Black grade. Unlike other systems, when a student reaches this level, they are expected to know their opponent's presence without touching them. Indeed, a proper exponent of Kong Sau would be hard pressed to tell you which attacks and defences were used during a contest, since the system enables the student to enter the "five animal trance" technique. This effectively means that the body takes over from the mind and reacts accordingly.

This was where the first difference between Mike and Ian was observed (apart from forms and techniques). Both students were able to enter the trance but only one had the 'finishing' ability. Ian, for some reason, could not finish an opponent after knocking him down..... Mike could.

Kong Sau contests end when one fighter is no longer able to continue. They last as long as is necessary.

Needless to say Vic paired the two friends for their contest. Apparently, it lasted 8-10 minutes before Ian lost.

Mike's fighting ability had been remarkable for a first timer, so Vic had told him. He was later to learn that his was not necessarily a good thing!

Reflecting on the contest he wondered how he was able to defeat an opponent and not remember specifics. This was due to the fact that the system trains the body to react rather than the mind. Techniques flow forth like a tidal wave once the 'trance' state is attained. It must now be obvious that the complete system is geared around the development of internal energy or 'chi' as it is known.

The system trains the body, from day one, to develop its internal abilities and enable the chi to flow at will, to be used either to heal an injury or to create one.

This concept is very oriental and westerners find it very difficult to accept its potential or believe its presence. The system is therefore designed to build upon the internal techniques without necessarily stating this openly. It is only when the student attains level 6 that the levels of internal energy are revealed. This energy explains the reason for the effectiveness of the 'pats'. Mastering the internal side of the system starts at level 7. Techniques are taught on an individual by individual basis.

It is the mastering of several of these internal techniques that eventually allow the "five animal trance state" to be

attained. Complete trust of the techniques is required to attain the state. The slightest doubt about the reality of any of these techniques will either prevent the attainment of the state or, once in it, will dissolve it.

It is for this reason that practitioners of the Five Pattern Family Fist system, who can attain and maintain the trance state, are extremely proficient in Kong Sau contests.

Ian's ribs took months to heal properly, following the contest. On the conscious level, Mike was very upset at the pain he had caused his friend but in the trance state he was not 'conscious'. He had apparently switched to tiger form and 'taken out' four of his friends ribs, one of them as Ian was falling to the floor! Vic had said that it was unusual to find someone who could attain trance state and follow through so decisively with finishing techniques. He was pleased! A rare occurrence.

The subject of the circuit was then broached. The circuit is a group of Kung Fu styles who meet from time to time to test out their techniques. Each school has a nominated fighter and contests are arranged behind closed doors. These are inter school Kong Sau contests. Fighters may stay on the circuit for as long as they wish, but they cannot leave it until they have completed at least two contests.

Vic had been on the circuit representing his Hong Kong club for five years and had not been beaten. He was tiring of the calls to fight and was eager to withdraw. He would not, however, until he had found a replacement. It was a matter of face.

The grandmaster of the system, now in his sixties, had also trained a fighter in the Hong Kong Club and was eager to put him forward as the school's representative when Vic had withdrawn. The school had never been happy with the

situation of having a non-Chinese representing them! Unfortunately, it seemed that just when they thought they were rid of the 'gwai loh' (foreign devil) another had appeared. There was only one way to resolve the situation.

Vic had asked Mike if he fancied the idea of the circuit. As all martial arts practitioners will tell you, they all secretly want to try their techniques out for real. Mike, however, after all of his training, did not doubt that the techniques would work. What was of more interest to him was the trance state. So, he agreed to just two contests and then a withdraw. Unfortunately, the other club in Hong Kong had a candidate and so who would represent the system could only be decided by an inter club contest. This was arranged. The Hong Kong club sent their man and an instructor to London.

Unlike traditional fights there is no real way that a fighter can train specifically for a Kong Sau contest if he intends to use the trance state technique. This is because the fighter never really knows what he will do in the contest. It was interesting to Mike, in the week prior to the contest, that the Chinese representative was performing set combinations.

Mike quizzed Vic as to why the Chinese was rehearsing fighting moves and techniques, whilst he was concentrating on breathing techniques. Vic had never been very forthcoming with information, all through his training, and said "Work it out".

As the days passed it dawned on Mike that the fighter was trying to impress him with his prowess. He certainly was fast and had tremendous power and Mike told Vic.

"Yes, he is but you've missed something", said Vic. Mike Pondered. Vic said "He hasn't practised the trance technique so in all probability he can't perform it". The thought that not everyone could perform this technique,

after training in his system, had never once occurred to Mike.

“Is the technique always effective?” he asked. Vic looked at him quizzically and as usual said enigmatically “Always effective, not always decisive.” Talking to Vic was like walking through treacle, the longer you did it, the stickier it got.

So the day arrived. It was a Saturday. Preparations commenced at 8.00 am with the contest scheduled for 10.00 am. Mike hadn't slept that night and was tired. The Chinese had been training from 7.00 am and looked sharp. Mike reconsidered, why not let the Chinese represent the club, this would make the Hong Kong club happy. However, from the moment that the Chinese paused from the kick bag, turned and leered at him, he knew that there was no turning back.

The fighters saluted. The area was confined. The two instructors saluted each other then the students. The contest began.

The Chinese moved first, connecting a crane kick with Mike's rib cage who moved back with the force to reduce the effect and keep the ribs intact, since the kick was 'Crane's penetrating kick' and was intended to break the ribs. He had been caught off guard, by the sudden start of the fight, and had been unable to assume the trance state. It was pure reaction on his part that had saved him. Before he could arrest his backward motion, the Chinese launched two palm heels to his chest, “Crane's exiting technique”. Mike entered “lack of breathing technique” the blows landed but did not damage him.

The Chinese was startled for a second, that was a mistake, Mike used a Crane technique of his own and “pacified” his opponents neck this technique involves a hand strike to the

side of the opponents neck). The fighter went down. Mike was extremely tempted to follow him down to finish him but held back to his opponents amazement.

To traditional fighters of any system there would be two obvious choices at this point, follow the opponent down to the floor and 'stamp' all over him, or wait for him to get up and hit him on the way up. Both were reasonably certain of inflicting damage.

Since Mike had not followed his opponent to the floor the Chinese was expecting to be caught as he got up. This was not the case, however, since Mike had finally seen a method of using the pause in the fight to enter the 'trance state'.

The Chinese got up with extreme caution. He was surprised when no attack came and smugly considered that his opponent was worried by him. He thought that the 'pacifying wing' which had just hit him was a lucky fluke.

He launched a tiger technique at Mike's collar bone, with awesome speed. However, the trance like state was now settled and Mike was no longer there. Had that blow connected with a normal person then both the collar bone and top of the rib cage would have been smashed.

It didn't though since the body's speed and reaction time, in the trance state, is amplified. Mike's body dropped and turned then rose and on the way up a right handed leopard punch connected with his opponents groin, as the body was lifted a left handed dragon hammer fist crashed into his opponents collar bone, breaking it like porcelain.

The look of anguish and astonishment on his opponents face would have amused him had he been 'conscious' enough to see it, he was, however, on a 'finish the fight' path and as the body compressed between the upward groin punch and the downward dragon fist, Mike's right hand was already hitting his opponents sternum with a tiger claw. It separated from some ribs and the opponent

flew to the floor unconscious. Mike, automatically followed him to the floor this time and was about to finish him completely, when the 'trance state' started to dissolve, telling him the threat was over.

He looked down at the crumpled body of his opponent, bowed and left the area. This signified that the Chinese's instructor was now allowed to enter the area to help the defeated fighter.

Mike was worried when he looked closely at the damage he had wrought upon his opponent and quizzed Vic about it. "Well, you wanted to know what it was like, now you do. Be thankful that it's him on the deck and not you!".

"Did you stop yourself or did you lose the trance state?" he asked.

Mike thought and told him that the last thing he remembered was knocking the Chinese to the floor and summoning the trance state. "Good!", said Vic, "it must have dissolved itself then. You have a technique which will be a harsh mistress to you, simply because when you enter the state you will have no idea whether you will come out of it the victor or the vanquished!"

Mike thought on this for days. It made little sense, but he couldn't deny that it worked. He was unable to believe that his body could look after itself with little or no instruction from himself. The reactions were practically autonomic. He had been told all through his black level training that this was a possibility but had decided to leave it up to the system to either develop it in him or not.

Here, it is necessary to point out that although the system has this technique within it, there is no guarantee that an individual will ever experience it, let alone control it. The Chinese had been proof enough of this.

The effectiveness of the technique was brought into sharp focus for him on his black level 2 grading, soon after the fight.

Vic had said that he was ready for it, despite his protestations to the contrary. The grading was planned, a weeks holiday was taken and it commenced.

At the end of the syllabus for level 2 black he was called on to perform one extra technique. This was typical of Vic, work your self stupid all week to impress him and just when you think you've finished.....

Vic went over to his holdall and extracted the Samurai sword and its scabbard. The katana was a demonstration type with a dulled edge, however, a skilled practitioner could still cut paper or sever a limb with the correct technique. Although the edge was dulled the point was still a formidable threat. All in all it was still a most dangerous weapon in the hands of someone who knew how to use it.

Mike had seen Vic perform with a complete array of Chinese weapons but had never before seen a Japanese sword in his hands.

Thinking he was going to get a rest and watch Vic perform with a weapon from one of Mike's old styles (notably Aikido) Mike proceeded to sit.

"What do you think you're doing?" bellowed Vic. "Oh, God thought Mike haven't you finished with me yet?". Vic told him to stand. "Are you any good with one of these?", he asked. Mike nodded. "Good! Catch". The sword was tossed at Mike. Under Japanese circumstances this would have been an insult to both Mike and the weapon, but he had long since given up the traditional values of Aikido and Karate.

Mike caught the weapon clumsily, Vic laughed. Mike stood to attention. Vic said "Show me something".

The simplest sword form with the most beauty, is the simple sword draw from the scabbard, the one handed cut to the side, the double hand strike vertically down, the cleansing of the blade and the withdraw back to the scabbard. Mike had not practised this in almost five years. But centring himself on the hara (the Japanese point of balance in the lower abdomen),(the Chinese tan tien was tempting - but horses for courses..) performed the set with a reasonable degree of self satisfaction. He hadn't lost it completely then!

Vic watched expressionless, he approached Mike and took the sword from him. He moved the old wooden hat stand to the bottom of the hall and walked to the opposite end.

He then performed a Japanese kata for sword, with such genuineness you would have been forgiven for mistaking him for a Kendo master.

Mike was stunned. He never knew. Vic was even more of an enigma than he had previously thought.

The kata was coming to its end, strangely enough, near the hat stand. With an imperceptible turn, the sword sliced clean through the upright and jumped back into the scabbard. Mike's jaw was in his lap. He knew that the balance of a Chinese sword and a Japanese sword was totally different. This could only mean that Vic had been trained in its use. Realising this, his blood turned to ice. He had a terrible feeling that the grading had not yet concluded.

Vic turned to him and smiled. "You have nearly finished. Just the sparring left. Please prepare to defend yourself against this sword. I will be your opponent. How will you defend?"

It hit him like a bombshell, he was tempted to tell Vic where to put his level 2. "You have five minutes to think. Sit down."

The minutes passed like seconds. His brain examined every technique he had been taught.

He thought of the specific sword defences from the crane system, the attacks from the leopard system. Anything that appeared relevant. The time was up. He proffered several defences but Vic stared. "Are you confident that any of those will work against me?". He asked. Mike honestly replied that he didn't know.

"Good answer!", Vic laughed, "Oh and there's one thing which I have forgotten", he laughed some more, "you will have the slight disadvantage of wearing a blindfold!".

Now there is taking the micky and taking the piss. Mike knew enough of Vic to know that he wasn't lying but was not confident enough to defend against him armed with that sword. "I can't do it" he said.

"You floored the grandmaster's prize pupil last month, with little effort. Why not?"

Mike thought about the reply. Vic never gave direct advice or solutions, but always gave hints. He thought about trance technique but seriously doubted his ability to enter it, with Vic standing in front of him armed with a katana and intent on producing 'kebab a la Mike'...

Vic was getting irritated, not a good sign.

"O.K." said Mike "I'll try it."

Vic cleared the area and blindfolded him.

"You won't know when I'm going to attack it could be immediately after I say "Start" or seconds or minutes after, its your problem".

“There goes the master of understatement again thought Mike..”

He stood in the middle of the area blindfolded. He entered the trance technique. Over a minute passed after the start command was given. He was unaware yet aware.

The blade cut through the air at his chest which was suddenly sideways on as it missed. The motion was redirected by Vic from vertical to horizontal attempting a waist cut. The underside of the horizontal blade was slapped upward by a palm heel strike. Vic’s wrist was caught by the other hand and pressure was applied to its joint. Vic’s fingers opened and the sword dropped. At the same time Mike’s other hand was rising to the locked elbow joint to snap it.

Unfortunately, Mike wasn’t the only exponent of trance state, and on losing the weapon Vic had entered it.

Mike came around on the mat feverishly checking for sword cuts or holes. He found none. He went to get up but his chest ached.

“Stay there for a minute”, he was told. Vic came over and applied chi to his chest, it warmed and eased. He was told to get up and, on rising, saw the sword on the floor.

“Did it work?”, he asked.

“Your still alive aren’t you?”, came the reply.

He sat facing Vic who bowed, and arose with a salutation. Mike returned it.

“Level 2 black”, Vic said. Mike nodded, “Thank you” he said.

Vic left the area and Mike got changed. Things were never quite going to be the same again, he thought.

The training sessions changed to encompass more training in the development of the trance technique. All patterns had now been taught and the switch to trance techniques was quite different from the usual training techniques.

Mike found that as he progressed with the training he was becoming more aware of his body from the beating of his heart to the movement of blood through his circulatory system. He also found increased stamina and the ability to drop in and out of the state at the drop of a hat.

To some extent, as he progressed, he could even influence which animals would predominate whilst in the trance state. This was shunned by Vic who disapproved, stating that trying to influence the state was to go against its very definition. Still Mike had always experimented up to now and could not change the habits of a lifetime.

It soon became apparent that he was going to have to complete his first challenge on the circuit. The location and exact time were never actually known until soon before the fight was due (mainly because this kind of fight was not exactly legal).

His first foray with Kong Sau had been at level 1 black in 1978. It was now early 1979, winter, and he was awaiting his first external contest. The arrangements were always made between the school's head (the Grandmaster) and the opposing school's head. Vic would make the arrangements under the Grandmaster's guidance.

The challenger for the first contest was to be a member of the monkey style kung fu form. He was Chinese and 27 years of age. Mike was almost 26. The first challenge was to be staged on neutral ground in Germany. The arrangements were made.

Mike was taken by ferry then by car to Europe. He eventually arrived after interminable hours of driving at what appeared to be a scout hut in a forest. It was late -

23.30 and all he wanted to do was sleep. Vic escorted him inside the hut and threw a sleeping bag onto the floor. He was told to get in and sleep. The only source of heat in the cabin was a stove packed with firewood. Mike fell asleep immediately.

This must have been a measure of his training maturity, since he did not stay up nervously awaiting the contest. At 6.a.m. Vic woke him. He got out of the bag and was shown outside. It was freezing! Snow everywhere. He needed a wash and to change, but wondered how he would tolerate the cold in his uniform. Vic walked towards another hut which had a fire burning in a fireplace. He was told to wash and change into his uniform - but not the jacket. Curious? he thought.

Mike washed and changed, wearing a vest instead of the jacket. He stretched and started to unwind. Toast and coffee arrived and he ate them. His stomach rumbled and he felt that he had wind.

He had no idea of the arrangements and inquired of Vic. Traditionally Vic could tell him nothing until they entered the area. He did give him a parcel wrapped in brown paper and string. "Lose it and you'd better disappear forever", Vic said. Mike wondered what it was but held onto it and followed Vic.

They approached a larger hut about 50 feet long by 20 feet wide. A German male approached Vic who shook his hand warmly. It appeared that they were old friends, probably going back to the time when Vic was in the services.

"They're here", said his friend "Who's fighting the Chinese, you Vic?", "Hell no, I don't do it anymore. Meet my student Mike". He held out his hand and Mike shook it. The German

looked at him quizzically and said “Are you any good? The Chinese arrived yesterday and he’s phenomenal!”

“Thanks for bolstering his self confidence!”, said Vic slapping the German on the back. “When do we start?”.

“Your choice, you can start at 10, 12 or this afternoon.”

Mike was deciding when to start since it was now 9.30, when Vic said “10!”

Here we go again, thought Mike. I might have wanted to study this guy. Vic caught the thought and as if it had been said out loud, said, “What you don’t know will be to your advantage.”

Mike thought that Vic was more incomprehensible than the Chinese themselves. They entered.

The Chinese was currently at the top of a staff looking around. Mike thought that it was a strange place to erect a pole in the middle of the floor. It would surely get in the way during the fight. He decided to remove it prior to the fight, just then the Chinese slid down the pole, stood up and carried the pole off the floor! So that was monkey style! Mike thought.

The Chinese’s instructor watched Mike’s every move from the way he walked to the way he spoke to Vic.

“Unwrap the parcel”, Vic said. Mike undid the string. As he folded back the paper a silk jacket fell out. It was pure silk and as such was light but strong when compared to traditional cotton material. Mike asked Vic what it was for.

“Tradition! It is traditional for an instructor to give his student his first jacket for Kong Sau. In my experience silk has a better feel and weight during combat.”

N.B. It should be noted that since the 'demise' of Kong Sau fighting today, the tradition has changed. It is now usual for the instructor to give his student his first black sash, on successful completion of the grading.

The sash is traditionally embroidered with the school name, the embroidery colour denotes which level black. Silver/White denoting Junior Black, Red denoting Black and Gold denoting Senior Black.

Mike looked at the jacket, will it fit?, he thought. It did, and allowed far more bodily movement than a cotton one!

Vic was now within the area and explained to Mike the proceedings. Very simple really, you walk into the fighting area bow to the instructors, then to each other and then...

...and of course there are no rules as before. Weapons are not permitted in this contest.

Vic said "I have chosen the earliest start time for you so that you won't be bamboozled by this guy's technique. Watching the style's physical ability can be off-putting. You must, on no account, attempt to fight the style without the trance technique. You will be outclassed and out-manoeuvred otherwise. You will never be able to take the fight to him since he will evade you at every turn. He must come to you. With trance technique you will react to him and therefore stand a good chance of winning. Are you clear on this?"

Mike nodded, but wondered again, Vic had said, "Stand a good chance of winning". Not "Will win".

He stood there feeling somewhat apprehensive. The clock read 9.55. - five minutes to go. All that had gone before in training flashed before his eyes. The original beating, the

training, the gradings and the Kong Sau contest in school. All those years in five minutes!

“Attention!”. Both fighters stood still breathing calmly. “To the area!”. They walked to the centre of the room.

“Compliments!”. Mike bowed to the instructors as did the Chinese. They then bowed to each other.

“Begin!”.

One second the Chinese was in front of him, the next he was somersaulting along the ground, in a rolling fashion, to Mike’s right. Mike rolled forward himself in the direction from which the Chinese had started. They had, in effect, changed places by these moves. The Chinese smiled.

Vic did not, but was prevented from communicating by the rules of the contest.

The Chinese lunged at Mike and missed. Mike had side stepped the attack but not quickly enough, and braced himself for the inevitable contact. None came and he stepped again to ensure the miss. This was exactly what the Chinese had planned for and as Mike stepped his foot was swept by the Chinese’s hand! He toppled backward with the Chinese practically on top of him.

He decided that the only course of action was to perform a reverse break fall, which he did. As he hit the floor he raised his knee at an angle and caught his opponent in the thigh, not enough to seriously hurt him, but just enough to propel him away from himself. The Chinese hit the ground rolling away from him. He immediately rose to his feet and judging the distance between the two of them, allowed the trance technique to dissolve his consciousness.

His opponent launched himself at Mike, who did not move. He had assumed the systems first seat of power, technique and this coupled with the trance technique made him immovable. His opponent crashed into him... and bounced off!. He had just hit the equivalent of a brick wall. As he toppled backwards under the unexpected resistance Mike advanced towards him. Using a coiled dragon kick he caught the Chinese under the chin, his head snapped back and Mike, having raised the head back, thrust the side blade of his foot into the exposed neck area. The Chinese choked and could not catch his breath, he was having severe difficulty in breathing. Mike concluded the fight by helping the Chinese out, he struck him in the solar plexus region and took two ribs out from the side for good measure. The threat to him was over.

The state melted from him and he stood there studying his opponent. Unfortunately for the Chinese, due to Mike's lack of knowledge of Kong Sau protocol, the Chinese's instructor was unable to aid his student until Mike had left the area.

Mike stood there looking in disbelief at the state of his opponent. He felt Vic's eyes burning into his back and turned. Then as if by telepathy, he got the message and went to Vic.

The instructor leapt forward to his student and proceeded to help his breathing. Vic looked at his German friend who was also staring in disbelief at the state of the Chinese. "Well, what do you think of him?". "Can he do that most

times”, he replied. “We’ll see”, said Vic. The contest had lasted less than three minutes.

Once more, Mike looked at the defeated Chinese and said to Vic “Am I right in thinking I only have to do one more of these?”. Vic nodded, but under his breath whispered, “Its unlikely that you’ll stop after just two!”.

He turned out to be right as usual.

The journey home did not seem so long as the outward trip. Mike sat in the back of the car pondering on the events of the area. He knew that the Chinese opponent was fitter and faster than him, yet it did not appear to matter, because in the trance state his body looked after itself. He wondered who would be his next opponent, of what style and more importantly when.

Unlike western boxing matches, there are not that many opponents willing to fight in kong sau. There are many martial artists who would like to try it, but few who are up to it. Traditional systems teach punch control, a deadly mistake in a contest since each punch must count.

During the next eight months Vic began to coach him in the etiquette of the contest. He was told to exit as soon as he had finished (if he had finished!) and to always compliment the defeated stylist before complimenting the stylist’s teacher. This was as a mark of respect and caused no loss of face for his opponent. Compliments were nothing more than a Kung Fu salutation, a bow normally.

He soon felt comfortable with the expected behaviour in a contest and questioned Vic more intensely on the trance technique. It was during these conversations that the first real disagreement came between the two of them. Mike had convinced himself that since he was more adept in the

Tiger, Dragon and Crane forms of the system, that he would be better off trying to influence which form he would use in a contest. Vic, on the other hand, told him that he was wrong. It was stupidity on Mike's part to think he knew better than Vic since he was a comparative novice in the technique. Vic, however, was a Master and resolved to let him have enough rope to hang himself.

So it was, towards the end of 1979 that Vic approached Mike once more.

"I have an offer for your 'last fight'", he said.

"Isn't that a bit soon, the first was only eight months ago?"

"Not really, you can never tell what the time interval will be, word gets around slowly or immediately - it depends on the last contest."

"Who is it?", said Mike.

"Now that in itself is interesting! He is not Chinese, nor is he from Kung Fu, but he is thought to be a hard fighter who wants to get into the circuit. The Chinese would consider this an insult, but the Grand Master has a lesser regard for you than a Chinese student, so he has let me decide".

"Do you know him?"

"I have heard about him and he would make an easier 'last fight' for you than another Chinese."

Vic had said 'last fight' several times now, as though he didn't believe it would be. Mike believed that it would be since he had nothing to prove, except to try out his new version of the trance technique.

"What style is he, Vic?"

“A bit of everything, influenced by all styles. He’s of Greek origin.”

Curious thought Mike. Still, it had to be better than fighting a more experienced Chinese. He would later realise that this was not the case...

“Arrange it then, Vic”.

Vic nodded and said no more on the subject.

It was at the next training session that Vic again approached him.

“How are you feeling”.

“Apprehensive, but confident”, replied Mike.

“I have arranged the contest for early December, are you ready?”.

“As I’ll ever be”.

The next few weeks passed quickly, Mike was now able to enter the trance technique quite quickly and could select one of three animals to be dominant whilst in the state.

He was feeling quite pleased with himself and failed to understand why Vic was so hostile to this experimentation.

Vic had arranged the next contest in Northern France and planned to go by ferry and car, once again.

The morning before the contest arrived and they set off in the car, once more. This time Mike was feeling more at ease with himself, since he believed he had come a long way since the first fight. He had a win, more confidence and his new technique.

The journey was a long one and they eventually arrived at a farmhouse in the evening. Mike was shown to a room and was told to unpack and come down to the sitting room for dinner. This he did and was surprised to see Vic's German friend talking with a Frenchman. The farmer.

Vic explained that his friend co-ordinated most contests and arranged the venues. The German approached Mike and shook his hand.

"Pleased to see you again. Have you been training hard?"

"I take all contests, Kong Sau or otherwise, seriously!", said Mike.

"No need to be edgy, what do you know of your opponent?", said the friend.

Before Mike could answer Vic replied, "Not much, I haven't told him much. He has been developing a new technique and is probably eager to try it out, so I considered my advice would be ignored".

"Christ he's a bit pissed off!", thought Mike. "Let's hope I don't need his help tomorrow".

Vic spent the evening chatting with his old friend and left Mike to his own devices. Mike had asked the location of the 'area' and was told that he could view it in the barn, if he chose.

Since Vic was obviously ignoring him and enjoying his friends company, he wandered over to the barn. As he approached the ramshackle door he heard thudding sounds. He walked more slowly. There was a light coming from around the doorframe where the door didn't quite meet the frame. He peered inside through the crack.

In the centre of the barn, implements and straw had been cleared away to leave a sawdust layered floor on top of earth. ("No expense spared", thought Mike).

To the right of the area - about 20 feet by 10 feet, a heavy kick bag had been positioned the rope supporting it had been tied to a cross member. Mike recognised the bag type as one filled with sand, to give maximum resistance to blows.

A dark haired man about 6 foot tall, with long legs was kicking the bag. There was no perceptible style recognisable, just very powerful kicks. The bag moved backwards about a foot on a short kick and swung wildly when hit with a thrust kick. Mike watched for what seemed like ages but was probably only 2-3 minutes. He could discern no clues as to the origin of the techniques but concluded that they must originate from Korea. Since it reminded him a little of Hapkido.

He was in two minds whether to enter the barn but eventually he decided to go in.

The man looked at him and carried on, not realising that Mike was his proposed opponent.

Mike looked around the barn. It was obviously not in use as a working barn, but was being used for storage and hire. The man finished his work out, grabbed a towel and headed off in the direction of the farmhouse.

"Well, he's certainly powerful", thought Mike.

He examined the barn's interior very carefully and found that all of the sharp implements had been stored on the higher level away from the ground floor, just in case somebody got over-excited in the contest.

The illumination came from a number of small battery powered lamps hanging around the side of the barn.

Mike examined the bag, as he had thought, it was filled with sand, he tested it for resistance, it was very heavy. He turned to go just as the farmer came in to tidy the place up and turn out the lamps.

On re-entering the farmhouse, he looked at the time and found it was 8.30 p.m., a sandwich had been left on the kitchen table for him along with a hot drink of soup. He finished both and went to his room to sleep.

He was awakened at 7.00 am by Vic and was told to get up. Vic asked him what he wanted for breakfast.

“When do we start?”, said Mike.

“10.00 a.m.”

“In that case I’ll have coffee and white toast”, said Mike.

He ate the strange bread and drank the delicious French coffee. He then started to loosen up, performing numerous stretching exercises. The time crept towards 9.30 and he collected his silk jacket. It was time to go to the barn. He joined Vic and walked over.

During his observance of his opponent, he had noticed that the techniques applied to the bag were mostly kicks (hence is guess at Korean origin Tae Kwon Do?). He had therefore decided to influence the tiger form to dominate the trance technique, since this was also very powerful. They walked into the barn. Vic looked around for the opponent’s instructor but could see no one. His German friend said to him,

“I forgot to tell you last night, he’s free lance”.

Vic appeared extremely annoyed with his friend.

“You mean he’s professional?”.

“Was, until last year”, came the reply.

“I should have been told this, before now!”, Vic snarled.

Mike had listened to this conversation without taking his eyes of his opponent who seemed remarkably unimpressed with Mike.

What had Vic meant by professional?

Where was his opponent’s instructor?

What was the German up to?

All of these questions started to give him cause for concern when both were told to prepare and enter the area.

It started.

Mike entered the trance state in less than two seconds. A long leg flashed toward his head, which was already moving out of the way. He had ‘felt’ the attack and as the leg was sent in a circular motion towards his head he was inside the kick and presenting his tiger claws to the inside of his opponents raised leg.

The claws crashed down onto the exposed thigh muscle and sent the leg outward and downward towards the floor, this action produced a reaction in his opponent’s upper body, which came forward into him.

As his opponent’s head came toward him the claws were already moving away from the leg into the head. They connected with the jawline and side of his neck, instantly knocking him backwards at great speed. His opponent tried to arrest the backward motion but his right leg no longer had any feeling from the claw attack.

Mike moved forward after him, his opponents eyes clouded over as if to lose consciousness.

The trance state started to dissolve.

The tiger form could see no further danger. Had Mike not influenced the trance technique with tiger, the untrusting dragon form would have maintained the trance state for him and the end would have been decisive, however, the trance technique had been tampered with (by influence) and the state dissolved.

His opponent had been in many fights prior to this and was strong in both mind and spirit, more than once he had fought back from the floor and won. He fought back from the state of approaching unconsciousness and slapped the top and inside of his leg to get the circulation and feeling back.

Although Mike could enter the state quickly, after it dissolved he was 'heady' for 3-5 seconds whilst he came around. In other words, he was now a sitting duck for 3-5 seconds.

His opponent was able to stand on the leg now, and could see Mike standing unsteadily six feet in front of him. He closed the gap. His leg was not strong enough for a roundhouse kick and so he chose the damaged leg to stand on whilst he unleashed the other leg at Mike's left side.

Mike was in a state of confusion as he came around, he could see his opponent who was still standing and in front of him. What had happened?

He instinctively attempted to evade and parry the kick, but was too late. It crashed into his right side and, were it not for a technique known as 'lack of breathing', would have taken two of his ribs out. He moved with the force of the kick and was sure that a rib had cracked. The pain and disorientation nearly finished him as he fell, deliberately, to the floor and out of range.

Had his opponent not been hurt, he would surely have followed Mike to the floor almost immediately to finish him. However, since he was once more out of range by about 8-10 feet he paused to regroup.

Mike had initiated the fall and subsequent roll, to achieve two objectives:

to place more distance between them and thus more time to get to each other,

to enter the trance technique.

As he started to rise the technique was re-established, only this time, as Vic would have it, with no interference.

His opponent had now recovered well and was surprised to see Mike get up from one of his better kicks. Still, on past record, he knew Mike would be in severe difficulty and decided to finish it.

Looking at Mike he could see that he had dazed him since Mike was staring into space with no apparent focus. He decided to take the fight in close and use the shortened Muay Thai techniques he had learned.

He closed the gap, held his hands high, and swiftly let fly with his knee to Mike's rib cage, intending to compound the damage he had caused earlier. The look of astonishment on his face was only surpassed by the feeling of pure pain as the back of Mike's hand connected with the inside of his thigh (the snake enters the cave) and then having lifted the

thigh muscle, launched the venomous bite technique to his opponent's groin.

The fist fighter felt sick, Mike had not yet finished though, since after attacking his groin and folding his opponent over toward him, the snake head hand strike was raised and connected at the base of his opponents sternum.

The cartilage gave way as the bottom two ribs became disengaged from the sternum. The venomous bite was again about to launch at the heart in a downward motion when the dissolve started as his opponent dropped to the floor.

There would be no recovering this time.

Mike turned and left the area quickly.

The German rushed to the fallen fighter to aid his breathing since he knew that the separated ribs which had been freed from the sternum, could puncture vital organs. He checked the chest area, bandaged the rib cage and checked the breathing. It was irregular but he thought that it should be all right until he could get the fallen fighter to a hospital.

Mike looked surprised.

“Ex army medic”, said Vic.

But which army? thought Mike.

The pain in his side dulled as he used the Chi breathing techniques which he had been taught. Vic had looked at his side and gave his diagnosis:

“Very heavy bruising but you have no cracks or breaks there. Bloody good job it wasn't me out there with you, or you wouldn't have got up, cocky bastard!”

“I assume you've finished 'playing' now and want to learn some more?”

Mike nodded.

“As you have always said Vic, all experiences are valuable”, he said.

Vic said, “Only if you survive them can you learn from them. Have you learned something?”.

Mike nodded again.

Vic, for once in his life, did not pursue it any further. He assumed, rightly, that Mike’s confidence had been severely dented (along with his rib) and that Mike would not let it end with this fight!

“Well that was your last fight, I will inform the GrandMaster of your intention to withdraw.”

Mike said nothing and they eventually got into the car and headed back home.

He spent the next weeks in training wondering how the trance technique had let him down and how an opponent could withstand a tiger blow and not collapse. In fact he later learned that the technique had not let him down but that he had let the technique down.

The system is effective but relies heavily on the student’s trust of the techniques, the second that trust falters, exposes the student’s inability to remain proficient. As for the opponent weathering the heavy tiger claw technique, no system is infallible and the fighting determination of a person can weather most things even if only temporarily.

As Vic had predicted, he was in two minds as to whether he should fight just one more contest. His confidence had been knocked and he was after the reassurance that he could still enter and maintain the trance state at will.

In fact, Vic had not sent any message to the GrandMaster withdrawing Mike from the circuit. So when Mike finally decided to try another, he was told that Vic had already assumed as much!

The training continued and the waiting resumed.

It was September, 1980 and the details arrived as usual. The next fighter was proficient in the Wing Chung system and came from Germany. The system is quite complex in its training methods and quite well known, in Hong Kong and elsewhere, for its fighting ability. This was not going to be a walk over.

Still, this time Vic had arranged for the contest to be held in London. Home Ground!

It was not permitted to arrange for the contest to be in either fighter's training school, since that was thought of as too much of an advantage. So, Vic arranged for the hire of a hall for the venue.

The day arrived and Mike was first at the hall. He was changed and going through his usual stretching exercises, when the German entered. He was over six feet tall and was accompanied by his instructor, a small Chinese man. Mike studied his opponents build he was extremely muscular, his chest looked to be 44 inches or so and his arms were massive.

The man changed into his suit and started to stretch and then shadow box. He was fast! The hand techniques were unusual. Mike had heard of this style from Vic who had told him that it made more use of the hands than the feet. Here

was an indication that the advice was correct. The feet seemed to be more important for stance control than kicking. Mike would have liked to study him more as he found the techniques fascinating. Unfortunately, he couldn't since they were instructed into the area. The usual formalities were observed, compliments exchanged and the face off.

Once more it started.

The German's hands exploded into action like the rotor blade on a helicopter. He was upon Mike as soon as the contest was started. Mike stepped backward and parried the oncoming blows to the side. It was now that he experienced the trapping techniques of Wing Chung, as one arm trapped Mike's hands the other rolled over the top to strike him in the chest. This moved Mike backward and as he retreated backward, one step, his attacker followed, with more hand direction changes.

The German seemed quite pleased with his progress since he had hit Mike in the ribs and chest a total of six times now. He pressed on, Mike's next punch was easily parried to the left and, as expected, the German's next strike followed over the top of his parry. This was heading straight for Mike's nose and was designed to smash it, thus blinding Mike with blood and tears. The backfist missed. The head was no longer there.

Mike's body had retreated backwards from the onset. It encouraged the German to believe that his opponent was retreating under pressure. What was actually happening was that the German was being drawn onto Mike and would have found it difficult to stop himself, had he not been so enthusiastic about wanting to beat his opponent senseless.

At the last instant Mike had side stepped, exposing his opponent's right side. The Dragon's tail technique whipped into the German's side. This coupled with the forward

motion of the German's strike knocked all of the air from his lungs. He gasped and turned toward Mike, surprised.

Mike maintained his Tiger stance as the German struggled to breathe. The German launched another assault, this time a two handed strike. Mike blocked the high and low hands and waited for the trap, which the German predictably attempted. The German crossed his arms over Mike's pinning them down and close to his waist. He had managed to inhale and his confidence was now growing once more.

Both of Mike's hands were pinned and now all his opponent had to do was roll his hands over Mike's arms and strike him. Good in theory, probably practised many times in his club perfectly. The only slight interruption to the finishing technique was the strike that hit him from the trapped hands!

Mike's right hand was pinned with the back of the wrist against the German's side. In Mike's Kung Fu style striking is practised from all distances, even zero. This is achieved by an internal method known as 'coiling'. This can release internal energy, gradually like a flowing river or explosively like a lightning bolt. The river was to follow the storm.

The strike hit the German hard and was totally unexpected. He buckled as a strange feeling of nausea swept over him.

For the uninitiated, the result of a 'coiling' strike can be described by comparing the released energy to a ball bearing in a pin ball machine. It bounces off each internal organ in the same way as the pinball bounces off the flippers, in this case the liver, kidneys and bowel.

The German's arms flew out in front in reaction to the strike, Mike's arms flowed around the German's left outstretched arm. The twist and lock coupled with the upward and downward motion of Mike's arms snapped the elbow joint like a dried twig. The German's right knee went for Mike's groin but was too late, Mike had already sensed the strike and had kicked the inside of his opponent's knee and then followed along the inside of the leg to the groin and then snapped straight onto the opposite knee. Something cracked.

The German went down and stayed down.

The familiar feeling dissolved around him. It was done.

Once more, Vic's friend rushed to the loser's aid.

Vic looked at Mike. "That was much more like the act of a fighter, rather than one of a prima donna. Better!".

Mike felt relieved. He had entered into the technique almost immediately and had not lost it until it was over.

Reassurance! But what of the circuit? Had he just fought his last? He looked at Vic for advice. None Came. The German was carried away. Mike left with Vic.

The next year saw many changes to Mike's training schedule. His effectiveness in contests had been broadcast throughout the circuit. No one seemed too eager to encounter the man who could dream himself to a win. Stories of his prowess became exaggerated and he had little or no contact with other fighters.

He had attained his master level one grade from Vic and his training was drastically altered by his relocation with his job. He was spending more time developing the techniques which Vic had taught him, and this was becoming easier due to their separation. Vic himself spent considerable time in America and the separation between Master and student extended.

He started to spend more time teaching new students and working. Over the years, many people had walked into his training hall but few had stayed the course. He was, however, developing a nice core of steady students and hoped that he would eventually be able to train at least one person to Black Sash level.

His friend and co trainee Ian had stayed in closer contact with Vic than he had and had visited America with Vic.

Almost a year had now passed without a challenge and he was beginning to wonder if it would ever resume.

Vic had befriended an American whilst abroad, who had a son 'Leroy' who was involved in the martial arts. Mike couldn't help thinking from his conversations with Vic that Vic had acquired a new protégé. So it was that Vic broached the subject of Leroy.

"He is very keen to enter a real "contest", Vic said.

What's that got to do with me?", said Mike.

"Well, he has the fastest hands and techniques I have ever seen outside of our system", said Vic.

"Why don't I invite him over for a couple of weeks and you can see for yourself?".

Mike knew that Vic had already decided to do this, regardless of his opinion. He also knew that Vic was angling for something else. He knew that it couldn't be a valid Kong Sau contest since Leroy was not a member of any circuit's club. He also knew that if Vic stepped outside the rules without consent then the GrandMaster would be pissed off in the extreme.

Mike decided to wait and see what would unfold.

In 1981 during a two-week summer holiday Leroy appeared in Great Britain. Mike was invited to the course which Vic had laid on for Ian, Leroy and Vic. A knowledge sharing course.

Mike was singularly unimpressed with this as a concept but accepted on the basis of his past relationship with Vic.

Neither Leroy nor Vic would discuss Leroy's style or even name it. This confused and upset Mike who considered it bad face. Leroy's father was apparently loaded with money and could afford to send him to any instructor and had done.

During the first week Leroy showed Mike his...

Mike was staggered by the speed of Leroy's techniques. His hands and feet were the fastest he'd ever seen, even to the point of being faster than Vic in some techniques!

A sudden realisation came over him, Vic was setting him up! He bet that sometime, on the weekend, he would be asked to fight Leroy. Unthinkable!

Throughout the week Leroy taunted him with technique after technique. Stating that Vic had told him about Mike's fights and that he couldn't see anything that Mike had done during the week that worried him and couldn't see how he beat hard fighters. His teachers had told him that they had never trained anybody as fast as Leroy.

"From the look of your techniques, I'd probably agree that you're the fastest hitter I've seen, but then again, I haven't seen my style's GrandMaster", said Mike. He was later to wish that he would never see him.

Anyway, Saturday night came and since they had been stopping at Ian's place, in Bath, they had dinner in a

restaurant near the city centre. Sure enough, as Mike had predicted, Leroy swung the subject around to Kong Sau.

“Vic tells me that you can only fight on the circuit if you are a member of the clubs circle”. “Man, I’d love to use my training in one of those contests. It wouldn’t last very long at all.”

“It’s never that straightforward”, said Mike, “each fighter has his own unique ability and anyone can come unstuck, I almost did once”.

“To hit me you’ve got to be faster than me and no one is”, said Leroy. He then spent the rest of the meal telling them all how great he was.

Back at Ian’s place Vic asked Mike what he thought of the American. “Modest type isn’t he”, said Mike.

“Have you ever seen anyone so fast?”, asked Vic.

“That’s what really pisses me off”, said Mike, “I could put up with his crap if I had”.

They all retired for the night. Sunday was a similar day and by Monday, back at the training hall, Mike had had enough. So it was not difficult to accede to Vic’s suggestion of a contest. He did have reservations though, since he was seriously impressed by Leroy’s speed. It had also been two years since he had fought in the area.

Ian attempted to dissuade him from the fight, since he said that Vic had planned this all along, and that Leroy’s father had only paid for their visits to and from America on the basis that his boy would get to fight Mike.

“If Vic’s promised it, then I don’t really have any choice, do I?”, said Mike.

The news was broken to Leroy who couldn't contain his delight. Mike allowed him to name the time and day. Leroy was briefed on the setup and sworn to secrecy.

The time arrived.

Mike had attempted to glean some information about Leroy's training and had expressed concern about his dazzling speed to Vic. The only advice Vic would give to him was the following question - "How old is your mirror?".

This helped a lot. Not.

The two fighters stretched and performed the usual warm ups, Leroy emitting the occasional "whoop!", "Yeah man, this is really it!".

They entered the area to the face off.

Vic started the contest.

Mike assumed Tiger stance.

Leroy attempted to taunt Mike by flashing punches near Mike's head. Mike did not respond. Leroy moved around like a cat throwing kicks and punches around his target. Mike didn't respond at all. Leroy looked at him wondering what kind of drug Mike was on that made him look so vacant. He decided to stop playing and show everyone how these contests should be fought and won. The punch came into Mike's chest at high speed. To Leroy's delight Mike was too slow to block it, in fact he must have been caught totally by surprise since he made no attempt to move. Enthused by this, he launched his second punch before the first had landed.

Thud! Thud! Both connected with Mike's chest and sternum.

The next thing Leroy remembered was having both hands trapped and pulled in towards Mike's body. A knee came into the side of his leg, deadening it. His hands were crossed and jerked forward. Leroy's head snapped back against his neck and he saw stars. The crane's wing connected with the side of his neck and 'pacified' him to the floor. Dropping with him, a phoenix eye fist or dragon's tooth hit his windpipe. He passed out.

Mike stood and left the area. It was over once more. Ian stood amazed, Vic smiled and walked to Leroy's aid.

What had happened? Leroy had hit Mike with two rapid punches which should have put Mike away. Why didn't they? They were moving at such a rate.

Vic's question suddenly made sense as Mike's consciousness cleared.

"How old is you mirror?".....

When Mike had started real fighting instruction under Vic's tuition, Vic had defined a fighter's effectiveness as the rule of three. One third of effort had to maintain a solid stance, one third had to go into the speed of a strike and one third was the 'weight' of the strike. Training should be given equally to all three. No one third was to be trained more than another, otherwise an imbalance occurred.

Mike had always given the speed third more training. The result of which was that his hands were a blur when practising. Since he wasn't going to hit anyone full out, then he didn't concern himself with the equality of the three. The problem is always that one of the other two thirds suffer. You either fall out of balance or the power of the strike is reduced.

It needed quite some effort on Vic's part to direct him away from any third's preference and into equality for the three.

He only succeeded when he challenged Mike to a short sparring session and wiped the floor with him. The distribution of effort whilst fighting must always obey the rule of three, he stated.

This is exactly where Leroy went wrong.

He had spent so much time training the speed third, that when he hit a real fighter like Mike, it was like a fly crashing into a car's windscreen, no real effect on the car. Mike's body had absorbed the two punches whilst in trance technique and redistributed their impact across the whole of his chest. The rest just happened as normal.

Leroy was eventually brought around and Vic had a long chat with him about training, ego and disaster.

Unknown to both Vic and Mike this 'event' was going to catch up with both of them at a later date.

At the end of the week Mike and Vic had a discussion about the future. It appeared that Leroy's father had offered to set Vic up with a training centre (or center) in America and Vic was keen to go out there and teach. This effectively meant that training time was going to be limited from now on, but Mike wasn't to be too concerned since there wasn't a lot more Vic could teach him.

It was as a result of this that Mike asked Vic to withdraw him from the circuit after one more contest only. Vic agreed. Vic was also obliged to attend it.

Life, however, is never that straightforward!

So, Vic, Ian and Leroy went to America and Mike stayed in the South West of England teaching and working.

Twelve months or so passed when Mike received a summons from Vic. It was strangely worded and he could not quite work out if this was his last contest. What he did know, however, was that he and Vic were to go to the Hong Kong club....

Mike had now settled into the west country and had been running beginners classes now for some time. It soon became apparent to him that teaching beginners was a waste of his time, since he had attempted to teach hundreds of people, over the years, but had only developed a core of around ten. He, therefore, was to decide that the only way to pass on the system, was to insist on a true sincerity and desire, for learning. He implemented this by declaring that he would now only, personally, teach the system, to people who had already attained a 'black belt' grade in another system.

So, after time, the summons (or holiday, he thought) to Hong Kong was asserted. He could not remember the precise moment when he decided that his pilgrimage to Vic's teacher would take place, but fortunately for him, he was now working, in the South West, for Debenhams and qualified for discount on 'holidays'. So he booked his flight to Hong Kong on a package deal, staying at the 'Lee Gardens' hotel on Hong Kong island side. The GrandMaster's club was situated on Kowloon side (via the Star Ferry).

On arrival in Hong Kong he was bewildered by the differences in space and contact. There were so many people there that you had to expect people to bump into you every ten yards or so. Moreover, you had to realise this was not deliberate, just a way of life. The temperature was the other factor, not just hot, in the high eighties, but humid.

So much so, that you could quite easily prove bread dough on the pavement. What appalled him most was the sight of multi storey mirrored buildings immediately next door to multistorey flats in buildings (which looked more like slums).

“Whose hell have I been dropped into?”, thought Mike..

(The GrandMaster’s filtered the reply...)

Many things happened on his two week visit, he saw the sights, met the GrandMaster’s nieces through Vic, but eventually it culminated in his visit to his teacher’s Kwoon. (Dojo, school, training hall....).

This, in itself, was not that simple a task, since he had no idea that the street numbering of Hong Kong’s residences was designed to indicate the floor first e.g. 4001, 4th floor apartment 1. He wandered aimlessly looking for the club’s address and discovered it, by accident, by the club badge on the first floor of the furniture shop.

He entered With trepidation. His first impression of the first floor was the stench. Indescribable. The West Country smell of muck spreading can be ‘got used to’, this smell was alien, cooking, sweat, people all rolled into one. Typical of cosmopolitan Hong Kong, and not easily got used to.....

He looked at the obviously sliding door. He went to knock, it rolled back. The imposing sight of his teacher, Vic, in a silk combat suit greeted him. “You found it then?”.

“Obviously!”, Mike said, “Nice pyjamas!”, he said testing the ground.

No response.

“O.K. so he’s on home territory and I’m not, he looks worse than me in front of him!”, thought Mike.

For the first time in years, Mike felt equal to Vic....prat!

“You have your time mapped out for you whilst you are here, you are honoured, use it well. I can’t help you much.”, said Vic.

It was interesting that it was brought to a head in a single day. He remembered how it started. He had entered the Kong Kong club and was told to change. He was to be introduced to the senior students by Vic. He entered a small training room. There were 4 senior grades going through advanced techniques and Vic.

Vic introduced him to each of them, Mike had the distinct feeling of being disliked by them. Vic told Mike to train with them for a while then he would get to meet the GrandMaster! Mike suddenly felt extremely nervous!

It was like when you were 8 years old and were towards the back of the school queue waiting for an injection, not pleasant!

Mike trained with the students for a short while when the door opened and he came in. All stopped and saluted - Kung Fu style. He saluted in return.

He was a slightly built man about five foot seven in height and floated rather than walked towards Mike. “So you are Vic’s student”, he said (strangely enough, with a Chinese accent!). Mike tried to answer but his mouth didn’t work, so he nodded. /

“Show me the Five Pattern Pattern”, he was told. Mike had performed this pattern hundreds of times but fortunately, never as good this time (lucky - nerves!). “Good!”, said the GrandMaster. “He’s not like Vic”, thought Mike.

He was then summoned over to the GrandMaster, as he approached the old man he grew weaker as though his strength was being drawn from him, the closer he got the weaker he felt. The old man stood in front of Mike their faces almost touching, he studied Mike's face for what seemed like an eternity, then suddenly with no warning and from that close distance, without moving, he kicked Mike in the temple and sent him careering onto the floor. Mike had never even detected the slightest warning of the attack, nor had his body. He lay there dazed, it took a few minutes to recover, but his training had been thorough in that respect and his internals brought the world back into focus. He suddenly realised that the GrandMaster was in a totally different league to Vic and himself and felt awed. The old man beckoned him forward again.

Extremely reluctantly, he approached him once more. "Hit me!", came the instruction. "Oh shit, I'm dead!", thought Mike. He wondered how to attack him and decided that, since he could not make that decision, he would use trance technique.

It developed in under a second, his body moved to one side of the old man, only to be slapped on the way past. The blow hit him hard on the shoulder but the technique steadied him and attempted to absorb the impact. It didn't do a very good job though, Mike let a side back fist fly at the old man's head, it couldn't miss.....it did. The wrist was trapped and what appeared to be a side wrist lock was applied, except it was far more effective and he was thrown the length of the room. He rolled and arose.

He tried to approach the old man but was unable to get near him, since the closer he got the harder it was to walk. At five feet from him he fell to the floor and could get no closer.

The trance technique started to dissolve. It shouldn't have, he was still in danger. He could not resume it, he tried and tried and failed.

The old man smiled. He glanced at Vic who rushed to him. Vic bowed, the old man looked at Mike who was lying on the floor weak, drained and bewildered. He looked at Vic.

“Interesting student!”, Vic nodded, the old man left the room.

Vic helped Mike up, the strength had started to return to his legs and body the moment the old man had left the room.

“What happened to me, Vic?”.

“Obvious isn’t it?”

“Obvious?”, said Mike.

“You met the GrandMaster.”

“I suppose I did, is he like that with everyone?”

“Not everyone attacks him!”.

Mike supposed not. He had a lot to reflect on when he returned home.

Vic told Mike that the GrandMaster always tested his students, but in different ways. Since he had not met Mike before he had tested various aspects of him in that one encounter. The GrandMaster could evaluate anyone’s capability by just standing near to them.

Mike realised that he still had a lot to learn and prayed that his last fight would not be against anyone like the old man.

Vic told him to continue training whilst he spoke to the old man. He was gone for some time, eventually he reappeared and was told that the GrandMaster had seen enough of him and had complimented Vic on his instruction. The session was over and Mike could leave. However, the old man had requested that Mike pay his respects to him on the way out.

The old man was sitting in the room with the two sliding doors. They had dragons carved into the red wood. Vic shook his hand and left. Mike started to dress but decided to wait until he had paid his respects to the GrandMaster. He was glad that it was over, the old man hadn't been too hard on him and he was thankful.

He left the room and went down the hall to the two doors. He was about to slide the right hand door open when, without warning, the trance technique assumed itself with no prompting! He paused for a few seconds, then sliding the door back rapidly, he somersaulted into the room. As he entered the door two blades came down one either side of him. They missed. He arose to find the trap. There were eight of them in all, armed with various Chinese weapons and intent on finishing him. Around the area, on a higher level, old Chinese men sat watching and eating rice, the GrandMaster sat in the middle.

Mike, had long ago asked Vic about fighting more than one person at a time. Vic had told him that no matter how many people set on him, only eight could be within range of hitting at any one time (without using weapons).

The eight were extremely coordinated together and posed a formidable threat. On rising Mike was already approaching the nearest to him. The Chinese wielded a halberd, a long staff with a blade at the end, he lunged at Mike who used his arms in a scissor motion snapping the staff and then sliding along the remaining wood until they hit the target, the Chinese's chest. The wind came out of him, Mike stepped behind him avoiding the second attacker and struck the

Chinese on the back of the neck. This knocked him out and into the second attacker. They both fell to the floor. Mike was on number two in an instant. Removing the rice flails from his wrist by breaking it with his foot. The second stamp broke his fibula. The leg was useless.

He held the rice flails inelegantly as the third approached him. The butterfly knives came at him but missed as Mike side stepped, kicked number three in the chest and then struck him in the temple with the rice flails. He went out like a light.

Number four approached with the staff. It jabbed at Mike's throat but was caught between both of his hands as they slapped together. The hands rolled the staff to the side and the thrust kick to the throat took out number four, just in time for the staff to block the downward single broadsword strike from number five. Mike jabbed the staff between the attacker's legs and then onto the floor in between them. The forward motion of number four coupled with the groin strike caused him to trip over the staff. As he fell, Mike placed the end of the staff precisely onto his windpipe with a stabbing motion. Number four was no longer a danger.

The staff was then rotated to strike number five's wrist, then his head. The broadsword fell from number five's hand to the floor. The staff rotated again and hit the other side of number five's head at the temple. He lost consciousness.

Mike steadied himself with the staff, Six, Seven and eight had also paused to regroup. Number six attacked, the three sectioned staff was held at the middle whilst the end sections spun like buzz saws. Mike didn't wait for six to approach him since his advantage was the six foot staff. He struck the left wrist of number six whilst he was still out of his own striking range, but within Mike's. The sectioned staff dropped slightly, but six held on tightly as seven lunged at Mike with the double broad sword. Mike stepped into six and hooking

the staff inside the arms and middle of the sectioned staff used the six foot staff to bowl number six into number seven. Metal hit metal as the end of the three sectioned staff connected with the sword. The rotating end of the right hand section connected with number seven's nose and split it, blood gushed everywhere. Number six looked startled and in that split instant was knocked unconscious by Mike.

Number seven was blinded by the strike to his nose, his eyes streamed with the uncontrollable release of tears. He no longer posed a significant threat to Mike who had just rolled away from the attack from number eight. He was armed with the long spear and the point missed Mike by inches.

Number eight had a significant advantage since the length of the six foot spear could hit Mike before he got within striking distance with his hands. He had dropped the staff when he rolled out of the way of the attack. The other weapons were too far away to reach and number eight ensured he could not get near to them. The spear lunged at him with precision. All he could do was avoid it. He blocked, avoided, side stepped for almost a minute, until his chance came. He had side stepped the last lunge and was close enough to number seven for him to be useful. As the next lunge came Mike performed a reverse round house kick to the back of number seven's head, this pushed him in between number eight's attack and Mike.

The point of the spear entered number seven's shoulder and he screamed, then Mike leapt up a level and grabbed the chopsticks from a surprised Chinese's hand, who had been sat there watching and eating rice! In the same movement Mike jumped down into the area and slammed the chopsticks into number eight's collar bone, he released his grip on the spear and as he did so, Mike attacked his rib cage with Tiger claws.

It was over, the state dissolved. The threat had been dealt with and he rose to consciousness. He began to shake uncontrollably. Vic was summoned and removed him from the room. It would be hours before Mike could speak properly or stop shaking.

This had been the GrandMaster's testing of him, not the earlier subterfuge.

Vic started to tell him that he had had a similar experience earlier. The GrandMaster had heard of the 'unofficial' Kong Sau contest with LeRoy and had decided to make a point!

Point Taken.....

Afterward, Mike returned home and Vic went back to the states with Ian. The visit had left Mike feeling as if something inside him was now missing, it turned out to be more serious than that..

After the Hong Kong experience Mike developed a confidence problem. The intensity of that last fight had shaken his confidence in his internal techniques, despite the fact that he had survived it. Vic had given him some recommended breathing techniques to restore his confidence but they hadn't worked. He was dreading the final inevitable invitation to the last fight. It came sooner than he thought... within a year...

The message came

"There's another opponent for you, a stylist from Chu Gar".

Mike asked, "What is the style like?".

Vic said that its roots were Mantis style and that it had its own form of internal energy, unlike our schools form. Mike pondered on this and said that he had never seen a Mantis student or Master. Vic told him that in his opinion they were probably the toughest opponent you could wish to encounter.

Mike thought that this was just his luck, last fight and he has to get the worst opponent imaginable, coupled with the fact that he didn't feel "right".

"Has a date been set for the fight?", he asked.

"No, we can pick any time next month, what suits you?"

So, it was the end of May and he was sitting by the pool drinking a bottle of San Miguel. It was Sunday and he was waiting to be contacted and taken to the training hall. Vic had told him to prepare himself for a grading over the course of the next 10 days (Ian's not his) and then the fight would be arranged after that.

The temperature was in the high 90s and he was hoping he would be contacted soon.... noon came and another bottle of beer. He was just buying it at the bar when a voice said make it two while your there.. It was Ian. He had just come from the hall and was there to collect him.

Mike asked for details, it was within walking distance of his hotel, Ian and Vic were staying with a friend. Ian was preparing to take his level 2 black and Mike was there to help him along before the fight. It didn't quite turn out as he expected though...big surprise!

Ian had said that the hall was a 15 minute walk and after finishing their beers they made off towards it.

The hall was a Tae Kwon Do training hall and had been "let" to Vic for the 2 weeks. Vic was there to greet them.

"How are the internals coming along?", he asked Mike.

"They're not", said Mike, "Seem to have lost it. Can't get into the technique for love nor money".

Vic studied him and said they'd have to work on it during Ian's grading. Mike agreed, but had strong reservations about the forthcoming fight. No technique, how could he last it?

Then, just as Mike was worrying about his predicament Vic added, "Oh and best behaviour, the GrandMaster is coming out with some people this week. He's going to watch your last fight."

So, on top of all of the things Vic could have said to him, to cheer him up and encourage him, this was probably the worst. Mike noticed Ian suddenly became uneasy as well.

They spent the afternoon chatting about the years that had passed, Vic and Ian were doing fine in the States and Mike was now working in the South West and teaching Martial Arts in the evenings. The GrandMaster was due to arrive on Tuesday of that week and so they planned to use Monday for working on Ian's training. Vic had suggested that for the Level 2 Kong Sau grading that Ian fight one of the Chu Gar school's lesser experienced fighters and so two fighters were coming out from Hong Kong on the following week.

Ian wasn't exactly enamoured with the idea, but as Vic said to him your only other alternatives are me or Mike! This put the situation into perspective.

The GrandMaster arrived the following day, he had brought an old friend with him and instructed Vic to tell Mike to cooperate with the old man. He was here to assist Mike in the recovery of his internal abilities.

Ian's grading began under the supervision of the GrandMaster . The old man examined Mike and prescribed a curious green mixture which can only be described at best as foul and at worst as camel crap. It was mixed up daily for him and he was to drink it down in one! He was also instructed in a new breathing technique and was told to practise it three times a day for fifteen minutes a session.

The first week of Ian's grading passed fairly quickly with Mike acting as the body bag for Ian's techniques. Ian was doing well and Mike told him. Mike had also noticed that he was beginning to feel more like his old self, his hands were starting to get warm at will and his body was regaining its internal senses. He still couldn't assume the trance technique though, and was still worried.

The fights were arranged for the Friday of the second week and Ian's grading was still going well. The culmination of his grading was to be a Kong Sau match against a Chu Gar opponent, Mike's fight would follow Ian's. The Chu Gar entourage arrived on the Thursday of the second week and they were greeted by the GrandMaster, Vic and the old Chinese. The presence of the old man appeared to cause some upset in their camp but in typical Chinese fashion they attempted to hide their reservations. Mike wondered what the old man's background was, but all Vic would tell him was that he was a priest.

Ian had passed all of his grading requirements by Thursday evening and this just left the fight. Ian and Mike went back to Mike's hotel afterwards and sat in the bar to discuss the following day. They stayed there until ten and then retired for the night.

The following day they were both out running at seven a.m. and arrived at the club for eight. The GrandMaster and the old man were there with Vic. Vic told them both to warm up and they awaited the arrival of the Chu Gar school. They arrived at nine. There were four of them, two students and what appeared to be the school's head and a teacher. An hour passed, one student and Ian were summoned by the teachers, an area had been defined and they were to start immediately. The GrandMaster, old man and the school's teachers sat around the area. Vic was to start the contest and Mike looked on with him. It started...

The Chu Gar fighter moved extremely quickly towards Ian and launched a series of hand movements at him. Ian easily avoided them and side stepped the oncoming opponent. As the fighter passed him, Ian side stepped and connected a well placed reverse heel kick to the fighter's rib cage.

Given the oncoming momentum of the fighter and the accuracy of the heel placement, it would not have been unreasonable to expect the Chu Gar fighter to have gone down to the floor. He didn't. This was Mike's first glimpse of the style's Iron Shirt technique. It appeared to encase the fighter's upper torso with armour. The more the fight continued and Ian hit the fighter in the body, the less the effect on the fighter it seemed to have. Ian, on the other hand was beginning to struggle, since some of his opponents own techniques were beginning to get through and he was losing confidence rapidly.

The end of the contest came unexpectedly, Ian had finally worked out that the body attacks were not very effective and had launched several kicks to his opponents legs, the stylist retreated backwards just as Ian switched his target area to the head area. The Chu Gar fighter had correctly anticipated the switch of attack and despatched Ian with a groin kick and knockout blow to his temple. Ian went down like a sack of potatoes and lay there. It was at this moment that a serious insult was sent to the GrandMaster's school. Seeing that Ian was unconscious, his opponent ignored protocol and dropped to the floor and smashed Ian's ribs. Three were broken in all, when for the first time, Mike saw the GrandMaster show emotion. He appeared extremely angry and stood up!

Seeing this the stylist smiled and left the area. Mike rushed onto the floor with Vic and attended to Ian. They carried him to the side and the old man went to work on him.

After an hour or so of attention from the old man Ian was able to sit up, much to the disgust of the Chu Gar school. He found it difficult to breathe though and had to manage with short gasps. Not very comfortable! The old man gave Ian a drink of the green mixture, Mike smiled as Ian's face contorted with the "delicious" taste.

Vic had discussed the next fight with the school's teacher and had arranged it for that afternoon. He took Mike to the opposite end of the hall and asked him how his internals felt. Mike was still unsure of this and told him so. Several times he had attempted trance technique and had failed on each attempt. He watched the Chu Gar students with interest and had to admire their style. This was even more worrying since he knew he was going to have to fight one of them in a few hours and it would be their best student!

The lunch hour dragged and Mike was still feeling extremely apprehensive about the contest. With no trance technique to rely on he would be in the same state as his previous 'opponents had been – vulnerable. He had to admit that it was not a comfortable feeling!

The afternoon's contest time arrived and Vic questioned Mike on his ability once more. Mike said that the conventional techniques would have to do since he had failed again to enter the trance technique. The old man came over to Mike and placed his left hand on Mike's shoulder and said something in Chinese to Vic. Mike's shoulder burned and felt extremely uncomfortable. Vic looked shocked and questioned the old man in Chinese, his reply made Vic look even more puzzled.

The burning had stopped and Mike felt totally confused, "What was all that about?" he asked Vic, hoping for a deeply meaningful reply. All he got was "Nothing of interest for you". "You'd think I'd know better by now than to ask for advice", he thought...

Vic led him to the area, all kinds of varying strategies were floating through Mike's mind, how to overcome the iron shirt, how to attack his opponent,.....

His opponent stood up, “yep, just as I thought, he’s big for a Chinese and solid”, thought Mike, “on the good side though, this is the last fight (one way or another)!” , he thought.

They entered the area, the student’s teacher started the contest...

This time there was no comfort in the trance technique, Mike was going to get to see the whole thing! The Chu Gar student came at him extremely quickly, the phoenix eye fist whistled towards Mike’s temple, an upward rising block intercepted it and Mike followed around the arm to lock it. As he did so the other hand in a palm heel strike connected with the student’s side rib cage, the expected crack never came! Mike’s hand bounced off the ribs like it had hit a wall. “Iron Shirt technique! Bloody effective!” thought Mike. The student retreated two steps, surprised by Mike’s defensive ability, but not half as surprised as Mike was.

The next attack came as swiftly as the first. A round house kick to Mike’s head, but as soon as the leg was raised Mike had moved in close and delivered a crane kick to the underside of the upper raised leg. “That must have hurt”, thought Mike, “Not doing too bad, considering”. His confidence grew and he began to settle in to the contest. He waited for the next attack to come planning to take his opponent’s throat out and finish him. Mike was beginning to get a little cocky and when the next attack came, a series of short rapid punches, he made a mistake, a big one! He attempted to catch the upper right arm with the intention of delivering the throat attack at the same time, unfortunately for him the hand strikes thrown at him were dummies! The real attack came from the leading leg and caught him directly under the sternum. He was lifted off the floor and landed on his back knocking all the air out of him and banging his head. The attempted break fall did not work perfectly. He was dazed and didn’t see the heel stamp that caught him in the Tan Tien .. His vision blurred.

He could barely make out the shape of the fighter bending over him, but knew that he was about to suffer the same fate as his friend Ian, if he didn't get up quickly! As the hand strike came at him, he instinctively caught the bicep of the arm with a leopard strike and deflected it, this made the fighter lose balance and topple over Mike. Mike caught the falling student's jacket and used the momentum to stand up.

He retreated several steps to try and recover whilst the student got up. It wasn't enough time and he was under attack again. He absorbed a strike to the neck and kick to the body and felt he was going down again, when something strange started to happen, his shoulder burned, this spread across his back and around to his front, his body was on fire! He looked down, no flames!

The Chu Gar student was presumably waiting for him to collapse, with the amount of punishment he had taken he should have dropped by now. Mike's hands started to get extremely hot and his feet 'gripped' the floor, he was going nowhere! The pain no longer existed, just the fire. When it was clear that Mike wasn't going to drop the Chu Gar student came at Mike again with total disregard for his body, since he was obviously using the Iron Shirt technique. The student's right hand came at Mike in a spear formation aimed at under the sternum this was bound to finish him, Mike was 'aware' of the arm and his own hand was moving in a palm heel block to parry it, on contact with the arm it cracked! His palm heel strike left the arm and came into his opponent's own sternum using the back of the wrist to strike, it hadn't occurred to Mike that the Iron Shirt technique would be there, and it needn't have, since he was on autopilot.

The reverse wrist strike connected but instead of bouncing of the target, another crack echoed around the hall. The student's face contorted with pain and terror, he currently had a broken right arm and a cracked sternum. Mike was unaware of the damage he had caused and moved in on the student who was already falling to the floor, whether the student felt the blow to his shoulder blade as he fell is debatable but it cracked just the same! He lay face down on the floor unconscious, Mike dropped to one knee and raised his hand over the rib cage of the student, the Chu Gar class stood up. The hand moved towards its target at breathtaking speed and stopped just short, Mike moved it under the body of the student and turned him over to check for signs of breathing. He was going to hurt for some months to come, but was alive! Mike withdrew, when for the second time the GrandMaster stood up again!

Vic came over to him and asked him what the hell he had done. Mike told him he had absolutely no idea but his body felt as though it were on fire and he felt like he could put his hands and feet through brick walls. The old man came over to Vic and spoke to him, this time Vic spoke to Mike and said "Have you any idea what he's talking about? He just asked me to ask you how you liked the Dragon's breath?", "What the hell does that mean?". Mike realised for the first time that he had experienced something that Vic never had. "Tell him thank you, and ask him if it wears off?" , Vic spoke to the old man and the old man shook his head.....

Mike thanked the old man the best way he knew how, he bowed his head to him and to the GrandMaster....who was smiling!

Two weeks had passed since the visit to Spain and Mike was feeling rested and recovered. He had been practicing with the new knowledge gained regarding “Dragon’s Breath” and was able to use it almost like the old trance technique. Vic had reacted strangely to this event and Mike would have sworn that he had been in a fortnights sulk. This behaviour was totally out of character for him and he had treated Mike with cool disregard..

Anyway, the outcome for Mike had been extremely positive in that not only did he have a new technique to develop, but he was finally off the circuit! No more Kong Sau contests! That’s what he called a result! But.....

Vic had arranged a training session for today and it was to start at 9.30 am. So he had breakfast and was off to see Ian and Vic in the training hall.

Mike entered the room. Vic was training on the punch bag and looked intense. “What was all that crap about Dragon’s Breath the old man was spouting about!”.

The delivery of this question was hostile and the punch bag disappeared from view under the force of Vic’s kick.

Ian was standing to one side looking very nervous.

“It was a completely new experience, a new technique which I have been trying to develop, somewhat along the lines of trance technique, but without the trance state.”

“Bollocks!”, said Vic, “the Grandmaster never taught me any such thing, but in the interest of fair play lets assume you have learned something new and it is better than trance state. There’s only one way to find out – lets try it out”.

“How?”, said Mike and it suddenly dawned on him that Vic wasn’t going to let this one rest. His blood ran a little cold and he noticed that Ian had moved back out of the way. “Shit!, He’s going to have a crack at me”, thought Mike.

Vic told him that soon Ian and himself were moving to America to teach in a gym out there, he had been offered quite a lot of money to set up a school. So this was to be their last lesson together. – in one way or another....

The problem with Vic was that he would only ever acknowledge one person to be better than him – the GrandMaster and any threat to this status quo was to be dealt with.

Mike was now that threat...

He watched Vic intensely as he fidgeted about, and then he felt it. Vic was entering trance state. He could feel the energy build up even though he was 10 feet or so away from him!

Ian had by now distanced himself from both of them and was well out of harms way.

Mike was scared but also fascinated since, up to now, he had thought that trance technique was entered when a fighter was threatened, yet it was obvious to him that Vic was entering into the state for attacking combat. He had obviously had another level of development than Mike had had.

OK, so now you need to realise the position Mike was in, here was his instructor, taught by the GrandMaster, about to knock the stuffing out of him.

Yes, you guessed it he was slightly nervous....

The energy flow from Vic was getting more intense and Mike's back had started to glow in reaction to it. The first move came so fast that Mike had no idea it was coming at him. Under normal circumstances he would never have had the chance to block the Crane's penetrating kick since he

never saw it. (It was also the first animal of the five which Vic had Mastered under the GM!)

Mike's left arm was already moving towards the leg at a similar speed to Vic's kick. Bong Sau (revolving door) block caught the kick at the ankle and were it not for Vic's trance state, would have broken it,

However, on detection of the block Vic was already moving in with Leaping Crane to close the distance and deliver Crane's folding wing block to Mike's sternum. This was again done at breakneck speed and was certain to floor Mike.

Except for the fact that he was no longer there! The heat on his back suddenly intensified as he easily sidestepped the blow and delivered the Tiger Claws to Vic's side. This time trance state or not, he would not be able to avoid it since the timing was such that the blow hit the side of his rib cage just at the point of him landing from Leaping Crane.

The cracks echoed around the hall as 2 ribs gave way under the force of the Dragon's Breath. The atmosphere was electric as Mike's energy met Vic's.

Under normal circumstances, Vic would have gone down to the deck, but he was still in trance state and was already moving back.

"Christ he's good!", thought Mike, "I know he has 2 busted ribs but the bastards still in trance technique!".

As Vic stepped backwards Mike moved in with a Dragon punch – crude but powered by Dragon's Breath it was like swinging a sledge hammer at a walnut.

Vic's block was timed perfectly and intercepted the punch easily, his body moved to one side with the block and was setting Mike up for Angry Dragon.

Except for.... His block caught Mike's arm in perfect position with perfect timing and did not even slightly move it from its path, the fist crashed through the block and caught Vic on the front of the shoulder, another crack sounded out in the room, Vic's arm was now out of action and the pain started to become apparent in his face as it contorted under the two attacks.

"He's losing it, at last!", thought Mike.

He stepped backwards and waited. Vic started to come at him again as trance state was beginning to fade from him.

He launched his good arm at Mike in a Leopard punch technique, Mike stepped inside him, cooled the heat from the breath and delivered Crane's pacify wing to Vic's neck.

"Ironic really", thought Mike, the Crane Master was falling unconscious to the floor with his favourite technique applied to him.

It was over, Vic was out and Mike was returning to normal temperature. Ian was moving towards the place where Vic had fallen and looked terrified shouting at Mike in panic.

"Ian, I didn't start this or want it to happen", Mike said as he moved Vic onto his back for air".

He applied energy to Vic's chest and Vic started to regain consciousness. The look of pain on his face was obvious, and Mike wasn't sure whether it was due to the busted ribs and shoulder, or to the obvious loss of face at being defeated by his student.

It took 5 weeks for him to recover from the contest and Ian had made arrangements for the trip to the states.

Mike saw them both off at the airport and they said there farewells promising to stay in touch but of course they never did,

“Vic! Look on the bright side of things!”, Mike shouted,
“You’ll still be number one in the states!”.

The reply was short, obvious and typical of Vic.

“BASTARD!”

Time passed lots of it!....At the time of the last contest Mike was around 30 years old. A lot had happened to him during the journey along the path of the Martial Arts. He had moved to Taunton where his first marriage had failed.

On the brighter side of things he had met a new woman at his work place at Debenhams and things were looking up for him. He was soon to change his job and move to Bristol and his relationship with his new girlfriend Xxx, was becoming serious and marriage was not only talked about but planned. In 1984 on the 25th August, they were married and lived in Weston Super Mare.

The Martial Journey was nearly over and he concentrated mainly on work but mostly on his wife who he considered to be the most beautiful woman he had ever met or ever would. He was wrong.

The job was going well and he had two clubs running, one in Exeter and one in Caldicot. At last he had found students who could take over the burden of teaching so that he could devote more time to family life and his career.

It helped enormously that his wife also worked as a systems analyst and they had work in common. The relationship grew and the teaching dropped off and for the first time in his life he got fat! It also helped that Xxx was keenly interested in Mike's son Simon from his first marriage and that they all got on well. This must have been difficult for her.

Eventually Xxx came to work at the same firm as him in Bristol and everything started to become comfortable. They would spend time out with each other before going home by dropping in at the local pub to unwind.

Later they decided that children would be a good option, especially as Mike was changing jobs again and would earn enough for them both to live on and Cassandra was born in 1990 and Alexander was born in 1992.

Although the firm remained the same his roles within it changed many times to accommodate the rapid change in the Information Technology market.

This inevitably put stress on Mike since he was now very overweight and had the responsibility of a family and maintaining a job.

And then it happened!

His job changed to a presales role and he had to visit exhibitions quite a lot, which could not have been very easy for his wife Xxx since it quite often involved staying away for a week at a time.

Anyway, by now the internet had established itself and Email was now a way of life. So he was surprised in June 1999 to receive an Email from Ian. It simply said Vic needs your help once more and that's when the pit of his stomach collapsed. He had a family, responsibilities and more to the point was now 46. Yet he knew exactly the meaning of the request..... And so he had to reply to the Email.

Vic had been summoned/challenged for the last time and wasn't up to it. What in the hell was he going to do. So, he arranged to meet Ian and Vic to discuss it. The conversation was traumatic, to say the least, and the risks were great. He also would have to lose a fair few pounds in the process. The difficulty was also that he would have to decide whether to tell the woman he loved to put up with this once more and he knew exactly what reaction that would provoke.

You see, from Xxx's viewpoint he was occupied with his job whilst she had few, if any, real interests apart from the children. So if he broached this now he knew she would never understand. The Japanese have a term "Giri" or obligation. Its not that you can choose or not whether to be obligated to someone you either are or aren't. Vic had taught him all he knew and it had caused his life to change.

Without the Martial Arts he would never have caught his wife's interest in the first place.

The problem is he also had an obligation or “Giri” to his wife and his family. So on one training weekend he agreed to meet with Vic and Ian and the challenger and in doing so he did it without telling Xxx. A lie by omission!

The Chinese was of the usual type and the area was prepared. It has to be said, at this point, Mike had still not agreed to the fight. Vic looked anxiously at Mike and so did Ian. The Chinese warmed up and went through some stretching exercises. He was from the same school of Chu Gar as one of Mike’s previous opponents. Mike had still not agreed to the contest with Vic and so there was an air of uncertainty. In fact Mike had no intention of fighting the opponent at all. So how was the situation to be resolved?

Vic was about to plead with Mike when Mike said “Doc Sau”!

“What the hell are you on about?”, said Vic.

O.K. so at this point the term probably needs an explanation. Kong Sau is the name given to the fighting on the circuit. Doc Sau means to fight and win without fighting. In other words to explain to you opponent that no matter what his abilities are that yours are better. In other words, practised by a Master, no one gets hurt.

“It never happens”, said Vic and Ian thought that Mike had finally lost his marbles. However, he hadn’t!

The Chinese spoke good English and was invited over away from the area. They sat down and faced each other. Mike asked about his training and who his Martial Lineage came from. He explained his teacher and his teacher’s teacher practically back to the Shaolin Temple. Mike paid him the respect he deserved and asked about his internal capabilities, which, as he recalled from the previous encounter with the system would be formidable.

They were outlined as being formed mainly around the Chi Gung concept of breathing.

Mike was aware of these exercises and explored the depth of his knowledge further. After some time the Chinese decided to ask Mike about his ability. After all Mike was a master but Vic was Mike's teacher. "This was all true", said Mike "but I have beaten Vic on his last contest" and Vic had asked Mike to serve in his place.

Before the Chinese could answer Mike explained that within the system are Five Animals and each of these has different talents dependant upon the intention that a fighter gives them. He further explained that there was also another side to the system called the Five Waters of Life and that this complimented the aggressive Martial Side by providing a harmonious balance between the two. Basically, before you have the right to hurt someone you should know how to cure them. "Is this the same in your system of Chu Gar?"

The Chinese answered that the system had no regard for an opponent other than to dispose of them efficiently. He further explained that he could not see the benefit of the harmony.

This was about to become aggressive, so Mike took another tack. "Do you have the ability to hit someone without contacting them?" The Chinese laughed at the concept stating that these were old stories put about by old masters to maintain an appearance of ability in their old age.

Oops!

They stood and faced each other. Ian was stood to one side and Vic on the other. The Chinese was about to ask who he would be fighting and Mike said "No one". At that point Ian collapsed to the floor. The Chinese was surprised!

Mike went over to him and placed his hand over his central Mu spot where the meridians have a confluence. Ian recovered and stood up.

The Chinese accused Mike of arranging it, just before he fell over.

Mike asked him to get up and come towards him. The Chinese couldn't move, in fact he was trying to move away from him. Mike asked him how he felt but the Chinese was scared.

Mike let it go. He then went over to the Chinese and performed the same energy transfer as he did to Ian.

“What you have just experienced is the ability and technique which is called Leaching. It is the use of the Ocean which affects all life and the void which is the place where people can get lost. The Ocean can be used to cure people but, when mixed with the void can take energy away from people”.

“I do not expect you to understand these concepts but I do expect you to respect them. Now, are you interested in combat?”

The answer was faint but definite. “No!”

They left the room and Vic and Ian walked away again.

That was the last time Mike ever saw Vic, who died when he was about 53 in the states. Ian is still around and is getting on with his life.

Mike still teaches occasionally but has four black sash graded students who teach his clubs in Exeter and Caldicot. Mike is now 48 and life goes on.....

That is occasionally, 2002 was a very bad year for Mike he was divorced by his wife who had found someone else. In the process he lost his house and she moved into a rented property with his two children, so he lost his kids as well! Mike moved into a rented property as well and had physical problems due to massive weight loss. This was induced by stress he also had to change his job due to impending redundancies and moved from Bristol office to Exeter which meant commuting every day from Weston. This added to the stress. The divorce was extremely messy and was finalised in November. The stress finally took its toll and he was laid off from work in December. Just when he thought the new year might bring him better luck on 30th December, he received a telephone call from his sister in Plymouth saying that their father had had a massive stroke and was in hospital, to add to this his mother had heard his father fall and in trying to move him had a heart attack and was in hospital as well. Mike had the children stopping with him and took them to Plymouth to see the damage. His mother was not too ill and was recovering, his father was paralysed on his right side and was on a respirator, he was semi conscious but unable to talk. They stopped until the evening and Mike took the kids back home. On New Year's Eve Mike had a telephone call saying his father had had another stroke and was not expected to last long, he died late in the afternoon. So that was 2002!

He had been paid 3 months salary in lieu of service and decided to take time out to rest. So into 2003 and he devoted Wednesday evenings to train in Weston, the Exeter and Plymouth clubs would meet for training then.

The system of Five Pattern Hung Kuen has many aspects to it and one of these is the healing side. This has been alluded to earlier but it is more than that. There is a sister side to the martial side called the Five Waters of Life and this is a complete system for treating illnesses. Mike had already started to teach his classes the fundamentals and it was because of this that as well as teaching the Martial Side on Wednesdays, patients started to appear, brought by his students.

Then his luck changed for a while! One of the Welsh students brought a girl over for treatment. The club's train in a hall over a pub and it has a back room that Mike started to use for treatments. They usually met in the pub and then went upstairs. The girl came in with her friend, they were asked by the Welsh student to pick out the instructor. They failed.

The girls were introduced, Linzi and Hayley. They went upstairs to the small room. Mike was immediately taken by Linzi's beauty and personality and knew that since she had come for a treatment it was going to be difficult to concentrate. He attempted to break the ice and did sort of. Now one of his methods is not to prediagnose illness, in other words he didn't like to be told what was wrong with a patient. There are mechanisms within the system for reading meridian pulses to establish the problem. Since Mike had been doing this for a long time he could "read" a person without touching them. This was indeed proving difficult because he couldn't help being attracted towards her. Anyway after sometime studying her, he established a back problem and an infection and asked if he was right.

Apparently he was, so he started to align the energy flow within her body to assist the healing process. After the treatment they all went into the training room, where Mike taught and the girls watched. The session finished at 9.30pm and they all went to the bar for a drink. He still couldn't take his eyes off her. Eventually they left.

Linzi had been off work sick, since December with the problem and Mike had been off work too. A relationship developed and they became close, very close. They saw a lot of each other and it took away the loneliness Mike had been feeling since he moved into the house alone. She had also replaced the grief he felt with love and optimism.

It was February and the relationship was going extremely well, then it happened. One evening the phone rang, "How you doing mate?"

Christ! It was Ian!

"We need to get together for a drink ASAP". "Why what's wrong, where are you?". A thousand questions ran through Mike's mind. "Can't discuss it on the phone but we need to meet and talk, I am not far from Weston".

So the meeting was arranged and they met in a pub, Mike walked in and his sixth sense started tingling, not good. Ian was sat in the corner and they embraced and had a beer. They took the time to exchange experiences and it transpired that Ian was acting as a combat advisor to the Special Forces, it was at this time that the gulf war got underway again and he didn't know how long he would stay in the country. After some time Ian got very serious. "OK I will get to the point!" and he did.

Apparently, before Vic had died he left an obligation to a Chinese Kung Fu school unfulfilled. This could be left undone but would bring dishonour to his name and standing on the circuit, so guess what? Someone else could pick it up! Or not.

Ian was second senior student and would pick it up if the first senior student didn't. Guess who that is? Mike felt that old feeling return to him. He couldn't walk away after all Vic had done for him, but he was no spring chicken now either.

He had, however, developed new techniques since the last fight and considered the matter carefully.

“Since it is an obligation, I have the choice of time, date and location” said Mike. “Yes, of course!”, said Ian.

He remembered thinking that it was not going to be easy to explain this to Linzi or his children, the eldest Simon was in the Gulf and his girlfriend was pregnant so he would take it hard. As for Linz she was reasonably new to the concept and because of the closeness of their relationship would find it difficult to accept.

Mike thought carefully over another beer and eventually said to Ian, “OK I accept, it will be on the 23rd March, 2003.”

Now this was a significant date since it was Simon’s birthday. Mike’s thinking behind this was that since he was in the Gulf it would give him something else to worry about, his Dad about to get his ass kicked on his birthday. “Ian since you have made the arrangements so far, organise a meeting with the school’s choice of fighter prior to the 23rd”.

And so it was put into motion, details emerged of the fighter who was from a Shaolin style and was 29 years old.

Time passed, not a lot of it! Mike had been thinking of where to hold it and was having trouble deciding. The meeting took place north of Bristol after they had been in the country for a week or so. Mike and Ian entered the room. Ian had established that there would be three of them the fighter and two minders. They were seated at a table, the minders turned out to be monks and Mike was uneasy.

Prior to the meeting Mike had discussed possible venues with Ian and Mike had expressed his concern over the minders, then Ian had a brainwave and said that they could use one of the rooms in his camp, he would arrange it.

Mike took control of the meeting, the Chinese was five foot ten, tall guy! Mike said that the date had been arranged Sunday 23rd March, 2003. The venue was described and the Chinese asked what time would it start. He seemed incredibly confident especially after noticing Mike's age. Mike dropped the bombshell, 9 o'clock. The Chinese seemed pleased.

Now the Chinese believe their internal energy is high in the morning and drops towards the evening. "Good we will arrive in the morning at eight", said the Chinese. "Well you'll have a long wait because I mean 9 pm!", said Mike.

Silence fell over the room, after sometime they bowed to each other and both teams left.

Mike continued his morning training routines using both weapons and forms, his neighbours must have thought he was crazy since he performed these in his back garden under one of the old trees, (called Grumpy, but that's another story).

Simon had returned from the Gulf since his girlfriend was pregnant and was extremely upset with his father. Mike explained the reasons for the date but got nowhere. Simon said he wanted to go to the fight, but Mike refused since he was still unsure of the minders.

Linzi was very worried as well. So much so she offered to accompany Mike to the fight, he accepted but only to come to the hotel with him and stop overnight after the fight.

It was the 22nd. Linzi had come over to stop on the Saturday, Mike had the kids. Not much sleep was had overnight and on the 23rd Mike and Linzi took the kids home. They left for the hotel and arrived around 7.30 pm.

Linzi wasn't sure what to do while Mike was going to be at the fight and was nervous. At 8.55pm Mike left the Travel Inn for the camp, they kissed and he promised to phone as

soon as he could. Linzi would then phone the Exeter and Caldicot clubs to tell them the outcome. He arrived at the camp at 9pm exactly.

Mike was practically at his original fighting weight, not bad for an old man! Ian had been sent to the gulf but had organised the room and a little surprise.

“Well, here we go again old man”, thought Mike.

On entering the hall the Chinese was already in the area the two minders were sat away from it and there was the surprise! Sat next to them (either side) were two soldiers in combat uniforms with side arms. Mike smiled and thought “the sly old bugger! Well done mate”, but wished Ian were here.

He had taken two butterfly knives with him for wrist loosening exercises and had them with his uniform. He took out the trousers and put them on, the room was as silent as a cemetery. He started to twirl the knives, he had decided not to wear a jacket and the Chinese looked at his physique with some surprise.

The Chinese was extremely fit and would make Bruce Lee look skinny. He took some metal bars out of a bag and in true Shaolin style proceeded to break them over his head! Four in all.

Pratt! Thought Mike and jokingly offered him a butterfly knife! “See if you can break one of these”. They were stainless steel and Mike had wanted to make the Chinese lose face since he knew the task was too difficult. To his amazement the Chinese accepted the knife and Mike became worried. Wack! Well actually four wacks, not a chance! Mike took back the knife, not a mark on it.

He finished his exercises and so did the Chinese.

They bowed to each other and it started. The Chinese was fast and proceeded to stay out of range but try and intimidate Mike by executing strikes and kicks into the air.

“ I must be getting old, this is getting me bored”, thought Mike. Then the Chinese made his first move, he launched a spinning kick to Mike’s side. This came in extremely fast. Mike didn’t side step it but blocked it with a palm strike, the Chinese reeled and stepped back. “Wonder what you are thinking now smartass?”, thought Mike. The Chinese maintained his distance since his reach was greater than Mike’s. He decided to hit Mike with an outside knife hand, as he launched his attack Mike stepped inside with Crane’s folding wing block, which parried the blow with the palm again but moved into the shoulder with his elbow.

The Chinese was again knocked backwards and lost his balance. Mike should have moved in at this point but decided not to.

“Well you are good but you ain’t so smart,” thought Mike.

Prior to the fight Mike and Ian had discussed what should happen to prevent another fight from occurring, the only way, it was agreed, was to make an example of the fighter, in other words hurt him and badly. Assuming Mike still could.

So that’s when the bait was offered. Mike waited until the Chinese came within kicking range and exposed his left side the kick crashed into Mikes ribs and the Chinese seemed very pleased but was now within range.

(At this point 214 seconds of the fight had elapsed – one of the soldiers was timing it).

Years ago Mike had been practising a move from one of the traditional Five Pattern Hung Kuen forms. This move when executed properly, hit an imaginary opponent in excess of 60 times within 8 seconds. Mike used to get frustrated since he could apply 63 strikes in 8 but always wanted to reach

64 and never could. 64 was wanted since it was divisible by 8 and Mike liked the idea. He never achieved it until he started to train for this fight.

So, 214 seconds later, with an aching side, he started and 8 seconds later the Chinese hit the floor! The move is designed to keep the opponent up for as long as possible before he finally hits the deck. Mike was shocked, he counted 65!

Now the minders broke etiquette and rushed into the area to aid their fighter. Mike bowed and left toward the soldiers who were ready for trouble. The sergeant, Clive, spoke to Mike. "Ian had said we might learn something by watching the fight, but I have never seen anyone move that quickly. Do you think you could do that last bit again slowly?"

Mike replied, "If you think you can get him up, I will have a go!". They laughed and left the minders to look after their man, supervised closely by a corporal.

Mike got back to the car and left the camp and then made the call, it was 9.35pm "Hello you", he said to Linzi, there was an audible gasp as she tried to ask how he was. "Got an aching side but the Chinaman's going to hurt for a month!". He returned to the hotel and had to ring her again since she had the key! She came out and it became quite emotional, they walked across to the bar where he had a relaxing beer, it never tasted so good! The calls were all done and they retired for the night, he slept!

Time passed, even less of it. It was April and another call came....the return of the student had not been well received. What Mike had not known was that the Chinese was one of three brothers, two were related to each other the third was one of a Chinese cell (Triad). He was challenging Mike since Mike had taken out his two brothers, one from an early fight and this one.

So much for 2003 thought Mike, since he had been having problems with Linzi due to the age difference she was 26 at the time of the fight and would be 27 in April. He wasn't.. Understandable really...

So he considered his options and accepted on condition that he would retire after this one.... If he survived.

Well, here we go again old man.....

It was May – the 6th to be precise, nearly two months after the fight, Ian was still in the Gulf doing something... Mike's mobile rang.

“Good evening Mike, I have been asked to sort out the arrangements for the fight which you have accepted as your last, this has been agreed. My name is Stefan and I was a close friend of your Master, Vic. I have been contacted through Ian and also have an obligation to your Master from when he was alive. If it would ever become necessary to help you, I was to come out of retirement to make arrangements for you, I am here for this one last fight. I am now going to fulfil this obligation”.

The man's accent was foreign and sounded German. “Can I ask who you are?” The phone went quiet for a while then came back the answer which almost floored Mike, “ I was the man at your first fight and Vic's friend!”

Mike couldn't speak for a while. Stefan said “When I watched your fight all those years ago you were in your mid twenties, more than twenty years have passed since then, haven't you had enough by now?”

Mike answered, “Of course I have but this involves family and I can't take the risk of collateral damage. I can't seem to get away from the circuit that is why this condition must be fulfilled as part of your negotiation.

I am getting pissed off with people telling me I am past it, I don't know how good this guy is but if he thinks his brother was treated badly recently, then he hasn't a clue how I feel. Has he ever been in a life or death contest?"

Stefan said "I know this guy and he is lethal, fourteen fights without a loss and all opponents very unwell".

"Well he certainly sounds like Vic", thought Mike "So why didn't he just say the guy wiped them out?"

"What arrangements would you like me to make?" said Stefan.

Mike replied, "OK I am a 'senior', so lets take it by the numbers. Firstly, I want a meeting, my choice of date and venue, he can pick the time. If he refuses or argues, its off".

"I pick Saturday 17th May, 2003. You organise a meeting place. He can choose the time.

Secondly, at that meeting we will arrange the fight in terms of time, place and location.

Same conditions will apply for choosing. Can you negotiate this and arrange venues?"

Stefan replied, "I am good at what I do!, what concerns me is are you still good at what you do?"

"Stefan, I have no idea, so much has happened to me recently that I don't give a shit. It may be that I am slower it may be that he is faster I won't know that until the meeting. I intend to investigate his abilities at the meeting."

Stefan stated "Fighting will not be permitted at a preliminary meeting!".

"You miss the point, I have no intention of fighting him, just probing his abilities. Didn't Vic ever talk to you about this?"

“Talking with Vic gave me a headache sometimes he was so obtuse”, said Stefan.

“I had a headache all the bloody time”, said Mike

“Anyway, let him know I want a conversation about techniques from each style, from me Five Pattern Hung Kuen and from him Pa Kua, this conversation will last for at least an hour. He can bring one person with him for the meeting and the fight.

I want you to arrange the location – not near to home and I want you to be there, we need to talk.”

Then it came out in the open, Stefan said “You do realise this is being watched by the Triads, since he is a member of one of their cells?”.

Mike said, “Tell them that whatever happens in the fight there is to be no recourse afterwards, if I get my ass kicked then it is done, if he does then likewise. I have had enough of this now and shouldn’t even consider this fight let alone accept it.”

Stefan hesitated, and then asked Mike “Is there anyone close to you that they could use as a lever, by threats, if they needed to?” Mike replied that the only people close to him were his children and god help them if they even contemplated it....

He seemed satisfied with the reply and said that he would make it known that Mike had backup of a like kind if they chose to go down that path, Mike believed him.....and how, but said that they would bring dishonour on themselves should they consider it. To Triads honour is everything...

Stefan then said that it would be a good idea if Mike were accompanied by someone to the fight and if he agreed did he have anyone in mind....

Mike replied “I will not take any of my students or anyone else to the fight, but you are right, company after the fight is a good idea, as was proven in the last fight by taking Linzi.”

Stefan asked who Linzi was and Mike explained. “Too bad said Stefan, you could do with a friend or nurse!”

Stefan said “Do you want me to book accommodation then?”

“Of course, book it overnight for one night, I will arrange the company to be with me for after the fight, who’s abilities will be relevant whether I win or lose.”

He then asked the obvious question, “How good will I have to be to overcome this Chinese fighter.”

The reply came swiftly, “When I saw you at your first fight you were fast, confident and you surprised me, I had never seen anybody your age dispatch somebody so effectively.

Hopefully you have learned a lot over the years because the fighter I saw the first time, good though you were, wouldn’t stand a chance against this Chinese.”

“Ok, thanks for your honesty, put it all in motion, I will let you know the name of the person I am bringing with me when I see her next week, Oh and please don’t talk about it in her company because she has no idea about this as a concept and would be very upset by it.”

So, it was to be set in motion, Mike had a quiet confidence in Stefan’s organisational abilities along with his extraordinary contacts and wondered what the outcome would be.

Now Mike had made a promise to Linzi, on her birthday in April, that he would not fight the Chinese if he could avoid it. Well this would be a good trick if he could avoid it!

Anyway, they had become distant since the last fight and he thought “Well, so what if I can’t avoid it?”

Guess what? A promise is a promise and an obligation an obligation! If only Houdini were still around could he tell Mike how to get out of it?

Within Five Pattern Hung Kuen, as a system, there is a trust that once you are on a path you need to follow it regardless of personal cost. Over the years this trust in the system had caused Mike to lose two marriages, three children and a special relationship, which he let go of, to his cost.

However, it had also provided direction for him, so swings and roundabouts happen everywhere.

This fight was to be a big test of his trust in the system and was especially poignant since the man who organised two of his previous fights had resurfaced.

Oh well shit happens, in Mike’s case the only thing that varied was the depth....

For the first time, before a fight, Mike seriously considered going to the fight and not fighting, in other words giving in. This would satisfy his promise of not fighting the Chinese and also take away the threat of reprisals.....the catch was he wouldn’t be able to predict the degree of damage he might sustain. It would probably be terminal.

Then one day when he collected his daughter Cassie from school she bought him a fridge magnet, with a saying on it, not as deep as Confucious or as eloquent as Shakespeare, it just said

“ I dropped a tear into the ocean today, when they find it I’ll stop loving you”.

So I guess its down to the Chinese guy to be better and have a better support structure. If he has a daughter as caring as Mike's then Mike will be doomed, on the other hand..... True love moves mountains.... And a daughter's love moves the world.

So, Mike settled into his usual training regime and ached like hell, never before had he had two fights in such a close time frame. Still, it took his mind off his current situation, for a while anyway...

So Saturday arrived very quickly and Stefan had organised a meeting place. Mike entered the room and was introduced to the Chinese fighter, for a change he wasn't tall! He was, however, very fit and had a minder with him. Stefan sat next to Mike and started to discuss the preference for location and date, the Chinese could pick the time. It was decided that the fight would take place north of Bristol, the date would be the 22nd May, the Chinese elected for a start time of 1pm.

The discussion started with Mike describing the internal side of Five Pattern Hung Kuen. The Chinese seemed interested but amused. After 20 minutes or so he seemed unimpressed so he started to describe the internal techniques of his system Pa Kua. During the discussion Mike started to feel weary and tired and thought he had been overdoing it with the training for the fight. Then he realised it, the Chinese was not only describing his system but was attempting to use a technique called 'leeching' on Mike to draw his energy from him. This technique is not very common amongst many styles and when Mike realised what was happening, he thought "cheeky git" and soon put up a barrier to prevent it from happening. He considered returning the favour but decided against it, so as not to reveal too much about himself before the fight. Still he had an indication now of the Chinese' ability and thought that it would be an interesting contest, if he could survive it!

The discussion closed after about an hour and Stefan said he had located a place north of Bristol for the venue, Mike told Stefan not to bother booking accommodation for him, since it was within travelling distance and that he would not need to take anyone with him since his son, Simon, had offered to drive.

As they stood up to leave Mike was acutely aware of the spiritual side of his Five Pattern Hung Kuen system and felt the need to ask the Chinese a question, “Your father says that you should not have this fight yet since your leg has not healed properly”.

The Chinese looked bewildered and said that his father was dead.

Mike replied, “Yes two years ago, in March!”

The Chinese looked stunned for a moment then shrugged and left.

Stefan asked Mike how he knew about the injury, Mike replied, “his father told me...” and left the room as well.

The arrangements were made....

So, a little more time passed and in five days time Mike set off for a rendezvous with Stefan at Bristol. Simon, his son, drove him to the pick up point and he arrived there at 12.00 pm, Simon dropped him off and drove off for lunch.

Within 10 minutes Stefan arrived and collected him to take him to the venue. There was little discussion between them in the car since Mike was obviously preoccupied with thoughts about the fight. They arrived at the venue at 12.20pm and Mike was led into the area.

The Chinese was already there and was stretching to loosen his muscles.

Mike started to loosen up too. He watched the Chinese perform “Swallow Diving” and “Swallow Rising” techniques very rapidly, these are designed to attack an opponent’s feet and legs and then suddenly switch to the upper body.

“Yes, he is fit and fast and at 35 he is probably at his peak”, thought Mike. After 15 minutes or so, Stefan asked if they were ready, they agreed and entered the area.

So for the last time, it started....

“Oh well, I tried to avoid this but couldn’t keep my promise, sorry Linzi”.

The Chinese came in with a pushing hands technique, this was accepted by Mike and they attempted to unbalance each other by pushing. Mike had practised this many years ago, but not with such an adept opponent. He felt himself become unsteady and “cheated” by using Dragon’s Breath.

The Chinese was pushed backward some distance but regained balance quickly.

“What do you think of that?”, thought Mike. It was clear to him this was not going to be a pushover for either of them.

The Chinese advanced towards him and dropped into a very low stance with the intention of hitting Mike in the groin on the way up. The punch came in very fast and Mike parried it by stopping the Chinese’ other shoulder with a punch of his own. The Chinese stepped back looking a little concerned.

On stepping back he performed a reverse spinning kick to Mike’s side. “Oh no, not again!” thought Mike and used an internal technique to disperse the effects of the kick, it

bounced off his left side. Mike was becoming a little tired now and the Chinese caught this and smiled. A combination of punches and kicks flew at Mike but none connected, each was parried or blocked and then it happened...

To the Chinese, Mike appeared mad, he had dropped his guard and was looking away from him.

To Mike the last thing in the world he would have expected had occurred, he entered a trance state but not like before, he was conscious of his surroundings and could feel Dragon's Breath within him at the same time.

The front kick came at Mike's midriff very quickly, Mike was not there at the leg's full extension since he had already begun moving away to the side. His own kick caught the Chinese under the thigh muscle and the force of his opponent's kick was negated.

Under normal circumstances, Mike would have moved in on his opponent, but an awareness suddenly came over him, the Chinese' leg had moved at the hip joint and the joint was obviously loose. This was a weak point and Mike wondered if it was what he had said to the Chinese at the meeting.

The Chinese still could not understand why Mike was seemingly paying no attention to him, but could not get through Mike's defences. Then his attack came, a feinted kick to Mike's shin followed by a high kick, with the same leg, to Mike's temple.

From Mike's viewpoint the shin kick was never going to connect since he had placed himself at an angle and could have parried it with his foot easily. He had already felt, by the Chinese' posture, that the switch to his head was coming and so, on the kick's way up, he attacked the top of the thigh with a knife hand and heard a crack as it connected with the leg, this caused the leg to sway to the

side and as it did so Mike moved in with a Dragon punch to the hip joint, connecting between the top front of the leg and the joint. Both strikes were issued with Dragon's Breath.

The pain on the Chinese' face was obvious, he had sustained at least a cracked femur and a smashed hip joint, needless to say he went down.

It was obvious he couldn't get up and Mike was slightly confused that his usual trance state awakening wasn't happening since there was obviously no threat left....

Then he realised why, he was turning automatically to his rear and side stepping at the same time, a snake strike using two fingers of the right hand, connected with someone's throat but who?

The state dissolved, when he looked down the Chinese was laying on the floor and next to him was his minder desperately trying to breathe but choking instead.

The minder had obviously taken offence at his fighter's defeat and decided to have a go, from behind. Not very wise and a loss of face for him and the Chinese.

Stefan organised their departure once the minder was able to breathe properly, he assisted the minder in getting the Chinese to a car. Mike waited for him to return and give him a lift back to where Simon was having lunch.

The fight had lasted eleven minutes, very long for a fight. He got back to meet Simon just before half past one. Mike was quiet for a while, but relieved. After all there were to be no more fights.

Mike thought "it must be Thursday, I never could get the hang of Thursdays..."

He was resting, at last, sitting by the pool in Crete and wondering how it all ended. He was now divorced and was finally on holiday with his two children. He had concerns about the holiday without his former wife, wondering how he would feel, since the last time he was here they were together. However, it turned out to be fine. He sat there on the sun bed whilst the kids swam and swam and he felt content for the first time in ages, the afternoon passed into the evening and they showered and went out to eat in Cassie and Alex's favourite taverna. They returned to the hotel around eleven and Mike put the children to bed. He felt restless and went to the bar for a beer with the barman Nikos.

As he lifted the bottle he caught a glimpse of the shadow out of the corner of his eye. He and Nikos talked about the holiday since it was nearly over and he felt sad. He ordered another beer and saw the shadow again, moving across the back window and thought he might be drunk since it moved so fast...

One beer led to the next and after ordering the next one he asked Nikos what was through the window since it was quite dark outside, he was told it was just where the hotel kept their rubbish. The shadow moved again and Mike was getting irritated. So when he ordered the next beer he left by the pool door and went to the alley by the window. As he stood next to a tree in the darkness he could feel it, a presence, which seemed to be in the tree. "You can come down now", he said. Nothing happened. "I know you're up there", still nothing. Mike pretended to go back into the bar but waited around the corner, he heard a rustle and he quickly moved around and caught the shadow in a throat hold. He dragged it into the bar area where Nikos was waiting. "Do you know this person Nikos?", Nikos replied "No", but was obviously nervous since the shadow was wearing training clothes, Ninjutsu to be precise. "OK lets see what he looks like without the hood". Mike removed it and then sat down.... "You may not but I do", said Mike, "Hello Stefan, what the hell are you doing here and dressed

up like an idiot?”. “I came to see you since I was in the area, Ian gave me the hotel’s name and the uniform helps to blend into the nights surroundings, since I am not supposed to be here”. It was one o’clock and they had a beer.

“What is it you want?”, asked Mike. “I came to ask for your help, there is a fighter who is systematically challenging all of the fighters on the scroll i.e. all those that have won three fights in a row on the circuit. He isn’t using standard protocols since he challenges them anywhere, not in an area. We want him stopped, he has taken out three fighters already. Can you help?”

“Absolutely not, I am retired now”, “But your name is on the scroll too”. “Well if he comes after me that’s different, but I am not fighting anymore. If you want to stop him then find out who is next on the list and arrange a reception committee.”

“Are you sure you won’t help?” “That’s what I said, no chance!, now what are you really doing here since you must have known my answer would be no”.

“You always were quick, OK, I have a new protégé that works for special services from time to time and is trained in Ninjutsu, Karate, Aikido and Kung fu but needs an edge. I would like you to try and supply that edge, do you still teach?”

“Of course I do send him along to meet me when I get back and we’ll see.”

“Its not quite that straightforward, there is a timescale involved”.

“How long is it?”

“Six weeks time”

“Stefan, I am not a bloody miracle worker”

“I know Mike but she badly needs a differentiator and you’re the only one I know who may be able to supply one”.

“She? Is she Chinese?”

“Yes, will you help?”

“I am not sure what can be achieved in your timescale but if you arrange a meeting I will see, now I have to go to bed the bar is closing”.

“OK Mike I will be in contact when you return home, enjoy the rest of your holiday”.

They shook hands and he left.

“Oh, what the hell”, thought Mike, “she might even be good looking...but I must stop sitting by pools in future!”

The holiday came to an end all too quickly, Mike and the children returned home and he took the children back to their house.

Weeks passed and then the call came from Stefan. “Hi Mike, can we meet?”. They arranged to meet in the usual place – the pub. Mike asked Stefan if any more had happened with his new protégé. “Funny you should ask that Mike, come outside.”

It was a sunny day and they went to the back of the pub in the garden. Mike looked at one of the benches enviously, as he studied a young woman of around 33 years old, of Asian origin, she was stunning. Someone’s a lucky bugger thought Mike.

Stefan walked towards the bench, she stood up, Mike meet Mai. The young woman bowed, Mike returned it and offered a handshake, which she took. He felt the energy flowing through her body and thought “mmm not bad...”.

“Stefan tells me you are a martial artist, How competent are you?”

She looked at Mike quizzically and answered “adequate”.

Good reply thought Mike, “Come with me down to those trees at the bottom of the garden”. They both followed Mike to the seclusion of the trees.

“I want you to kick me in the side as hard as you can”, said Mike.

She looked at him in astonishment, “but..”

Mike interrupted and told her to get on with it, Stefan nodded.

She was wearing a Chinese dress cut to the knee and split up the left side, so she elected to kick with her left leg into Mike's right side.

Thud. The kick was a good one, remarkably hard considering her size.

"No one has ever done that before", she said.

"What, not fallen over?", said Mike. She nodded.

"Do you train with any weapons?". asked Mike.

"Quite a few", she replied.

"Is the staff one of them?"

"Yes".

Mike asked Stefan for one of his staffs. Stefan always carried an array of various "tools" and returned with one around six foot long.

He gave it to Mai. She felt for its balance and performed some rather elegant exercises with it. Yes she could handle one alright....

"OK Mai, when you feel up to it attack me with it".

She was beginning to wonder who the hell Mike was, but decided to carry on with the "discovery".

Mike ignored her and resumed his conversation with Stefan, the straight lunge with the staff should have hit the side of his neck except for the fact that he had turned away from it and knocked it to one side with the palm of his hand, she seemed bewildered but composed herself and caught the staff with the other hand, she now had the staff held horizontally to the floor with both hands clasping it, the intention was to ram the horizontal "bar" into Mike's throat.

Mike turned again and with a knife hand (from the old Karate days) chopped the staff almost exactly into two pieces.

He then twisted both pieces outwards, one with each hand, disarming her. On the disarm he moved in toward her and tapped her to the floor with the two sticks.

He dropped the sticks and helped her up. “No one’s ever done that before”, she said.

Mike smiled. She certainly had talent, but mechanical talent. Stefan had obviously spotted her ability but also its restriction.

“OK, now I want you to attack me with whatever technique you choose”. She looked at him again as though he was mad, after all she had considerable training in the martial arts.

She faced Mike in a high crane stance and waited. She could not understand why Mike was still talking to Stefan, it was then she decided to launch a crane’s beak strike to Mike’s temple. It never landed, Mike caught the hand at the wrist and locked the wrist, elbow and shoulder with only his left hand whilst his right hand “patted” her sternum, this coupled with his right leg behind her right leg, sent her gracefully to the floor with him on top of her, a very nice place to be...

Whilst on top of her he said, “and if you tell me no one’s ever done this before.....”, she laughed.

Stefan returned the pieces of wood to his car and they returned to the pub for a drink, Mike suddenly realised just how stunning the girl was and stared at her whilst they drank, so did most of the pub.

“You have considerable technical ability, but that’s all”, said Mike. She was polite and just nodded. “In six weeks I might be able to show you how not to care, this will improve your abilities since at the moment you are looking for a defence or an attacking opportunity, this slows you down”.

She sat patiently. “I don’t understand”.

“When you attack me I am not worried about it, I don’t care what you come in with since the outcome is inevitable, you have intention and a plan, I have none. This means my reactions are not hindered by emotion”.

“In six weeks I can teach you this and it should polish what you already know, I will not be teaching new techniques, just a new approach for you. Does this interest you?”.

She nodded politely and thanked Mike with the usual courteous bow.

Mike told Stefan to arrange a training venue for two evenings a week and said to call him when it was done.

They got up to go, when they got to their cars Mike said “It was very nice meeting you Mai, you obviously know that you are very attractive and this is possibly another of your weapons, but when you come training, lose the dress and wear something more practical”. She laughed and they left.

The idea of not caring about an attack is a very difficult one to assimilate. This is because it is the body's natural reaction to duck or flinch when attacked. Martial Arts of all kinds try to teach a student to avoid this reaction and face the attack, the idea being if you can see it you can do something about it. This gives a Martial Arts student the edge over a pub fighter since he can then use the large repertoire of techniques to allow him to do something about it. However, when you watch two Martial Arts fighters sparring the outcome is usually similar to watching two pub fighters slugging it out.

So a differentiator is needed and this is what not caring gives a fighter. No preconceptions.

Mai turned up for her first lesson and yes she had lost the dress, in its place was a simple Kung Fu uniform, still it looked good!

“What did you think of our first meeting?”, asked Mike.

“It was very confusing, I am extremely well trained in Martial Arts and have never been disposed of so effectively”.

“Well, no matter how many techniques you have, there will never be enough combinations to cope with every attack, just some or most at best”.

“OK lets begin”, Mike asked her to take a ready stance and when she settled into it, he told her to hit him.

She waited and after a time launched a punch to his face, very rapidly... it missed and her arm was caught at the wrist. She seemed annoyed and whilst the arm was trapped she attempted to kick Mike, this was stopped by the edge of Mike's foot. Mike released the hold and told her to take a ready stance again.

OK relax and I will hit you, all you have to do is block it. She watched him intensely but although she caught sight of the arm movement, she was powerless to stop it from hitting her chest. It didn't Mike had stopped it before it was due to make contact.

"Shall we try again?", said Mike. She seemed confused again, "How can you move that fast?"

Mike realised he was in for an uphill struggle. So he took her back to basics. "I want you to look away from me, do not attempt to watch for the strike I will be performing on you, trust me you will be able to block it, but only if you don't watch for it".

This seemed madness to her, but she thought she might as well try it.....

She waited and when she was beginning to be comfortable not looking, it came. It was incredibly rapid but more importantly her hand was moving to intercept it without her thinking about it. She slapped the strike to one side and accused Mike of slowing the strike down.

"Can you see how effective you are if you don't think or care?". "That was first time luck but if we build upon it you will be able to do it every time. Interested now?"

She nodded. "So we can start now for real, close your eyes and breathe deeply, in a moment you will feel heat on your back let me know if it gets uncomfortable".

She waited with interest and after a minute or two her shoulder blade began to glow and then the heat increased rapidly but it wasn't uncomfortable. Mike asked her if she felt OK, she nodded after another minute or so the heat started to decrease and eventually stopped.

"How do you feel?", asked Mike. She said that she felt light headed. Mike warned her not to get up for a while otherwise

she might fall over. Typically for a Martial Artist she decided to test the statement and stood up quickly.

She fell over.

“What was the point of the exercise?”, she asked.

Mike explained that she had just experienced energy transfer and that with a little training she would be able to detect energy flow in everyone, this would help her body to detect when an attack was coming and allow her body to take control of the situation rather than her brain having to look for it.

She seemed confused. “Still interested?”, asked Mike. She replied that she was and would like to continue with the training.

Mike asked her to return the following day and they would continue with her “refinement” process. “Oh, and I like your pyjamas”. She laughed.

She returned the following day with her pyjamas, Mike asked her to get changed and waited for her in the room. Mai came into the room and looked different, Mike couldn't quite detect exactly why she looked different but began the lesson anyway.

“Looking at the way you move I would say that your Kung Fu style is Pak Mei, am I right?”

Mai looked puzzled, “How did you know?”

“Your moves give the style away, you are too circular, but I can fix that, lets start with your breathing techniques, how many do you know?”

“There are only two, what do you mean?”

“Who told you that?”, said Mike.

“I have trained in the martial arts since I was 12 and in all of that time I have only discovered two techniques one for power in strikes and one for relaxation”.

“So you would be surprised to know there are some fundamental breathing techniques for all types of occasion, there are twelve basic techniques for self development, lets see which two you know”.

“Show me the relaxation technique”

She sat on the floor on the back of her heels in a typical martial style and began to breathe slowly and deeply from the stomach not the chest, classic!

“OK I have seen that before lets try the other one. Hit me in the stomach using it. In your own time....”

“Mike, I can break bricks with this technique you may get hurt.”

Mike smiled and asked her if it was more powerful than her kicking ability....

She looked at him quizzically but was told to carry on. She adopted the usual low stance and moved her arm backwards and forwards twice, then with a sharp exhale and a loud shout hit Mike directly in the stomach.

To her surprise he didn't fall over. He smiled and asked her how her hand was. She didn't speak for a moment then, when she had got over the shock of seeing him standing there she asked him why he was not injured.

“Well, you have just experienced the use of another breathing technique”.

“But that punch was capable of killing someone”.

“Apparently not me” and he laughed.

“I don’t understand, how did you do that?”.

“All in good time Mai, I am trying to change your traditional mindset and introduce you to easier ways of fighting”.

“Is it Chi Gung techniques?”, she asked.

“That would be the usual interpretation by Kung Fu schools, but its really a lot simpler than the demanding discipline of Chi Gung, you would need to train in those for years, I only have 6 weeks”.

“”Will I be able to take a punch or kick like that?”.

“I hope so, though if anyone tries it while I am around, you won’t get chance to find out, because I will deck them”

She smiled and so the relationship started to develop.

The training started shortly afterwards, she had agreed to come to him twice a week or more, if necessary, so it began.....

At first she was like the usual martial artists, wooden in moves. Mike began to explain to her how the lack of caring method worked, she had already experienced this when she blocked Mike’s strike but could not understand it at the time.

So, she started by being taught how to re-evaluate her punching ability this was not a direct criticism of her methods of striking but an attempt to get her to look at them from a different viewpoint.

He started with her punch to his stomach and asked her to repeat the technique again but this time to watch the resulting impact on both her fist and his body.

As she connected, it was obvious that a rock had hit a hard place. Except, there was more strain on the rock.

“OK that is what I expected, now lets try something different, you know two breathing techniques, one for power one for relaxation, that one was used to generate power?”

“Yes, it adds to the punches velocity and force, I can break bricks with it.”

“Well, so you say and I don’t doubt it for one minute, however bricks are hard and have a breaking strain, bodies are, more or less, elastic and give. Obviously there are parts of your body which have a breaking strain as well, such as joints and bones.”

“So, if I were to hit your ribs there would be more chance of a break?”

“Of course but depending on the training mechanisms used a break is not always guaranteed. So lets try something different.”

“I don’t want to change my style in these weeks, just to improve it Mike.”

“I don’t have time to change your style, so you should be OK. Well, this time I want you to hit me with exactly the same technique but I want you to use the relaxation breathing technique with it”

“I don’t know if I can do it?”

“Then you’d better try, now in your own time, hit me”

The hand moved backwards and forwards, as before, and moved fast, very fast towards Mike’s body. It hit. Mike moved backwards under the power of the punch.

“What happened, why did you move backwards?”

“I didn’t, you did it and with remarkably more force than the first one.”

“I don’t understand, I didn’t try as hard.”

“Well, best stop trying in future!”

“We will explore this lack of effort and caring in the time we have together and it will give you several advantages such as being able to fight longer since the effort is reduced and being able to hit far more effectively than you currently do.”

“OK, its 6pm that’s enough for today. What are you doing tonight?”

“Making lots of notes!”

“That can wait, you won’t forget what you have learned so quickly.”

And with time honoured technique, he dragged her to the local pub. They sat in the lounge area, she was going to go into the bar until he suggested that with her looks, she would probably have a fight started over her. So they went to the lounge. He ordered a pint of Stella Artois, unusual for him, and asked her what she wanted to drink. She ordered a soft drink so Mike bought her a San Miguel, the most popular bottled lager in Hong Kong, when he was there.

“Mike I very rarely drink!”

“Mai, I very rarely take just one student to a pub and when I do they buy!”

They sat in the corner and talked. It was 6.15pm.

“I had a conversation with Stefan about you and he mentioned the fact that you could gain an advantage from me, he also mentioned the fact that you were an expert shot with many different types of weapons. I expect you also know how to use a knife properly.” She nodded. “Well in the last week of the six, we will examine your usage of a knife and polish that as well.”

“Mike, when it comes to weapons, there is not much more that I can learn.”

“Really? Does that include the six foot staff?”

“She laughed, point taken!”

“Well you are beginning to lighten up in my company and are even getting used to my sense of humour! So, I know from my conversations with Stefan that you are probably involved in some kind of agency work, which you won’t be able to discuss with me. “

“Mike I.....”

He cut her off. “Listen I have no intention of prying, since it really is none of my business, I am doing this as a favour to an old friend. I have to know, for the sake of your training and my sanity, whether your departure has the possibility of you not returning.”

“Why is that important to my training?”

“There are two reasons. It will decide the running order of the remaining training I will be giving to you, in other words it will set my priorities.”

He got up and ordered another round of drinks and this time bought sandwiches for them. She sat there deep in thought, probably wondering what she could say to him without compromising herself or her position.

He returned to the table and sat down, they drank while she remained silent.

“Shit”, thought Mike, “This is going to be difficult, a few weeks martial training left and one week of weapons, I need an answer”.

He decided to let her answer in her own time, because she was obviously having a problem deciding.

“Mai, do you know the Chinese story of the Cat and the Tiger?”

“No, why?”

“Well it explains the difference between me and most traditional Chinese teachers. If you were training regularly with me you would probably get bored with my stories but you’d have to suffer them anyway.

So, years ago, before the Tiger became an agile hunter, it used to hunt with brute strength and stamina, mostly though it just ran fast in a straight line and pounded its prey to death with its powerful paws and jaws.

One day, after eating, it wandered through the jungle and met a cat, it had never seen one before and was about to eat it when the cat said that it had seen the Tiger hunting and thought it wasted too much energy. It promised the Tiger to improve its technique in turn for its life. The Tiger had just eaten anyway and the cat wasn’t that big, so it agreed. The cat trained the Tiger over the next few days teaching it how to hunt with agility, turning, stopping, changing direction to confuse the prey and after 3 days the Tiger was proficient in hunting and preserving energy during a hunt.

The cat had finished the training and was taking his leave of the Tiger when the Tiger pounced on the cat, who side stepped the attack and ran up a tree. The Tiger stood at the bottom unable to get to him and looked at him quizzically. “How did you do that, it asked.” The cat looked down from the tree and said to the Tiger “that was the one thing I didn’t teach you!””

“I don’t understand?”

“Well most teachers don’t pass on all of their knowledge to their students, they always hold something back to remain the best. This is how the martial arts have become diluted over the years, few masters are willing to part with all of their knowledge, they are cats. I am not, I need the information from you, to teach you the best way I can, to make you the most effective fighter that I can, I cannot hold anything back that might help you. This may mean teaching you things that you are not ready for.”

She sat and thought about this, still obviously perturbed. Mike had a drink and waited as well, the sandwiches turned up and they ate. Mike had noticed that most people were watching them.

“Oh, here we go again”, thought Mike, “the age thing seems to be bothering the blokes, its not my bloody fault if I am lucky enough to be out with younger women. Just hope some tosser doesn’t mention it cos I’m not in the mood for it tonight!”

Mai, sat there quietly eating and drinking, when they had finished the sandwiches, Mai asked, “Mike, you said there were two reasons, what is the second?”

Well, if you can leave your drink for a minute we will retire to the darkness of the garden and I will show you the second. They got up and Mike led her out to the back garden, it was no longer light out there and she was looking confused, expecting that her daily lesson was not quite finished.

“Follow me to the bottom of the garden by the trees, please.”

Mai thought that Mike had suddenly become very formal, so she followed in anticipation. They reached the trees and Mike stopped.

She was wearing the same dress that she had wore on their first meeting, not the most practical kung fu uniform.

“OK, Mai I want you to close your eyes and listen to the trees and feel your surroundings. I then want you to find out where I am and attack me, with your eyes closed, but in your own time.”

“How do you want me to attack you and how will I know where you are?”

“Do you really expect an answer to that? You won’t know where I am and how you attack is up to you.”

She stood and composed herself with the relaxation breathing technique. Mike was slightly impressed she had been paying attention! After a few seconds the attack came, Mike had stepped quietly to the side, but Mai had attacked where he had been stood in front of her. You could be forgiven for thinking that this was stupid, since he was no longer there, but she had not intended to attack but to use the ‘strike’ as a subterfuge for the immediate spin around and backfist delivery to Mike’s head, a bloody impressive move, except for the fact that this was Mike and he caught it as she opened her eyes. Then the second reason was explained, Mike twisted the caught wrist, pulled him to her and

Kissed her.

Not good form, but Mike had never, in all of his years of practising, wanted to look good. Anyway, she kissed him back and so the relationship changed. They went back inside and had a quiet drink.

“Why did you do that?”, she asked.

“Two reasons, you are probably the most beautiful woman I have ever seen, let alone trained and it might give you a reason to come back, why did you do it?”

“Mike, I wanted to, I have never met anyone like you and in China, age is not a problem it’s more of an advantage, oh and in answer to your question, yes there is....”

Mike explained that it would in no way affect her training, if anything he would be harder on her from now on. She didn’t seem to be concerned. The weeks passed, very fast.

Week 5 came and he re-evaluated her techniques, which were now so fast and precise that on a technique level she was now better than him. He did not have enough time to teach her the other aspects of internals but doubted that she would need to be that good anyway.

So, on the first day of the final week she came into training in the usual dress which he had come to love her in and had brought a bag with her as requested.

Mike asked how many kinds of bladed weapons she was used to, she opened the bag. Inside were : butterfly knives, throwing darts, single sword, single broadsword, double broadsword, chain whip, tanto and several kinds of commando knives.

“Ok, quite impressive, what do you normally use?”

She took out two belt knives and a standard commando style knife.

“Well, we had better find out what level you are at. Do you attack from the front or behind?”

“It depends on the situation, mostly from behind, but when I am attacked its usually a frontal attack”.

“Ok, lets see you do a frontal attack”

She picked up the commando knife and attempted a very fast lunge to Mike's throat, only to slow it down before it reached its target. Mike was furious as he disarmed her and told her so.

"Mai, when I said attack me I meant kill me, not go gentle on me, so we will do it again, but this time I am your enemy and will sure as hell take you out if you don't commit to the attack".

She nodded somewhat embarrassingly and started again.

She used the commando knife in her right hand and attacked Mike's face with her left hand holding a belt knife, whilst attempting a foot stamp at the same time. Mike parried the left outwards to disrupt her balance and moved his foot away from the stamp, these two attacking moves were designed to distract him from the knife coming at his head from the side.

Mike's left hand caught the commando knife hand at the wrist just as the belt knife reappeared at his groin area, his right hand was already moving downwards and outwards and caught the other wrist. Both wrists were twisted outwards by his grip which was designed to make her drop the knives, she, however, was a lot better than she used to be and used his grip to steady the kick which she launched at his tan tien. It landed, but Mike had already felt this happening and stepped into the kick adding force to the disarm, she dropped the knives and he took her remaining leg out and her to the floor, where he kissed her. Not exactly good teacher student etiquette in the martial arts arena!

He helped her up and congratulated her on the multiplicity of attacks.

"I am now confident in your martial abilities and am quite relieved, your knife skills are quite remarkable because I didn't see the belt knife until I had to, however, I have a

week to show you other ways of attack and defence with the knife.”

“Mike, I had intended to kill you with that attack and that worried me because I don’t know what I would have done if I had”.

“Mai, I care about you more than you can know, the only way I could be confident in your success was to see if you could kill me, I am happy that you could, but even happier that you didn’t!”

“Mike, what if there is somebody out there as good as you?”

“Easy, come back and get me!”

They kissed again and held each other for a while.

The week disappeared all too soon, Mike had not re-educated her in blade techniques, since she was an expert already but he had shown her different aspects of the same moves, which surprised her greatly.

During the evenings of the last week they spent every night together, Mike explained that he wouldn’t do that during the first 5 of martial since he didn’t want her distracted, but in the last week he hadn’t had much to do really. So the last evening came on Saturday and they went out, Stefan was due on Sunday.

They went into town, Mai was quiet for some time, eventually she asked,

“Mike I didn’t realise you had so much knowledge of weapons, is this part of your system as well?”

“Mai, traditionally it is, however easterners are more dedicated to learning different aspects of a system than westerners who are really only interested in unarmed

techniques. I only teach weapons to a select few and then only if they ask.”

She thought for a while and then curiosity got the better of her, “How many weapons do you know?”

Mike thought about the contents of her bag and said “those you brought with you, the single and double broadswords, halberd, three sectioned staff, wooden staff, hand pikes and Japanese katana, Sai - all on their formal level. However, realistically anyone good at weapons, should be able to pick up a weapon they had never used before and find an application for it instinctively, I had to use a pair of chopsticks a few years ago to get out of a sticky situation and no, it wasn't rice!”

She laughed. They went around a few locales since they were open late on a Saturday but the time went too quickly and they got a taxi back home and retired.

They were up early the next morning since Stefan was coming around 1pm. They were both depressed and again, the minutes passed away like seconds.

He arrived at 12.45pm and greeted them both eagerly. “Well how did she do?”

Mike said “See for yourself...”

They went into the garden, Mai led the way followed by Stefan then Mike, as she went through the door into the garden, Stefan attacked her, she turned into the attack and floored him ending up on top of him, Mike looked at him, Stefan was white. He had a belt knife pressing the skin under his adam's apple.

Mai let him up, he was visibly shaken and said so.

“Will she do?”, asked Mike, “Yes”, he said.

“Stefan, when this is over I want to see her again, you arrange it for me, OK?”, he nodded.

Then came the time that they had both been dreading, she had to leave. She went over to Mike and kissed him, he held her for a long while, “Mai”, Mike said, she looked at him and nodded, “I want you to promise me something from a student to a teacher, not from you to me”. She looked anxious and nodded again.

“As soon as you leave, I want you to promise me that when you think of me it will only be as a teacher not Mike”.

“Mike, that’s not going to be possible!”

He said, “I m not asking you to forget me, just until you do what is required of you, when it is over you can come back, but if you have me on your mind in the wrong way it will affect your performance and I want you to come back.”

“Remember me as the bastard who made you look stupid for a good 4 weeks.”

She nodded, Stefan told her to get in the car and they went.

Mike wondered if he had done a good enough job, only to screw it up by getting involved, still it would be a good test of her character and of his.

He suddenly felt empty and could not face going home just yet, so he parked the car on the drive and walked to the pub at Sunday lunchtime. He couldn’t eat and stared at his drink for sometime, fortunately he had a lot of friends in the pub and it eased his heartache and worry a little. He started to think of his students who he had somewhat ignored during the past month and half. “Best get myself back into training”, thought Mike.

Training.....

It was a wet cold Wednesday evening as he walked down the road toward the hall. It was 6.30pm and he was not too far away now. He carried a holdall with a tracksuit inside. Walking down the road in London he passed the down and outs and beggars pleading for money, he was not in the most salubrious of surroundings and felt threatened on more than one occasion. At last he could see the light shining through the bottom floor window and he arrived at the door at 6.45pm. The room was empty so he waited inside nervously. Ten minutes, or so, later the students started to arrive. Stephanie told him to follow her and showed him to the men's changing room.

He changed into his tracksuit and followed the other lads out of the room into the training area. The students were doing gentle stretching exercises until the master came, at 7.00pm he arrived and walked directly over to Stephanie.

“Take the warm ups and put him on 20 of each exercise, after all he is a black belt!”

Stephanie went to the front of the class and told them to line up and take their timing from her. Mike hadn't been told how to perform any of their exercises yet, but the lad next to him described each one in detail, 20 sit ups, 20 split kicks, 20 clap ups, 20 long squat thrusts, rounds of bunny hops, etc, etc it lasted an hour after which he was totally wiped out. His track suit was wringing with sweat and he was breathing heavily.

The others seemed fine, Vic walked out onto the floor and told Stephanie to walk him through each stance and correct any mistakes. So followed 30 mins of stance work and this weakened him even more. After the stance work, Vic asked Stephanie to pair each of the class members off and go through sparring techniques.

He summoned Mike over to the other end of the room and started...

“Show me how you punch”.

Mike demonstrated his normal Karate punch and it was very fast for him.

“OK, now lets see if it’s any good! Hit me in the stomach!”

Mike was slightly bemused because even though he had got over the pounding from Stephanie, last time, he had not actually hit anyone. So he asked Vic if he was ready.

“I was bloody ready when I walked through that door of doubtful parentage you asshole!”

Mike wondered what was going to happen, guessing on the result of his last visit, he thought Vic would probably block it and sort him out so he resolved to hit as fast and as hard as he could.

He judged the distance perfectly and the speed with which the powerful Karate punch travelled at was impressive, his stance was locked waiting for the impact and there it was, he hit him! For a fraction of a second he was elated that he hadn’t been blocked then he realised nothing was happening...

“What the hell was that?”, asked Vic, “You punch like a child, what was the black belt for? To let you know when your white suit was getting dirty?”

Mike was bewildered, he had hit him with the breaking force of 4 one inch boards and he had been laughed at.

“I expect you realise that you have got quite a bit of work to do if you want to train here properly”

Mike nodded and said nothing.

“Can you take a punch?”

Mike said that he could take a reasonable punch in Karate competitions and in class. He wondered, however, the difference between his idea of being hit and Vic's. Not to worry though, he was about to find out.

Mike was suddenly very worried, Vic moved towards him and said

“Take a strong stance that will let you take a stomach punch, use everything you know to stop it hurting you”

Mike stood in a low zenkutsu dachi stance (a forward facing stance), he looked at Vic and became very worried. Vic left him there for a minute or so then went over to Stephanie and took her place.

“Go over and when he is ready hit him hard”

Stephanie was not too enamoured with this as a concept but knew better than to argue with Vic so she went over to Mike and asked him to let her know when he was ready. He nodded and tensed. She hit him, he flew backwards at a rate of knots around 6 to 8 feet then rolled. He had been expecting a practised wind up and was waiting for it, she just appeared to tap him in a very relaxed manner and the rest just happened.

Vic swapped places again and Stephanie, bless her, helped Mike up. He looked at her, she whispered, “I would like to say I'm sorry but its not allowed.”

Mike understood and accepted the unsaid apology.

“Come over here”, Vic was looking directly at him with steely eyes.

“I am about to teach you only two techniques tonight, the way you ‘learn’ them will let me know if I am wasting my time.”

“First we will try and get you to hit properly”, Mike didn’t realise it, at the time but he was about to undergo a rare experience, **Vic** took him through the re-education of his punching. This lasted 30 minutes and at the end of it he was asked to hit Vic again. He emptied his mind of all the things he knew and kept in mind what he had just been taught, he hit Vic in the same place and felt nothing.

Which was mystifying because Vic moved backwards, slightly.

He stood there confused and Vic told him he would now be taught the second technique. “Show me kiba dachi” (riding horse stance). Mike realised that Vic knew about Karate, since he was using the Japanese names for stances. Mike assumed the stance and Vic criticised the height of it and told him to sit lower in the stance.

He lowered his stance and the pain shot through his thighs like white fire, he wondered why, since he had practised this for years, he had forgotten until now that he had already done over 200 exercises this evening. It hurt, hurt like hell and Vic knew it. Vic wanted the stance almost textbook perfect and said so.

Mike didn’t realise it at the time but this was to be a yardstick in his training further on down the line. Vic told him quite matter of factly not to get out of the stance until he was told.

The first five minutes were the worst.

The next five minutes, they were the worst too.

13 minutes into it and his back and legs were screaming with pain, his outstretched arms which started off parallel to the floor were sagging and the pain in his shoulders was also becoming unbearable.

In the 14th minute he was about to drop and Vic knew it, he had been watching all of the time from the start of the first minute. Mike's body was visibly shaking and at the stroke of the end of the fifteenth minute he dropped to the floor.

Vic looked at Stephanie and nodded, she ran over to Mike to see if he was alright, he tried to get up but couldn't and fell over. His legs, arms and shoulders were shaking.

Vic ended the class and looked over at Mike, who looked back at 'the spawn of the devil' - Vic.

"See you on Friday?", he said and walked to the changing room to get changed.

"Is he always like that?", Mike asked Stephanie, "Dunno, no one's ever stayed up that long."

She helped him up and he limped to the changing room. Vic was dressed and looked at him, Mike said nothing, just looked. Vic left. Wednesday was over at last and Friday was only 2 days away!

Mike ached continually from the moment he left the training hall until the next visit, still he slept well on Wednesday night!

So, it was Friday 6pm and he was off to the hall again wondering what nightmare awaited him tonight. He arrived early and this time let himself in and went to get changed, He went to the training area and slowly and painfully stretched his muscles, God it hurt, he felt like a 60 year old. He knew that there would be more humiliation tonight but he was determined to stay the course and carried on stretching until the others arrived. Stephanie came in and

asked him how he was, she looked concerned and told him she hadn't expected to see him tonight. Mike told her that the best way to treat a fall from a bike (or horse stance) was to get back on again! She kissed him on the cheek just as Vic walked in, shit what rotten timing thought Mike. Vic leered at him, Mike carried on stretching.

"Back again then lad!", Mike nodded, "Don't speak much do you lad?". Mike said "Sorry, but its only my second time and I haven't got used or even learned the rules yet."

"Well if its not worth saying, you are wise to keep your trap shut!", he walked into the changing room and the others walked into the training area.

Stephanie looked sheepish but smiled at Mike, who returned her smile. He hadn't noticed it before, but she had the nicest eyes and the kindest smile he had seen in a long while.

Vic returned and the exercises started again, after he had stretched out they didn't seem too bad this time and he managed to cope with them very well all things considered.

It was 8 o'clock and Vic took them through the usual stance work, Mike had already worked out the similarities of the kung fu stances compared with karate, for instance kiba dachi was almost identical to horse stance, zenkutsu dachi compared to dragon stance etc. Vic was quite surprised at not having to correct him (and probably pissed him off!), later Mike had told him it was Stephanie's teaching!

Mike was right in thinking it was going to be another night of humiliation but was wrong in the context of the event.

After the stance work, Vic paired everyone off and proceeded to demonstrate some take down techniques, he put Mike with Stephanie and smiled. It was about then that they came in.

Two rather large blokes who Mike would have sworn were West End Bouncers they came in and sat down. The fuse was lit!

Vic looked at Stephanie who went over to speak to them asking them if she could help them. Some banter was passed back and forth and she looked uncomfortable, now Mike didn't know the correct form in the class but he could see that she was bothered so he bowed to Vic and indicated Stephanie, asking without saying, if he could help.

Now Vic must have been curious because he nodded and Mike went over to Stephanie. Mike was, at that time, 5 foot 9ish and was around 11 stone. The seated 'gentlemen' were not. Around 6 foot 3 and huge.

Mike asked them if he could help. "Just go and sit down sonny come back when you have a coloured belt and have grown 6 inches".

Mike motioned Stephanie to go back to the class, Vic was watching all of the time with interest.

Mike said "as it happens I have a coloured belt, most of us do, we just don't wear them"

"What colour is it, pink or yellow?", said King Kong. Mighty Jo Young his mate just laughed. Vic hadn't taken his eyes off Mike.

"Well, actually its black, but its in karate and not this system, I was floored by a beginner when I first came here and I was very good at karate."

"Well that's why we've come here, to see the teacher of this system, they say he's as hard as nails and that interests us", said Kong. Jo cracked his knuckles.

It was now obvious that they had come looking for trouble.

And then for the first time ever, it happened, he heard Vic's voice, not lad or son, but "Mike, come over here please". Mike bowed and went over to Vic.

"Pansy!", said Mighty Jo.

Vic bowed to the class who returned it. He walked over to the gentlemonkeys and asked what they thought they were going to achieve by coming here. Kong replied we have heard a lot about the teacher here and want to know if its true. "Depends what you've heard", said Vic.

"That he's unbeatable, so we've come to find out."

"What both of you or just one of you?"

"One's all it will take, where is he?"

"That'll be me then....", said Vic

They laughed. "You are taking the piss".

"OK, maybe, maybe not but piss is right, because you are pissing me off, so get your ass on the floor, one or both I don't mind either way".

They got up, bemused as Vic walked backwards into open space. They followed. Then it happened, Vic went to 'sleep' standing up!

They jumped him, he wasn't there and in three lightning fast moves they were hit and propelled out of the door a distance of at least 12 feet into the road.

Vic, 'woke up', "OK where were we?", said Vic and carried on teaching.

Mike was astounded, they hadn't laid a finger on him and he still didn't know what had happened except that Kong and Jo had slipped on a hell of a banana peel. It was as though Vic had been hypnotised.

The evening's training ended and no one spoke of the occurrence. Mike asked Stephanie what she was doing after and suggested a beer. She agreed and they went around the corner to a pub.

Mike bought the drinks and they sat down in the lounge.

“OK Steph, what the fuck was that?”

She thought for a minute, had a sip of her drink and said “nothing really, just Vic”

Mike thought about it and asked “so what did he do to them”.

“Got rid of them, they won't be back they never do, when you get hit by Vic properly, you don't want to be hit by him again”.

“Steph, they never touched him, you saw the size of them”,

“Mike they never do, no one does, when he goes off into that distant gaze routine no one does. Oh and thank you for coming over to help”. She kissed him on the cheek again.

Mike walked her home and returned home himself, he wasn't going to sleep well tonight.

He had arranged to meet Stephanie on the weekend , she wanted to take him out in London, he thought it would be a good way to quiz her some more about the system and Vic and so the training was cemented into him, having seen what had happened on Friday he was going to learn the system whatever Vic had in store for him.and there was plenty in store.

He was stopping in Earls Court and Stephanie had got the tube across on Saturday night to meet him and introduce him to the delights of 'Little Australia'.

He was stopping in Philbeach Gardens and met her in the "Cromwell" pub. Stephanie turned out to be really good company, they were of similar age and background and got on really well, a couple of hours had passed and a few drinks had gone down. Steph was in her early 20s and when she wasn't in a kung fu uniform had an absolutely stunning figure and Mike told her so, unfortunately, it didn't go unnoticed and when Mike went to the toilet, someone else moved in.

Now when Mike came out of the toilet, he was confronted by a slightly drunk Aussie trying it on, Mike thought do I let it go or interrupt, knowing how hard she could hit. Then it hit him, she was in trouble and although she could more than cope with herself in the controlled environment of a class room, a pub was a lot more threatening. The Aussie was a typical fit surfing type so Mike thought it was time to leave.

He went over to Stephanie and said it was time to move on, she got up but the tall Aussie objected to Mike's interference. Mike explained politely that Stephanie was with him and helped her up and out of the pub.

The Aussie followed. Stephanie was worried and said so, Mike told her to keep him between her and the Aussie at all times and to let him handle it. The Aussie approached Mike and issued forth a few kind Aussie expletives, more or less suggesting that Mike was going to go surfing on his head down the road. Stephanie looked worried but stayed behind Mike.

Mike watched the Aussie's balanced walk (he would have fallen off his surf board in that condition). The Aussie used all of his finesse to charm Stephanie, he swung a haymaker

at Mike's head. Mike blocked it with a karate block and spoke Aussie to him..... he hit him in the nuts.

They went on to the next pub. "Karate isn't all that bad Steph, it has its place, for a cricketing nation he didn't manage to bowl a maiden over."

She held onto his arm and they went into another pub. Mike bought two more drinks and she said "I didn't know what to do, Mike, in class it would have been easy but faced with that in a full pub worried me."

Steph, it shouldn't have happened anyway, but look on the positive side if you weren't stunning you may have been upset at being ignored."

She went to kiss him again he turned his cheek towards her but she pulled him closer and snogged him.

All in all quite a weekend, thought Mike and it wasn't over yet. (This event caused Stephanie to re-evaluate her training later).

Stephanie suggested they go to a club, so they got the tube to the West End and stayed out until around 4am, all in all a very nice night (apart from earlier). They were both slightly drunk so, since Steph lived closer she suggested they crash around her place. So they got a cab to her place and went to bed.

On Sunday they went to lunch in Westminster, a carvery. Over lunch Mike asked her what she knew of Vic. As it happened she knew a fair bit "I'm sort of one of his favourites, although he doesn't actually have any, really, its not like him."

"OK tell me about him".

“Well I first started training in jui jitsu but became disillusioned, so a friend heard of a new club opening and gave me the details. I went around and there were about 8 who turned up”.

“He introduced himself and it sort of started from there. Apparently, he started off in the special services and used to do sort of hush hush things in the far east. While he was out there he got involved with some unsavoury types and sorted a fair few of them out. He ‘bumped’ into the Grand Master and somehow was accepted into the school for training in the system. This was unusual since he was a foreigner and the Chinese didn’t take too kindly to outsiders. However, he had a fairly close relationship with the GrandMaster and trained every chance he could. He eventually was awarded a Master grade himself and became one of the most feared fighters out there.”

“What do you mean feared fighter, did they have competitions?”

“No Mike, not what you would call competitions, each kung fu school would have its own top fighter and from time to time they would arrange fights between themselves. Some of them got quite nasty. Apparently Vic was quite exceptional at these contests and is still undefeated”.

“Christ that explains the monkeys at training”.

“Monkeys?”

“Yes, King Kong and Mighty Jo Young on Friday”.

She laughed.

They finished lunch and Mike was starting to form a certain respect for his teacher who seemed to have one method in dealing with undesirables, put up or shut up!

Mike was working in the Civil Service at the Empress State Building behind the Motor Show Exhibition Hall. Stephanie was working near there so he suggested that they pick up a change of clothes and training gear from her place and stop around his for the night. They could both go training together on Monday after work.

Stephanie was up first in the morning, Mike was in the Civil Service and start times were a reasonable 9.00am, Steph wasn't and started earlier. She suggested that they meet for lunch so they met in the Cromwell again.

Mike was quite relaxed for a change, the challenge of learning a new programming language was keeping his brain too active and her company was relaxing.

Lunch went all too soon and it was back to work for both of them. They both finished at 5.30pm and met once more, this time changed and carrying kit bags ready for training.

They went for a drink (orange juice, cos of the exercises) and waited until it was time to leave for training. They were growing on each other and liked each other's company.

Soon it was time to go and they arrived once more at 6.45pm at the training hall, to Mike's surprise Vic was already there and changed for training. He was going through a set pattern of moves which reminded Mike of the kata he practiced except that this was far more powerful and had a lot more emphasis on breathing techniques.

That said the speed with which Vic moved was awesome, Mike had seen Sensei Harada of the Karate do Shotokai school, perform kata years ago but this was far more than that.

He watched the pattern come to its conclusion and stood there amazed.

Vic had obviously caught this and asked Mike if he was any good at forms (since he wasn't very good at fighting).

Mike hadn't been asked to perform any kata by Vic since Mike thought he was disinterested. However, Vic asked him to show him one and told Mike to pick "a good one".

Mike thought about it for a while and chose "Bassai" this has quite a few different applications within it and to his surprise Vic quite liked it. The other students were arriving and stopped to watch the kata. Mike was, for the second time, feeling quite good about himself and after he had finished he thought it had been one of his good attempts!

He waited for a reaction from Vic, after a few moments Vic said "You cocked that last part up!"

"You know it?", said Mike, seeming extremely surprised.

"Not really, most forms/patterns/kata, have similar movements within them, I understand the application of the movement whatever style it comes from. You ballsed up the last set of moves, let me show you how they should be done."

And he did...

Considering he hadn't seen the detail before, his explanation of the movements' applications described something that Mike hadn't been taught before. It was obvious he was right, the more Mike thought about it.

"Ok, lets show you part of a pattern from this system and see how you do". It was from the snake form and he demonstrated the first thirty moves of it, only once.

"Ok, now you do it!"

Mike expected to be taught it move by move, but this didn't happen. So he thought again and ran the sequence of moves over in his mind.

"Is it a test?", he asked, "maybe", said Vic.

And so it started, he performed the correct moves in the correct sequence. Vic was visibly surprised, he had repeated the first part of the form almost perfectly, albeit without the correct breathing techniques!

He waited for a reaction, "lucky bugger! But you forgot the very first moves". Mike was surprised at this and said so.

"Before I started the form I announced its name and gave a formal salutation, you didn't".

"I didn't think it was part of the form", said Mike.

"All of our forms are announced before they are performed."

So Mike learned another valuable lesson.

The evenings training progressed in the usual manner, then at the end, after around two hours, the class was leaving to get changed, just as Mike started to leave the room Vic said

"Before you go, show me again".

Mike was taken by surprise at this and looked puzzled.

So he went to the middle of the room, gave the salutation and announcement and started.

He did the same as the first time, this time Vic looked really puzzled.

"How did you remember that after two hours?"

Mike said that he just did.

This was a kind of an ace up his sleeve, he had always had the knack of remembering forms after being shown just once.

Their relationship was about to change slightly....he just hoped he hadn't pissed Vic off.....he didn't know it but he hadn't.

What happened next completely surprised him, he had changed and so had Stephanie and they were planning on going out to discuss the evening, she was more than curious about Mike's ability to remember patterns. They planned to go to the pub once more (as was becoming their habit).

Vic asked Mike where they were going, so Mike told him and Vic said "Good, sounds OK, I'll join you, I could do with a beer".

So the three of them left and went into a nearby pub, Mike asked them both what they wanted, but Vic said he would get them in, so Stephanie had a vodka and lime, Mike a Stella and Vic a large Tiger beer.

Christ he even drinks like the Chinese, he thought.

They sat there wondering what to say, but didn't need to, Vic's attitude had visibly changed, as soon as they had got outside of the training hall, he seemed more approachable.

Ok, lets get this in context, he changed from an active tiger into a resting leopard. Still bloody dangerous...

Vic said, "Mike, how were you able to remember the moves from the pattern?".

"I have always had a kind of photographic memory for kata, my instructors used to get frustrated by it, since they had to repeat the forms over and over, before getting them. It is

slightly better than photographic, since that takes 'still pictures' mine takes 'movies'".

Vic decided to test this further and did a close hand set where the movement is restricted to a radius of about a foot. Anyone looking at it would just think he was explaining something.

"Can you repeat that?"

"Quite crafty, you chose a form with restricted movement and sometimes one hand obscured the other. However, I have one question before I try".

"What is it?"

"When your hands formed a reverse letter X (one hand palm up, one hand palm down) were your thumbs tight to your hand or loose?"

Stephanie couldn't make out Mike's question and looked puzzled.

Vic didn't answer directly, he simply told Mike to work it out.

"Oh shit", thought Mike, "another bloody test".

Anyway he repeated the hand set and had a drink and waited...

Stephanie looked at Mike as though he had just landed from Mars. "How did you do that Mike?"

"Wait Steph, I don't know if it was right or wrong" and said slightly louder, "He's a crafty bugger", and waited...

Vic was in a contemplative state and Mike wondered if he'd gone into his 'far off gaze routine' and started to feel uncomfortable.

Then, suddenly Vic said, “You performed the X cross hands with the palm up thumb loose and the palm down thumb tight, were you hedging your bets to get it half right?”

“Was it right or wrong?”

“Answer the question smart ass”

“Well, since I didn’t see it properly I had to go through the set, move by move in my mind and the two moves before that, looked as though they might be picking something up, when I thought about it I concluded that if they were, it was probably a knife, hence the tight and loose thumbs”.

Now for the second time in one day Vic looked stunned.

“It was right, go get some more drinks Mike, same again”.

He’d used his name again...

Mike was at the bar ordering the drinks and thinking he had been fortunate, because whether Vic knew it or not he had just taught a complete form to him to practise.

He carried the drinks back to the table and as he placed them on the table and sat down he saw three not so wise monkeys enter the pub.

Kong, Jo and a rather bigger version of them both.

Vic wasn’t looking in that direction since he was sitting opposite Mike.

Mike said “Vic...”, he was cut off by him.

“I know, my two friends are back, who’s the third?”

Now since he was looking at Mike and there were no mirrors in front of him, how the hell did he know about them and the third? So Mike asked...

“Well, having hit them I know their body signatures and can sense it”

“What about the third, how did you know about him?”

“70/30 guess, if they had come in here by accident they would have reacted more nervously when they came in, since they feel quite calm they must have brought a bigger friend with them, which means they were pissed off at being beaten and want some sort of revenge”.

Mike was only just starting to realise that this system was more than just self defence, it had weirder aspects to it. Vic wasn't just a fighter but a bloody magician, he could feel a person's presence.

They carried on talking, the monkeys ordered their coconut milk and bananas (beer and nuts) and the big new one started staring at Vic, who ignored him.

“Ok, Mike (his name, the third? time!), explain the hand set, I did choose it to make it difficult for you and take the piss a bit. Watching a form is one thing, watching a deceptive hand form is another, explain”.

Before Mike could answer, the new monkey came over, Vic was waiting for an answer, Stephanie was worried, Mike was trying to draw his attention to the imminent approach.

Vic had all but finished his drink, must have been thirsty or was getting into the swing of the evening.

He approached Vic from the side his body with his back to the bar and facing Vic. If you were at the bar you would have thought he was just there for a conversation with his friend. He was and wasn't.

He must have been slightly phased, because he got no reaction from Vic at all who was sitting holding his glass. Vic was waiting for Mike's answer and Stephanie said "Vic...."

He nodded and said nothing, he patted her hand and nodded again.

His 'friend' said "You hurt two of my friends recently, do you know who I am?"

Vic looked up and said "Yes, as a matter of fact I do".

His 'friend' looked perturbed. "Ok, who am I?"

"Should have thought that was obvious.... a fucking idiot".

"Well you sure have a way with words", thought Mike and moved his chair back slightly.

This clearly didn't impress him and with a very quick move, he pulled a knife out from inside his jacket.

Mike thought that he had obviously done this more than once since he was quite skilled with it. He wondered why Vic had done nothing, but Vic was still looking unconcerned and looking at Stephanie.

"Son, you had better know how to use that knife, pulling it in a crowded bar is lunacy. Either use it or put it away, but if you decide to use it you can pick anyone of these nice big stained glass windows".

The 'friend' looked confused and said "what for?".

"I always give assholes a choice of how they will leave a bar if there is more than one window".

The 'friend' must have thought it was Vic who was the lunatic, since he still had his back to the bar and looked like he was talking, no one could see the knife except for Vic, Mike and Stephanie.

Mike was holding Stephanie's hand and watching the other two monkeys, just in case...

The knife hand moved only about two centimetres intending to slash Vic.

At that instant the base of Vic's glass slammed into the knife wrist as Vic's other hand's knuckles slammed into the opposite side of the wrist.

Needless to say the knife fell onto the table as Vic's hands reached around his 'friend's' neck and slammed his face into the table top.

His left hand pressed into the base of the skull holding his face to the table whilst his right hand had the point of the knife against his neck.

"I suggest you take your two friends away from here and never come near me again, otherwise I will give you this knife back – point first!"

Point taken...

He let him up, blood was running down his face where his nose had connected with the table. His friends helped him out of the pub. Vic walked over to the bar and the landlord came over to him. "File this with the others", said Vic.

Vic came back with another round and a bar towel for the table. Mike cleaned the table, returned the towel and sat down. He put his arm around Stephanie who was upset.

Vic said “Well?”

Mike said “You knew he was going to pull a knife?”

Vic said, “That’s not what I meant, I am still waiting for an answer, that idiot wasn’t important”.

Mike thought, “Christ, he’s still on about the hand form! Well one of the hobbies that I have always had is card tricks and sleight of hand, so I am able to follow hand movements reasonably well”.

Stephanie said, “You never told me that, can you show us one?”

Vic looked bemused, so Mike agreed and showed them a couple of coin tricks which impressed Stephanie, he told her he’d show her some card tricks later. It was near closing time and Vic, apparently, had a good evening. So they left and went home.

Stephanie and Mike arrived at her place around 12 and Mike wanted to talk to her about the evening but especially Vic’s response.

Mike had been thinking about Vic since the incident and was puzzled by his lack of concern, he certainly was a bloody enigma, three possible attacks from three big blokes and all he did was ignore it and pat Steph’s hand and drink beer.

“Steph, was that normal for him?”

Mike, at some point you will realise he isn’t your normal martial artist, sometimes he uses pure techniques, probably like when he was in the services and they had specific techniques for attack and defence, sometimes he uses that far off “I’m not here technique”, usually when he doesn’t know what to expect.

Tonight must have been a standard knife technique since he let them walk away, the other would have seen police cars and ambulances everywhere. He was obviously in a good mood and was enjoying himself!”

“Mike, you didn’t look at all worried tonight, why?”

“Well I am pretty good and although the monkeys were huge, Vic was there. If I had to help I could have but there were three of them and three of us.”

“Mike, I’m not sure I would have been any good”.

“You wouldn’t have to be Steph, they wouldn’t have got anywhere near you, Vic would have seen to that and on the odd chance that they did, I would have been in their way”.

“I have to say, that although I am extremely confident in class, I haven’t really experienced anything until these last few occasions and training hasn’t really prepared me for the reality of street fighting. They don’t seem to care whether they get hurt or not”.

Mike put his arm around her and said “look Steph, most of the jokers you meet on the street have got lucky once or twice and they think they are invulnerable. The reality is they haven’t a bloody clue but rely on false confidence to impress people. The sad thing is it works with most people and they get away with it.”

“Mike how do you know who is the real threat and who is the joker?”

“Well that depends, in my experience, the real fighters who can, don’t make a big thing of it. They just do it, if and when it’s necessary. The others tell you how good they are.”

“Anyway, its late so lets go to bed” and they did.

His programming work wasn't going so fast as normal, he was too preoccupied with thinking about Vic and wondering what the hell his background had been. He wondered if Vic would ever tell him or any student and was very curious.

He had been going to training regularly now three times a week and was getting quite good at forms, even Vic had said so, a rare compliment.

One Wednesday night a new prospective student came in, Mike could tell by his posture and the way he walked that he was a martial artist of some sort and watched.

It was early, 15 mins or so before the class was due to start and Vic arrived. In his usual manner, he noticed the new guy and ignored him. He got changed and came into the hall. The new lad was around Mike's age and asked him about the style, Mike told him what he could but gave no information away about Vic, after all he'd had none.

The new lad introduced himself, he was called Ian and Mike introduced Stephanie and told him the instructor was called Vic. Ian stared at Stephanie for a while and then saw Mike looking at him slightly sternly. He became uncomfortable and looked away. Mike started to chat to him, apparently they had something in common, he worked for the MOD as did Mike.

"Well, Ian what style do you practice?"

"I have trained in quite a few, Karate, Hapkido and Kenjutsu, not because I couldn't stick with any of them, just because my job, as you know, takes me around the country quite a bit and you never know what club is going to be there. So I adapt to whatever is at the place I am staying. My tours usually last between 18 months and three years depending on the complexity of the project(s) at hand."

"So how did you come to be here at this training hall?"

“One of the guys in work knew somebody who’d tried it then got reposted and he told me.”

“Ok, word of advice, its bloody difficult to get in here, if you tell Vic you are here to try it out, he’ll tell you to piss off and stop wasting his time. Take it from me I have attained senior grades in different martial arts, but they are nothing compared to this.”

Ian looked interested and asked Mike how to approach it.

Mike told him very simply, go up to him and ask him. Ian looked perturbed and asked when would be the best time, Mike told him that it would be good now before they started.

Ian approached Vic and Mike looked as they talked. He was wondering if he would get the same treatment as he had when he tried to join the class. They talked for a while and Ian came back. He told Mike that Vic had said he could watch if he wanted, so he sat and waited while the class got ready.

The class started and the warm ups were finished. Ian was looking on intently.

Mike wondered what was in store tonight, still he had finally got used to the warm up session and was raring to go.

That evening they were taught a new form, form 1 as Vic called it. Ian was watching intently. Steph was struggling slightly so Mike asked Vic if he could help her. He was expecting some put down from Vic like “Cocky Bastard!” but to his surprise Vic nodded. Now considering this was the first time anyone in the class had seen form 1, he was taken aback by Vic’s attitude, still after all of the form had been shown, Vic said “Mike, show me form 1!”

Mike went to the centre of the hall and stood to attention, he performed the salutation that Vic had done and said loudly “Form 1!”

He performed it almost as second nature but this was different, although he knew moves after being shown them he felt weird, natural sensations, as he performed it. It came to an end and he came back to the ready stance.

He waited for instruction from Vic, none came. After what seemed like hours (only seconds had passed) Vic spoke, just one word “AGAIN!”

He knew not to argue or ask what he had done wrong the first time, so he just got on with it. It ended again....

“RELAX!”

So he did.

“How did it feel?”, Vic asked.

“Peaceful, but with a strange flow almost like swimming or being pulled along by the tide”.

Vic, nodded, “Exactly, its one thing to repeat a set of moves but quite another to experience their meaning”.

Mike was beginning to understand what he meant and nodded.

“OK, you can now give me a rest and teach the class, I want it move perfect by everyone in an hour”.

Vic sat down and started to talk to Ian, while Mike taught the class!

After an hour, they had it reasonably well and they all went through it together in time with each other. Form 1 is recognised by differing schools of Kung Fu since it

resembles the Tai Chi forms so commonly seen in the media. It is, however, far different in its content as Mike would find out later.

Anyway, Vic, seemed pleased with the class and surprised Mike again, he bowed to him and took over the class. What followed was an explanation of some of the applications and as normal, all too soon, the end of the session approached.

Just before Vic dismissed the class he made them all sit down and told Mike he now had three forms from the system, the original first part of a snake form, form 1 and a hand form. So, in true Vic fashion he sat with the class and told Mike to do them all, but in reverse order.

This time Mike was convinced he wasn't taking the Michael, And he performed Form 1 (and the feelings started again) then he performed the hand set, very few people saw much of it and lastly he performed the snake form and this time the form took him along with it.

“So this is proper Kung Fu”, thought Mike, he went with the form rather than drag the form with him. At the end he felt exhilarated and was breathing heavily.

And it happened again, Vic bowed and went to get changed.

The class looked bewildered, Stephanie came over to Mike and said “How do you do that, it looked like you were floating?”.

“Don't know Steph it sort of pulled me along with it”.

“Still, everyone else in the class can do it now”.

Ian, stood up and came over to them,

“Mike, do you mean to say that you have never done that form before tonight?”

Mike told him it was his first time and Ian looked bewildered.

”Well what did you think of the session?”

Ian said that he was particularly interested in Vic’s explanation of part of the forms application.

“Look, Steph and I are going for a beer as normal, after we get changed, if you’re doing nothing come with us for a chat, first rounds on you!”

Ian waited, they came out with Vic, who was in a good but contemplative mood.

“You coming for a beer, Vic?”, said Mike.

“Well I am supposed to be meeting someone tonight, but if you want you can come, it’s in a different pub though”

Steph, nodded and she, Mike, Ian and Vic left for the pub.

It was further away than their ‘usual’ but after 15 or so minutes walking they arrived at a ‘spit and sawdust’ pub.

Steph looked a bit worried and to be honest, Mike wasn’t sure, since they had had trouble in a respectable pub. Ian didn’t know any different, so they all went in.

Vic went to the bar and ordered the drinks leaving them sat in a corner of the room. Ian was full of questions, Vic brought the drinks over and went back to the bar.

That’s strange thought Mike, he usually sits with us, anyway Ian was full of questions and they sat and chatted and got to know one another. Steph, made it quite clear that she and Mike were seeing each other, just in case...

They finished their drinks and Vic was still at the bar, Ian said he would get a round in and the evening started to take a turn for the better for a change, quite pleasant really!

Mike put his arm around Steph who was relaxed and waxing lyrical about the earlier forms. Ian came back and quizzed Mike about his ability to remember forms and Mike quizzed him in turn about his training. It looked like they were becoming friends.

Mike had just about drunk half of his pint when he came in, a big bloke, about 6ft 3ins (about 2 metres for the kids out there!)

Mike had an uneasy feeling about him by the way he walked, in a direct line straight toward Vic. Vic had his back to him and as he got within 4 feet (over a metre!) Vic said,

“Hello Stefan, how are things?”, pretty remarkable when you consider Vic had his back to him. Still, that was Vic.

Mike wondered who he was and half listened to Ian and tried to listen to Vic with the other half.

Stefan and Vic talked for about an hour and Mike was getting pretty curious but held it back, wondering whether this was a social call or not. It did appear to be more business like though.

Mike got up and went to the bar for another round and asked Vic if he wanted one.

“Mike this is Stefan an old friend of mine”.

“Pleased to meet you”, and Mike shook his hand, a firm vice like grip.

“Do you train in martial arts?”, Mike asked, as he got a round in.

“No, Vic and I knew each other when we were in the services”.

He had a German accent, which made Mike wonder even more.

Mike wondered if Vic was in the German army or Stefan in the British.....

“We sort of bumped into one another in Germany”, said Vic.

“We’ve known each other for years”.

“Come over and join us if you like”, said Mike, and took the drinks back to the table.

“Who is that?” said Steph.

“A friend of Vic’s, he’s German”, said Mike.

“Oh, he mentioned something about a friend in Germany who had some sort of involvement in arranging/coordinating fights for various kung fu schools”.

“What sort of fights?”, asked Ian.

“Inter school contests”, said Mike, “Steph told me he was involved in Hong Kong”.

”What like competitions?”, Ian said.

“Not really, there are apparently no rules in these”, said Mike.

Ian didn’t understand and wondered what the hell he was thinking of getting himself involved in.

Ian was very curious about the concept of inter school fights and the lack of rules. How the hell did it work?

Steph told him that the German guy (Stefan) apparently arranged the fights and venues. It was all a bit hush hush since the fights weren't exactly legal. He had quite a few contacts across Europe and the UK and they allowed him to use their venues.

Ian still had a problem with getting his head around the no rules scenario, there must be some kind of referee, he thought. He asked Mike what he knew of it and Mike said he hadn't a clue, but he had seen Vic dispose of three guys at once and didn't imagine that Vic would fight in any other sort of contest.

Vic brought Stefan over to their group and told them that training would be off in 2 weeks time since he would be out of the country.

Ok, so the group were curious and Mike asked the question they all had in their minds, "Who are you going to fight or is it a surprise?".

Mike had never been one to wonder about a subject when a direct question could solve it.

Vic looked slightly surprised by the question, but said that Stefan had organised a fight for him in Europe against a Chinese opponent. Mike couldn't quite get the concept of "wanting to fight" in this way and said so.

Vic told him that he was on "the circuit" and had a number of fights to complete before he gave up. It was an obligation to the kung fu system he taught and couldn't be avoided.

"Ok, so what if you say no to the fight", asked Mike.

"You need to understand, from the outset, that if you ask to be taken onto the circuit and you are allowed onto it, you

commit to a number of fights. This is a commitment to your school and to the circuit and you cannot refuse a fight until you have completed that commitment”, said Vic

This all seemed alien to both Mike and Ian, but Mike was intrigued by the concept and decided to quiz Vic some more about it at a later date.

Vic and Stefan said goodbye to the group and left the pub, leaving them to talk the concept over. Ian was green when it came to knowledge of the system and asked Mike what he knew of this fighting commitment. He also wanted to know how a fighter could feel “comfortable” with no rules to protect him.

Mike said that he was new to the concept as well, but he had seen Vic dispose of three attackers up to now and Vic hadn't been perturbed in the slightest. He just didn't care Ian....

Mike asked Steph if she had spoken to Vic about the “commitment”, she said that he had once told her that you could commit to any number of fights but the absolute minimum was three.

“How many has Vic had?”, Mike asked.

Steph said that she was unsure, but thought this would be his third.

They had an interesting hour speculating about the first two and Mike was wondering if spectators were allowed to be present. Anyway, it was getting near to closing time and they left the pub. Ian went back to his place and Mike went back with Steph.

So the two weeks came and went quickly, training by Vic was cancelled for the next few weeks, but the class could still train if they wanted to, to keep in practice. It seemed odd to Mike not having Vic in the room to bollock him but

the three of them practised forms and went through hand to hand techniques as though he was still there. Communication with Vic was non existent and they felt concerned – Steph not so much... she felt pretty confident that China was going to have another casualty to look after!

Mike and Ian talked about the concept quite a lot, in the pub after training, neither could get to grips with the idea.

Steph wasn't bothered and just accepted that Vic would come back as usual and as if nothing had happened.

So, after 3 weeks, he returned. They trained as usual and you would never know that anything was different, Indeed to Vic nothing was. They went to the pub as usual, after training and Vic was his usual self.

Mike had a pint and Vic bought another. Mike couldn't resist it any longer and asked Vic when he was going to tell them what had happened.

Vic said "nothing much, he lasted longer than most.."

"What's longer?", asked Mike.

"90 seconds", said Vic and continued drinking his pint.

Steph laughed and said "I told you so!".

"Can you give us any details?", asked Mike.

"That's sort of a problem", said Vic.

"When I fight I use a technique called trance state, which doesn't allow me to see too much of the fight".

"Then how the hell can you win it?", said Mike

"It fights for you, what I can tell you is only what an observer sees – Stephan"

So followed a detailed description of trance state and the punishment meted out to the Chinese opponent. Mike and Ian were in awe of the explanation and hardly believed it. Steph just went with the flow.

Mike was finally beginning to understand why she wasn't bothered or worried, she trusted the system and since Vic was her instructor, didn't have a doubt that he would not come back.

This was the turning point for Mike – trust, given absolutely, there is little need for concern. Doubted, even slightly and its all up for grabs.

So it was then that Mike's interest in this thing called trance state was sparked. He was determined to learn the technique and made it a point of getting Vic to teach him it.

This was not as easy as it seemed to him since not everyone is capable of learning it, it chooses you, not the other way around. Vic explained that there were breathing techniques that could be practised but there were no guarantees.

So with breathing patterns and forms Mike walked the long road to learning trance.

Not Disney entrancing but Trance state.

The problem is one never knows if its right or wrong only if its effective and you can judge that by still being alive!

So after a lot of training Vic said to Mike "OK hit me with your best shot, straight in the shoulder!", so Mike thought pratt won't argue I will just do it.

Now, if a normal punch is equivalent to dynamite then, after all the training this was going to be nuclear! So he hit him but he suffered, his arm muscles shattered on contact and his chest ached....

“You ok asshole?” said Vic. Mike was obviously not and said so.....so Vic said, “I have heard of you speak of IRON SHIRT but that’s just for protection, what you need to realise that there is another technique that hits back!”.

OK so lets digress a bit.... Mike was confident in his abilities, however Vic was too, so later it would be the obvious move to fight each other, this was the crossing point and had to happen. The realisation of this caused Mike a problem.....he respected Vic but knew he had to fight him and win! So how do you do that? Well the only way he could think of was not to “know” him....a thought that was later to come back to haunt him, any way horses for courses...

It took Mike a long time to work out just what had happened to him and eventually, after much thought he decided to ask Vic about the technique.

His response was unfathomable, Mike thought he had tipped over the edge. Vic told him that the technique had nothing to do with body hardening, or Chi routing but had everything to do with colour!

“Yep he’s lost it”, thought Mike (for a second), yet he couldn’t deny that he was physically hurt by the concept. So he decided to explore it more....