

S.H.S.

XONARYE



XONARYE TO RISE AGAIN

XONARYE SERIES

XONARYE

Australia

DEDICATION

To my beautiful children Rachel and Heidi. Proud so, proud of who you are and what you have become to date on your journey of life. You are my inspiration for this and countless things in my life.

XONARYE

Australia

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CHAPTER 1

Unlike most adventures, quests, or journeys that started a long time ago—or the old catchphrase “Once upon a time”—this story starts now, in the modern world 2019. If you want to know something, you have technology at your fingertips, ready to spit out any information that you desire. However, what if something isn’t available on a search engine? I am not talking about some small detail like what a random celebrity’s budgie’s name was—something much larger, far more important, and unique. Your brain is churning over wondering what on earth this mysterious information might be. This secret has a lot to do with the earth. In fact, the earth is hiding it and not many people know of this existence. You want to know more? Well, read on.

The story starts in a place that not many of you have heard of, a small country town called Naracoorte. You are likely thinking, *Where? How do I even pronounce the name?* Well, you have heard of Melbourne and Adelaide in Australia, haven’t you? It’s nowhere near either of them. So where is it? Go four hours south of Adelaide and five and a half hours west of Melbourne. That is where you will find Naracoorte hugging the borders of South Australia and Victoria. What’s even there? To be short, not much. I joke—they do have a claim to fame, as they say. There are the Naracoorte Caves, which are World Heritage listed. You can see some wonderful sights and see the past of fossils and some megafauna species.

Here we meet a young man who has just started a building apprenticeship with a local builder in town. Meet Leaf Brodie, a

nineteen-year-old knockabout country lad, standing at an average size of just under six feet, with a scrawny frame that his body will grow into. He has short blackish hair and ocean-blue eyes, with a smile that could get you out of the biggest hole or even melt a hardened heart.

It's the middle of January and a sizzling hot summer day. We find Leaf working hard on an elegant old farm homestead that needs a lot of work to bring it back to its past glory. He's wearing a tank top and footy shorts, and he is drenched in sweat. He is in the bathroom with a hammer and chisel and is breaking the tiles off the wall to prepare for a brand-new bathroom. He places the chisel next to the edge of a tile and swings the hammer down upon it, forcing a few tiles to bounce off the wall and then burst into tiny bits on the floor. He breaks more tiles off the wall, and this time some of the wall comes away. He thinks, Damn it. Now I'll have to repair the wall before I have to install the new ones.



As Leaf's eyes adjusted to dust settling through the sunlight coming through the window, he noticed something lying on a piece of timber from where the wall broke away from. It was a rectangular beaten-up rusty-looking metal box that has seen better days.

As he picked it up, he could hear something slide about in the box. He thought it odd that a box was hidden in a bathroom, of all places. Leaf attempted to pry it open with his hands; however, the locks were rusted shut. Clearly, the moisture from being in the bathroom over the years had done a number on the box.

Leaf grabbed his trusty hammer and chisel and started whacking into the hinges in an attempt to gain access to the contents of the metal box. After a few minutes of laying into it and sweating some more, he had success. It was finally open. What Leaf found inside was a rectangular object wrapped in black hessian. Carefully and very delicately, he unwrapped it.

Leaf's mind was jumping around while wondering what in the heck was inside and why had someone had gone to so much trouble to look after the item. All of a sudden, his phone on top of his esky started

ringing. His mate Summo—Dean Summers—was calling him. “Hey, mate,” he said, “we still good to meet with Spence at the pub after work?”

“Yeah. Hey, Summo, I’ll be there for a beer later,” replied Leaf.

Hanging up the phone, he noticed the time and decided to pack up for the weekend and call it quits. He did a quick clean up of the mess he had made in the bathroom and packed up his tools, tossing them in the back of his old white ute. About to take off, he remembered the box that he found. He ran back in, grabbed it, and flipped it onto the passenger seat next to him. He put his foot to the floor and started heading back to town to go home and get changed.

Home was a three-bedroom brown brick house where he still lived with his parents. Leaf was an only child in the family. His mum worked at the chemist in town, and his dad was a truck driver. They were good parents who raised him to show respect and to work hard. They too were raised with these values by their parents. They pushed hard for him to have a trade, as they believed it would set him up in life. And with the way technology was advancing, it’s a job that would not be getting replaced by technology anytime soon.

Pulling up in the driveway, he jumped out and went inside to get ready to head down to the pub to meet the boys. He decided that he would drive down and only have a couple of beers so he could get up and get something done in the morning.

The pub was a hive of noise and activity, with groups chatting away, ordering drinks, and coming down from a long week’s work. Making his way through the crowd, he spotted Summo and Spence standing around a table and chatting, a beer ready for him. Summo was still in his black chinos and white checked shirt. He has just started a cadetship at the local car dealership. He had short blonde hair with plenty of gel in it to style it with swish from the left to the right. Spence couldn’t look any different, wearing work boots, dusty jeans, and a woollen jumper. People could tell he was working hard. As a son of a farmer, there was always plenty of work to do. He had brown curly hair and was of a stocky build, quite different to Summo who had an athletic build to him. Spence face was scattered with freckles around his face as well. The three of them were all around the same height even though Summo thought he was the taller of the three. You couldn’t get a more interesting trio: a famer, a salesman, and a tradie.

He shook hands with his boys and took a swig of his beer it was nice and cold and very refreshing. Then they talked about what went on in each of their week. After about an hour of reminiscing, Leaf decided to pull the pin and head off home. Driving back home (under the legal limit), he saw the metal box. It had completely slipped his mind.

CHAPTER 2

Pulling up to his home, Leaf grabbed the metal box and headed inside. No one was home. He guessed his parents had gone out for tea. Heading to his room, he finished unwrapping the black hessian bag. What in the world can be so important to keep something so protected? Ran though his mind yet again.

After opening the bag, he saw an old leather-bound book, with leather straps and bronze buckles keeping it shut. On the front was a large *X*, with the word *Xonarye*. The *X* was outlined black, filled in with a deep blue, with the top right and bottom left corners of the *X* halfway up and a diagonal white strip cutting though the blue and black. The *X* itself felt like it is protruding off the leather, apart from the white angles.

Sitting on his bed, he examined the rest of the outside of the book with his eyes and hands. There was nothing on the back or spine of it. Fumbling around with straps and the buckles, eventually he was able to prise it open. Clearly, from the age of it and how difficult it was to open, it had not been opened in God knows how long.

Slowly and carefully, Leaf opened the book to reveal elegant free-flowing cursive English writing. Leaf squinted hard at the writing in an attempt to read it. This was going to be a real struggle for him to read it. It was getting late, and he didn't have the energy to fight with the words on the page, so he called it a night.

He woke up the next morning with a sense of determination to see what this book was all about. Sitting up in bed, he opened the book for round two. He started to read it slowly to himself.

Xonarye: The History of a Great and Proud Country

This book was written by me, Aneil Zeryan, the last leader of this country. Xonarye was located where the Gulf of Aden now is, bordering Yemen, Somalia, and Djibouti, making what the Red Sea is now previously the Red Lake. We were a peaceful country and reasonably poor economy-wise. That all changed when we discovered a resource that would change the country dramatically. We discovered a mineral called Xzed, which is easily pliable into almost any item you can imagine and is basically indestructible. It changed our country into a thriving economic powerhouse in the region. With this being the only place where the mineral could be found and with the country flourishing, it brought conflicts from other countries. Jealously, money, and power-hungry countries came to claim our country and the sites for Xzed.

“This must be a nonfiction book,” said Leaf to himself. He had never heard of the country Xonarye or the mineral Xzed. However, he has to investigate just in case there’s an outside chance there’s a hint of truth. Hopping on his phone and looking up Xonarye, xzed, and Aneil Zeryan on some search engines, he found absolutely nothing at all on any of these subjects—nothing on Xonarye even being a book. His next thought was to look up some maps online from various years to see if by chance it was on a map. Again, he came back with zero information. So why would a nonfiction book be hidden in a box in the cavity of an old house? Either way, Leaf was hooked and needed to know more information; there was one way to do that.

With the conflicts came a lot of unneeded destruction and death of many innocent countrymen. We fought

back to protect our land and home, but fighting didn't come naturally to us, so we came up with another plan to protect ourselves from these raiders by disappearing into the ocean. We did this by using our great est asset we had: Xzed. Using Xzed, we made massive drills to break away from adjacent countries, allowing us to move on to our next steps. We built many large lifting platforms that were installed underneath the country. With this done, next was to build a dome to cover the entire country. All these steps took plenty of time and planning. We were going to lower the country into the water and escape the conflict, the violence and find an easier life and peace for our people.

When the time came to implement the plan, there was a lot of excitement and nerves; however, everything in the move beneath the ocean went smoothly. There were some growing pains from not having sunlight to grow crops and people being isolated from the rest of the world. Things however became dramatically worse when a deadly disease swept the country, causing havoc and claiming many lives. Our doctors could not come up with a cure to save our people. The decision was made to resurface and receive medical attention from the outside world. More issues arose when the platforms refused to operate; we were stuck in a tomb, with a virus decimating the population.

With the population dwindling and only a small amount of people who hadn't been infected by the virus, a small ray of hope was given. The head designer of the dome was on his deathbed and made the revelation that there was a small escape tunnel back to the surface. The way out was a bunch

of keys he had made twenty-six to be precise they were made out of Xzed and formed them into square belt buckles, with a giant X protruding out as the key's mechanisms to unlock a hidden door. It was designed as a belt buckle so it could always be on you without getting lost and to blend in with what you were wearing. The desperate search for escape was on, which was very difficult seeing that there was a killer virus on the loose. After months of searching and many more deaths, the door was finally found. The only problem was that there were only twenty-six people left alive. There was so much death, and as the leader, I felt so much responsibility. It was a disgusting, numb feeling that I would have to carry for the rest of my days on this planet.

We could escape, but then what for the rest of us? People would still want to find Xonarye for Xzed, and then there was the virus that could be released to the rest of the world. We discussed between us the options that we had made to keep us safe. We decided would separate to keep the keys from being all in the same place. We would scatter to parts of the earth to rebuild our lives. We would only tell one of the twenty-six where we were going so that one day, when the time was right, there was a way for Xonarye to rise again and be rebuilt in its past glory. Leaving as a failed leader of such a great country in tatters was consuming my mind as we made our way up the tunnel. We reached the top and went our separate ways in the hope of finding peace from the ordeal. I can only pray that our glorious country can see the light of day again.

Xonarye to rise again.

CHAPTER 3

Leaf's mind was spinning out. The writer of this book had an amazing imagination. You could truly feel the words and lose yourself in believing that what they were talking about was real. Turning over to the next page, he read a breakdown for the rest of the book's content.

Land Mass, Capital and Main Cities, Population, Economic Profile, Currency, Flag, and Languages

Flicking the rest of the pages over with his fingers, he saw the same type of writing on each page. Arriving at the last page, there was a different style of writing, one that was more modern and much easier to read.

This burden has been passed down from generation to generation. This burden has been to protect Xonarye, this book, and the key. As I have no one else to pass it along to, it makes me happy that no one else in my family has to carry the load. If you are reading this, you have a choice to keep the secret, put this back, or accept the challenge of raising the world's greatest secret. The third brick on the bottom right of the fireplace will send you on your way. Choose wisely.

Xonarye to rise again.

Well, this is an odd twist at the end of the book, he thought. Or is there something back at the house? Jumping up and chucking on some clothes, he ran out the door and took off in his ute, back out to the house. Talking to himself as he drove, he asked, "What if this is real? What then? Surely there will be nothing there. But what if there *is* something there?" He felt excited to be going on a treasure hunt. Logic kicked in, and he said aloud that nothing would be there or that even maybe this was an elaborate practical joke from his boss.

He rolled up to the house and made his way to the main living area, to the old fireplace. It had seen better days a lot like the rest of the place. It was made up of deep red bricks with black mortar and a beautiful crafted piece of redwood for the mantel making it the feature of the house. Leaning down to look at the brick, he saw that it looked like a normal brick. Pushing on the brick with his hand, he soon realized that it was not going anywhere in a hurry and the position of the brick was also going to be painful to remove. It was going to take some effort and time to remove this brick. He headed back to his ute and grabbed some tools.

Getting on his knees to get at the right angle, he places the chisel on the mortar and starts hitting it with the hammer. After a few minutes of banging away, he wasn't really getting anywhere at all. Then he realized that they'd used the rotary hammer on-site the other day and it should be in one of the other rooms still. After checking a few rooms, he found it and then placed his earmuffs on, firing up the drill. Leaf felt the vibration radiate throughout his body as the drill hit the mortar and brick. After ten minutes on the drill, he loosened the brick enough to be able to pull the brick out with his bare hands.

Getting down on his stomach to peer in the hole where the brick was, he couldn't see much because it was so dark in the hole. Reaching into his pocket, Leaf grabbed his mobile and flicked on his torch to peer into the hole again. His eyes caught something in the light, right at the back. Putting his hand in, he could barely touch the item in there. After twisting his arm, shoulder, and his body in all sorts of positions, he was able to pull the item out of the hole.

Getting up off the floor and brushing himself down, he noticed that the item was a black hessian bag just like the one that had the book in it. This is more than a coincidence and defiantly not a practical joke. Can

this be real? he thought. How can a country disappear without a trace of it not being on the Internet? Opening the bag, he found some pieces of paperwork and a key with a round golden key tag, the number seven engraved into it.

Looking at the key in his hand, he saw that it had no writing or distinguishing markings on it apart from the seven—and what the heck did it open? Unfolding the pieces of paper, he realized there were three pieces. Looking at the first page, he saw that it was in the same handwriting as the one at the back of the book. The second page was the same as the rest of the book; however, the third was printed, as if by a computer. Leaf decided to head back home to read the papers and to take in what was going on. Quickly packing up the mess he made, he took off back home.

He made his way to his bedroom, but his old man stopped him in the passage. “Leaf, have you forgotten to do something this morning?” he inquired. Leaf looked at him blankly, nothing coming to his mind; all he could think about was reading the papers he’d just found. His dad reminded him that he needed to mow the lawns. Leaf let out a moan of disappointment, but he hightailed it outside to get it over with.

CHAPTER 4

Leaf was pushing the mower with the sun glaring down on his back. He just wanted to smash out the job so he could read the papers. It felt as if it was taking forever, and he was starting to feel frustrated. Finally, he finished and trudged inside to get a drink to quench his thirst. While in the kitchen gulping down water, his mum came into see him. She was a tall person with short black hair and a distinguished long nose. Looking at her son, she said, “You look hot and bothered.” “I’m beat,” snapped Leaf. “I’ve been out in the hot sun and have better things to do.” His mum, not looking overly amused from his outburst, said, “You have chores in this house to earn your keep.”

Leaf knew better than to stand around and argue with his mum. Feeling frustrated after sweating his bum off in the sun, he decided to have a shower. Standing in the shower with water splashing on his face, he took a deep, calming breath. Why I am getting so worked up about this? Curiosity? Adventure? An escape from normality? Was it something that had grabbed his intrigue and he just had to know how all this ended? The shower was exactly what he needed to make him feel like himself mentally, refresh his body and cool him down from the sun.

At last, he was back in his room, where he could read the paper and have a closer look at the key as well. Grabbing a magnifying glass to see if there was any other engraving on it or any more on the key ring, he could see no markings at all. The teeth on the key were like none he had

seen. He still had absolutely no idea what the key was going to open, and he hoped there was a clue in the paperwork.

Looking at the first page, he saw it had the same type of writing as in the back of the book.

So you have chosen to accept the challenge to raise the great city of Xonarye. I hope you understand the importance and weight you have put on your shoulders. This is important due to the fact you are going to raise a great country of my ancestors and their history. The weight of expectation to succeed and to keep the country safe is great. Safe as in there will be people who want to find the country for Xzed and exploit it for themselves. The dangerous secret organization that caused the most trouble in the past and is still searching for any trace of Xonarye is Reblick. At some stage, they will come for you; however, people will help you along the way, including myself.

The key opens a box that will have the first belt buckle to Xonarye. Also in the box will reveal where you need to go next and who you will have to see. The road will be long—it will test you physically and mentality—however, in the box, you will have finance to help you on your way. This is the only way I can help you on your journey; I wish I could do more. Sign the document I have left and present it on arrival.

*Yours sincerely,
Phillip Zeryan
Xonarye to rise again*

Wow, there is a lot to take in thought Leaf. Weight on shoulders, mentality challenging, exploit Xzed, key to a box, a document, expectation to raise a country, and then there is a Reblick mob. This is all very overwhelming he thought to himself; I'm just a nineteen-year-old kid from the country and I have never been overseas before. An army couldn't

complete this task, raising a country from the depths of the ocean. Not to mention there is no information on this place except in this book.

He wondered if maybe he should talk to someone about this or hand it over to someone more qualified. What if I did tell someone? What if it's the wrong person? What would happen to my parents or me? He could feel the stress starting to drift over his body. He was starting to get a headache and a dry throat just from the stress. Yet there were two more pages for him to look over.

Coming back from the kitchen from drinking two glasses of water to quench his thirst, he decided that it was time to read the next pages. It was in the same type of writing as the rest of the book that Aneil Zeryan had written in.

I failed myself and my people, and you have the chance to right my wrongs from the past, to raise this great country and show the world what they have missed out for so many years. You have the chance to show them more than just Xzed; show them our majestic rivers, the heights of our mountain ranges, and the beautiful architecture of our city buildings. I wish I could have seen my beloved country back where it belongs, glistening in the sunshine. When you raise Xonarye, take my belt buckle to the capital city, Langeth, and place it at my wife, Freya's, graveside. This will put my past to rest and honour her. Do my country justice and the fallen people proud.

Xonarye to rise again.

Aneil Zeryan

Leaf could sense from the book and the paper he just read the disappointment and regret that came across from Aneil Zeryan. Still feeling overwhelmed from everything that he had read over the day so far, he was mentality drained and decided to lie down on his bed to just rest and try to relax. After lying there for a while slowly recapping everything that he had read, his eyelids closed slowly and it wasn't long before he was fast asleep snoring.

CHAPTER 5

Waking up startled from his sleep, he soon realized it was Sunday. He was clearly more tired than he'd first realized. He rolled out of bed slowly and made his way to the shower to wake himself up. Trotting back to his room, he spied the book and papers he had found over the last couple of days. Everything came rushing back to his brain like a dream. There was still one more one thing to read—the third piece of paper, which looked like it had been printed off a computer.

This is a legal binding document that has been commissioned by Dell and Dell Legal Firm.

I, Phillip Zeryan, give permission to _____ to unlock lockbox number seven under my name at the bank at 44 Waymouth Street, Adelaide, South Australia.

All the contents in the box will belong to the signature of this document, and all privileges that come with the contract that I, Phillip Zeryan, signed when first opening the account.

Any person or company representative not following this documentation will be prosecuted to the full extent according to Australia law by Dell and Dell Legal Firm.

This was the document he was discussing about in his letter, so this must be real, right? It was a legal binding document from a legal firm. Whipping out his phone and searching on the Internet, he found the company Dell and Dell Legal Firm. This was the first thing he found on the Internet that related to anything he had read. Then, looking up the address on the legal document, he saw that there was a bank, just as the document said there would be. Now what? He needed someone else to read this information—another pair of eyes that weren't biased and belonged to a logical thinker.

The first person he thought of was Spence; his dad had raised him to be highly organized and think logical in order to one day take over the family farm. How would Spence react to this being highly logical? Would he think it was complete hogwash? He trusted him and needed to get some sort of reality check. Picking up the phone and calling him, he said, "Hey, mate. I need to come see you. Where are you?" asked Leaf. "I'm out on the farm," answered Spence. "I'll be out there shortly," said Leaf. "I have something to show you, mate."

Rolling up to Spence's farm, Leaf felt a bit nervous about everything and divulging the information he had discovered. When he knocked on the door, Spence opened it and asked, "Are you oaky, mate? You didn't sound like your normal self on the phone." "I need you to read some things and give me an honest opinion." He handed Spence the book and the papers. "Tell me what you think after reading them." Holding the book, Spence looked at with puzzlement. Then he saw the weird look on Leaf's face. He agreed that he would read it and come see him tomorrow.

Leaf didn't sleep much that night, as he wanted to hear what Spence had to say about it all. Was he going to think he was a moron for believing it or would he think there was a chance it was real? It was a long day at work the next day. It seemed as if it dragged on forever. He kept checking his phone to see if Spence had rung or messaged him. Nothing, nothing at all. Pulling up to his house later, he noticed that Spence was standing in the front yard waiting for him. "Hey, Spence, how are you? What did you think of the book?"

“Well,” said Spence, “some things make sense and some don’t.” “What makes sense?” Leaf asked him. He took a deep breath and then explained to Leaf what he had figured out. “I rang and spoke to a lawyer at Dell and Dell. Apparently, they had a client by the name of Phillip Zeryan. They were able to confirm that the document you found was real and that the bank would have to honour it. Those are the facts,” continued Spence. “As for the rest of it, I can find no evidence that Xonarye or Xzed existed.” This confirmed everything that Leaf had been thinking.

“Now you know what you must do next, don’t you?” asked Spence. “No, what?” answered Leaf. “You have to sign the document and go to the bank. We need to see what is in the lockbox, that’s the only logical thing to do. That way we can get more information before we do anything else.” explained Spence. Leaf stood there processing what Spence had said. He looked at him. “You said *we*.” “Of course,” said Spence. “I’ll be there with you so we can figure out everything.” Leaf smiled. It was good to know that he would have a friend by his side and another point of view. “Should we tell Summo?” he asked Spence.

“Well, it wouldn’t be a bad idea. Three heads are better than two, and he is always up for an adventure.” answered Spence. After catching up with Summo and going over everything with him, he was more than keen to go for a drive to the big smoke. They soon then realized that they would have to take a workday off because the bank didn’t open on weekends. Between the three of them, they would try to get this coming Friday off.

All three spoke to their bosses the next day, and they were all lucky enough to get the day off work. They all messaged each other with the good news that the Friday road trip was all go.

CHAPTER 6

The next few days at work were hard to get through for all three of them. They were all excited about going to Adelaide on Friday. They had only gone there a couple of times since they'd gotten their driver's licenses. There was still so much for them to experience in life, let alone in the big city. Comparing the size of Adelaide to little old Naracoorte was not even comparable. Naracoorte had a population of 8,300, and Adelaide had a population of 1,400,000.

The three met Thursday night to make sure they were organized for the next day. They would leave at eight in the morning to give them time to get to Adelaide, which was three and a half hours away. "Have you got the book packed and signed the document?" asked Spence.

"I've packed the book and document," said Leaf.

"Have you signed it?" inquired Summo.

Spence could tell by the lack of silence from Leaf that he hadn't even thought of it. He passed him the pen and paper for Leaf to sign. Looking at the paper, Leaf put pen to paper and signed his life away.

"What are we wearing to the bank?" asked Summo.

"Why?" asked Leaf, looking more confused than before.

Summo looked at them both and explained how it would look rolling up in a hoody and jeans to a bank to withdraw such an important box.

It made sense to both of them. Leave it to Summo to think of how he would look. He was into his imagine and how he looked to other people.

That night was hard for Leaf to get some sleep due to excitement of what was lying ahead—there was also that fear of the unknown. He felt tired and lethargic the next day from lack of sleep.

Summo and Spence rolled up in Spence's black sedan. Leaf would be riding in the back for the three-plus-hour trip, trying to get comfortable and maybe get some sleep. But this proved impossible because his mind was still running, just like last night.

What to do for the car trip? he thought. The book. He hadn't read the entire thing yet. He could read it and learn more about Xonarye.

Land Mass: The land mass of Xonarye is 410,000 square kilometres. It stretches from the border of Djibouti and Eritrea across to the Perim Peninsula of Yemen and then winds up the coast of Yemen, past cities such as Ghadir, Aden, Zinjibar, Shaqra, Al'Lrah, Al Mukalla, and all the way up to Ash Shihr, where the country ended. From there, it went across to the horn of Somalia and to the city of Caluula, making its way next to the Somalian border, past cities like Bender Cassim, Maydh, and Berbera, before coming back to the Djibouti border, but not before passing the capital, Djibouti. Djibouti, the country, is also the name of the capital city. The mountain range of Zeryan, named after my family, crosses across the whole country. It starts near the city of Bender Cassim of Somalia and goes to the city of Shaqra of Yemen. Off the mountain range is Xonarye's largest river, called Valex, which flows from there to the Arabian Sea.

Slowly closing his eyes to the image of Xonarye in his head, the next thing he heard was Spence talking to him. They were halfway to Adelaide to have a pit stop and stretch their legs. Leaf noticed that Spence kept looking at his watch a lot. "Are we in a rush or running late?" he asked.

"We have to be at the bank at three but before that we will meet the lawyer at one thirty," responded Spence.

“What lawyer?” blurted out Summo.

“Well, when I spoke to Dell and Dell about the document and how it was found, they advocated that one of their lawyers should accompany us, just in case there’s any drama,” explained Spence.

Leaf was annoyed. “Couldn’t have you told us this earlier?”

“Well, I guess so, but I didn’t think about it,” replied Spence in a defensive manner.

Summo could see the situation was tense. “Come on, boys, it’s not that big of a deal—just a bit of miscommunication.”

Summo’s right, thought Leaf. It was a good idea in case there were issues at the bank.

They all climbed back into the car to continue their way to Adelaide so they could check in to the motel and change before the meeting with the lawyer.

“What’s the lawyer’s name?” asked Leaf.

“Um, it’s Frank Dell, so I presume he is one of the partners or one of the sons of the original partners,” responded Spence. He pulled out his phone and brought up the company’s web page. They could see Frank Dell and see what his experience was. He had thick black hair with a part on the right side of his head, with a proud look on face and what looked like a small diamond stud in the middle of his left ear, which gave him a since of style. He was the great-grandson of one of the original brothers who started the firm. He’d been a lawyer for fifteen plus years and was thirty-nine years old.

Can he be trusted, though? That was the question running through Leaf’s mind. Was he or could he be part of Reblink? He needed to be ready, and the only possible way was to have more information. There is an old saying that knowledge is power, and there was one thing he had that was going to give him that knowledge: the book.

The flag of Xonarye—you would have already seen it—is the X on the book. The X, of course, stands for the Xonarye. The blue represents xzed when you first find it in the ground, the white when it is heated to a hot enough temperature. The two white stripes stand for the twin cities

that stand at the end at each ends of the country. The capital, Langeth, borders near the city of Gjibouti. The other city at the mouth of the River Valex is the great fishing city of Fasmara.

The languages of Xonarye are very hard to describe. Like many neighbouring countries, there are many pockets of different dialects. The main languages you find in the major cities are English, French, Arabic, and Somali. In the more remote parts of the country, they were more diverse, with different types of Arabic, such as Djibouti Arabic, Najdi Arabic, and Gulf Arabic. Closer to the Yemen border, you will find Mehri and Socotri dialect.

CHAPTER 7

Lifting his head out of the book, he noticed they were just starting to come into the city: the hustle and bustle of cars stopping and starting at traffic lights; people scurrying around as if their pants were on fire; the buildings rising up from the ground up high into the sky. As they drew closer to the heart of the city, the traffic became more congested. After grinding through the traffic, they finally arrived at their accommodation. They checked in and made their way to their room on the seventh floor. They had just over an hour to unpack and get ready to meet the lawyer Frank Dell.

They all made their way through the shower to clean themselves up from the trip and put their suits on. Summo had a snazzy dark blue suit with a white shirt and a matching deep blue tie, of course. Summo always had to look good and stand out in a crowd. Spence had a light grey checked suit with a blue and white checked shirt underneath. Then there was Leaf, with just a plain black suit and a light silver metallic shirt. Next to his mates, Leaf felt like the odd man out he didn't get dressed up to often. He grabbed the legal document and the book. It was about time to meet Frank Dell. They were meeting him at café over the road hidden in a corner of an office building.

Walking into the cafe, Leaf spotted Frank straight away in a corner booth, waiting for them. He looked stylish in a black pinstriped suit, matching tie, a grey checked shirt, and yes, Leaf could tell it was a diamond stud earring in his ear. They each introduced themselves with strong manly handshakes. Sitting down in the booth, Frank asked to look at the

document. He studied the document meticulously, front and back. Gazing at the three, Frank spoke in a most formal manner. "I can confirm that this is a legally binding document that will be honoured when presented to the bank in question." Leaf handed over the book to Frank to look over. Frank pushed the book back to Leaf, much to all of their surprise.

"I know what that is," proclaimed Frank. The three all looked at each other in pure shock and then back at him. "When the client Phillip Zerayn saw me to set up the legal document, he gave me this book to read. I read it very carefully a couple of times; it's a most curious tale. I deal in facts and logic, not fairy tales; however, why would a client come to me and pay a lot of money for legal services is a question that I have have not be able to answer?" explained Frank.

"So you think it's true?" asked Leaf.

"There is a real possibility that this may be true, but to figure this out, more questions need to be answered." answered Frank.

"What's in this for you?" Summo blurted out of nowhere. "I mean, we aren't your clients and we have no money to pay for this meeting."

Leaf felt like a duck out of water sitting around three other people who knew how business worked to some extent.

"I have been paid a large retainer fee by Phillip to be ongoing council to whomever contracted the firm. I am also held to client confidentiality, which means I am legally binded not to discuss this with anyone except you three gentlemen. On another note, this is the most curious case I have been involved with. I am quite interested to see what path this journey takes all of us on." Frank enlighten them.

"There seems to be so many twists and turns already. How many more will come?" pondered Leaf to himself.

Standing up, Frank said, "If there isn't anything else to discuss, we have an important appointment to keep and it would be very inappropriate to be late."

Walking out the front, they saw a black luxury car waiting for them. "Wow, nice ride," exclaimed Spence. "It is saying Frank, however; this isn't mine."

"Then who's following up, Spence?"

"I booked us a luxury Uber for us in advance so we will arrive on time, and it's always a good thing to arrive in style." said Frank sounding very pleased with himself.

None of the boys had ever been in an Uber before or, for that matter, had a meeting with a lawyer before. These experiences they had in the last hour would be many more that would come their way.

Arriving at the bank, they made their way through the big double glass doors. Frank went to the counter and spoke to a woman teller on the other side of the security glass. "My client Leaf Brodie and associates have a meeting with the branch manager."

Summo leaned over to Leaf and whispered, "Why I am an associate?"

Trying not to laugh, Leaf responded, "Talk to my lawyer." He needed a bit of a laugh to settle himself down.

They made their way to the branch manager's office and introduced themselves with a hearty handshake. The manager name was Wilford Miller. He had his glasses sitting on the bridge of his nose. He had short grey hair and a well-groomed grey moustache. Frank handed over the document that Leaf had signed the day before. "My client would like to open the lockbox that this document corresponds to," he said.

Peering through his glasses, Wilford took his time to read the document in great depth. The three guys waited nervously while he was reading. "This is highly unusual; however, everything is in order," said Wilford. "Which one of you gentleman is Mr. Brodie?" Leaf raised his arm nervously like a little kid at in trouble at school. "Can I please have some identification Mr. Brodie?" asked Wilford. Leaf pulled out his passport, driver's licence, bank card handed them over to Wilford to check. Wilford went over the ID looked at Leaf and said, "Everything is in order here.

"I can take you down to your lockbox, but only you can go, Mr. Brodie." explained Wilford. "Your lawyer and associates can wait in another room," went on Wilford. Walking past Frank, he shot Leaf a wink, which settled the nerves he was feeling radiating through his body.

They made their way to a flight to some metal stairs that spiralled in a downward direction. At the bottom, they came to a large metal vault door that's was a massive circle and twelve pin lever handles on it. On the wall were two electronic pads; one was a keypad, and the other had no numbers. Wilford walked over and put his right hand on the plain pad, which scanned his hand. With his left hand, he punched in the security code and then the vault handle spun automatically and the door slowly opened in front of them.

CHAPTER 8

Walking into the vault, Leaf saw the light bouncing off the metal walls stacked with hundreds of lockboxes. “You will have the vault to yourself to go through the contents of the lockbox. Once you have finished, bang on the door loudly seven times and I will let you out,” said Wilford. “If you require anything, I’ll be on the other side of the door.” Wilford made his way out of the vault slowly and closed the door.

Picking the key out of his pocket, Leaf put it into the keyhole and unlocked the lockbox. Pulling the box out of the wall, he placed it on the wooden table that was in the middle of the safe.

Leaf took a big deep breath before opening the box lid. His eyes darted around as he looked inside the box. He saw something shiny in the top right-hand corner of the box. Picking it up, he could hardly believe what he was holding in his. It was the belt buckle that the book spoke of. The buckle was in a matte silver colour. It was a rectangular shape with sharp corners on the front was the big X for Xonarye. The X was a deep blue, with two small white angles running through the top right and bottom left, it also had a thin black border around the X and the X was raised from the rest of the belt. Picking it up, he decided to take off the buckle he was wearing and put the Xonarye one on. It felt like the right thing to do in his head and he knew it would be safe there as well.

Peering back into the box, he could see that it was only filled with paperwork. Leaf decided he would feel more comfortable reading it with

the other guys. He tucked the paperwork safely inside his top jacket pocket. He put the box back into the wall and then knocked on the door loudly seven times for Wilford to let him out of the safe. They made their way back up the winding stairs. Leaf asked Wilford on the way up, "Do you have a room for my lawyer and my associates to talk in private?"

Wilford nodded his head. "Yes, we can arrange a room for you to use Mr Brodie."

It felt weird to Leaf for someone to call him Mr. Brodie.

Walking into the room, he was ambushed by Summo and Spence firing questions at him left, right, and centre. His mind could barely think due to the noise the two were creating. Through the noise, he heard Frank raise his voice. "Everyone sit down so we can discuss this like normal people and not like cave men." The three lads parked their bums in three separate chairs placed in the corners of the room. "I can see you found the belt buckle." Frank pointed at Leaf's waist. "Very wise."

"What else did you find?" asked Summo.

Leaf pulled the paperwork from his jacket.

"What do they say?" asked Spence.

"I haven't read them yet. I wanted to read it with you guys."

Answered Leaf.

Leaf passed the paperwork to Frank. "Will you do us the honour and read us the paperwork?" he asked.

Frank shuffled through the papers. Clearing his throat, he began to read the papers aloud to the three lads. "You have chosen to keep following this path you started in Naracoorte. Your journey will take you to all ends of this planet, and you will need a lot of help on you journey. See the details below for a bank account that you now have access to. One million dollars is in there; this should be ample enough to fund your journey."

The three guys looked at each other in shock with their jaws dropped like you would see in a kid's cartoon. Summo mouthed, "One million dollars" to Leaf and Spence.

Frank continued reading. "If you have not already contacted Dell and Dell lawyers and spoken to a man called Frank Dell, you can trust him, and I have paid him to be your advisor on helping raise Xonarye."

Leaf looked at Frank and said, “You’re a man of facts. What are the facts telling you when a man leaves you a million dollars?”

Frank closed his eyes, clearly pondering the question. “Hmm, I believe that no sane man would leave someone a million dollars to find a place that no one has ever heard of.”

“What about the buckle?” snapped backed Leaf.

Frank looked at him in surprise, as if he didn’t expect an outburst from him like that. Summo and Spence were equally as shocked as Frank.

“That buckle you wear could be made of any material. Are you that gullible, Mr. Brodie, to believe this fairy tale?” asked Frank.

“Are you that greedy that you would do anything for money?” Leaf retorted.

Spence felt the tension in the room. “What else is in the paperwork?” he asked to change the subject.

“It says, ‘The next key is in the country of Cuba, and the person who has the key is Nila Runika. She will tell you where to go next on your journey. Yours sincerely, Phillip Zeryan. Xonarye to rise again.’ So, you want to go to Cuba?” asked Frank in a condescending way.

There was dead silence in the room, you would be able to hear crickets in the room if there was any.

“The only evidence we have at this stage is the buckle, and that is made from Xzed,” said Spence at last ending the silence.

“If it’s made from Xzed, then it would unbreakable,” said Leaf. “Can you set up something up for us for tomorrow to test the buckle?” He looked at Frank. Frank looked a bit stunned by the request. “Well, you are being paid by Phillip to be our advisor so you can help us.”

“I can do that for you; however, I would advise you to set up the bank account to access the money—that is, if you want to chase the fairy tale,” said Frank with a sly smile back at Leaf.

Walking back into Wilford’s office Leaf organized a new account for the money to be transferred into. The bank card would be sent out in a few days, and downloading the bank app, he could have access to the money straight away. Leaf thanked Wilford for all his help and said he would be in contact if he needed his help in the future.

Walking back into the other room, he saw Frank chatting away on his phone. Summo and Spence came over to look at Leaf's phone to see that there was a million dollars in his account. None of them had ever seen that amount of money before in the short lives.

Frank finished his phone call and explained that he had arranged for someone to look at the buckle tomorrow. "A car will pick you up at your motel tomorrow at ten sharp and take you to the appointment."

CHAPTER 9

Back at the motel, the boys sat down to relax and have a beer. It had been a full-on day with a lot to take in.

“Leaf do you believe there is a lost country or that Phillip was a crazy person?” asked Summo.

Leaf took a swig of his beer. “I believe there is a lost country. You know how you get a gut feeling about a certain thing? I feel that way.”

“Is that you wanting to believe so you can travel the world like you always wanted or are you truly believing your gut feeling?” questioned Spence.

Leaf looked at both his mates and asked them, “What do you guys think?”

“I’m on the fence, mate. There are compelling cases for both sides,” said Spence.

Summo took a deep breath. “If you truly believe this, mate, I am on your side.”

Leaf smiled. He knew Summo would have his back. He also understood Spence’s point of view, that he was a man of logic. Leaf had always had a strong impulse to travel the world and see all the wonders it had to offer.

After they finished their beers they headed to bed. It had been a long day and tomorrow would be the day of truth. The testing on the belt buckle would put to rest who was right and who was wrong.

Leaf woke up during the night flipping and flopping, trying to get back to sleep. Lying there wide awake with so much on the line tomorrow was rolling around in his skull. Maybe reading would help him drift back off to sleep. Which section of the book hadn't he read yet? Oh, yes, capital city and main cities would be intriguing.

The capital city is Langeth. It's near the border of the city of Djibouti. Langeth is where I lived and governed the country. Fasmara, the twin city to Langeth, was on the other side on the country, where the long winding river Valex meets the Aden sea. Spintex was near the middle of the country, on the east side of the Zeryan mountain range. Up in the northwest, near the Yemen border, is Cintama, very important in trading with Yemen. On the Red Lake is Wex Wex, an important port to trade with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Eritrea. Tamhola is the gateway to Somalia in the southwest of Xonarye. The last was Mintogh on west side of the Zeryan mountain range. Mintogh was extremely important it over saw the mining of Xzed. These great seven cities are the pillars of the great country Xonarye.

Xonarye's economy revolved around the crown jewel being Xzed; however, there was far more than just that. The countries' main resource before Xzed was silver mined along the mountain range of Zeryan. We also had a variety range of crops from cotton and sugar cane found in the North of the country. Palm oil and tea grows very well in the southwest portion of Xonarye. In the mountain range, coffee beans grow well in the rich fertile soil. Livestock was very popular to eat and trade. We had herds of cattle, goat, sheep, camel, and chickens. Another vital part of our economics was fishing. We fished heavily in the Red Lake, Valex river, and far reaches of the Indian Ocean.

Eventually, Leaf finally managed to go back to sleep. He awoke to Spence shaking him by the shoulders, shouting, “Wake up, man! We have to get ready shortly.”

Leaf was extremely groggy and took a few minutes to get his bearings of where he was. He dragged himself to the shower to wake up and get ready for a day ahead. It was a make-or-break day as to whether Xonarye was true or a fairy tale.

They made their way downstairs and waited in front of the motel. A red SUV pulled up to the curb. The window came down, and a voice called out, “Car ride for Leaf Brodie.

“Yeah, that’s us,” replied Spence as he grabbed the handle of the door.

They made their way past traffic, heading in a Northern direction. The buildings and sheds they were driving past were looking old and raggedy. It was an old industrial area that looked like most of the places were abandoned. The car pulled up to a shed that was leaning on an angle. A good gust of wind and the dilapidated shed would probably have toppled over quite easy.

Summo banged on the front door of the shed a couple of times, with no answer coming or any signs of life from the shed. Banging on the door a few more times, eventually there was movement at the station. Someone came to the door eventually. There stood a big man, not big as in tall, but fat. He had a massive gut out in front of the rest of his body, he had a long grey beard and curly grey hair coming out from his yellow baseball cap he was wearing. “What the hell do you guys want? It’s Saturday—don’t you bloody know!” bellowed the fat man.

“We were sent here by Frank Dell,” snapped backed Leaf. “Is that how you talk to people?”

The fat man was clearly stunned, probably not used to being talked to like that.

A vehicle suddenly pulled up behind them. It was Frank, and he could obviously tell there was some tension in the air as he hopped out of the car. He looked at the fat man. “Jimmy, did you forget about me?” he asked.

Jimmy’s head dropped like a bag of cement. “Sorry, boys, it slipped my mind.” He put out his hand to shake theirs. “Name is Jimmy James. I can build or destroy anything.”

“Anything?” asked Leaf slyly.

“Yeah, come on in and I’ll take you out back to the good old workshop.”

Much to their surprise, they saw a sparkling clean workshop that was highly organized. It was nothing like they had pictured compared to the outside of the building.

“So, where is this item that you want me to destroy?” asked Jimmy.

Leaf handed him the belt buckle. Jimmy snatched it out of his hand and chucked it on his workbench, he whacked the hell out of it with a hammer. The hammer bounced back off the buckle, forcing Jimmy off his feet and landing quite heavily to the ground.

Picking himself up off the ground, he had a maniac like look on his face. “This is bloody awesome! A challenge! Hell, I love a challenge,” bellowed Jimmy. “What’s that little bugger made from?” he asked.

“Apparently, an unbreakable metal, hence us seeking your expertise,” Frank said.

“Hmm, unbreakable. Hey, I think I will back myself to destroy it,” proclaimed Jimmy.

“Well, what next scientific test do you have next, then?” asked Summo, trying not laugh after what he witnessed with the hammer.

Picking up the buckle and placing it in the vice, Jimmy fired up his welding torch. He placed his mask on his face and warned them to stand back, as things were about to get hot. Placing the torch on the buckle and heating it after ten minutes, it still hadn’t changed colour or started to melt. Jimmy started stoking his beard, deep in thought. “Right on to the next test,” announced Jimmy.

“He’s a persistent bloke,” whispered Spence to Leaf. “Wonder what’s next.”

Leaf looked at Frank and gave him a cheeky wink as if to say, Do you believe me now? Frank stood there unmoved by Leaf’s wink or the failure of Jimmy’s two attempts so far.

CHAPTER 10

Jimmy went over to a big standing drill press and locked it in a vice. He grabbed a drill bit off his workbench and held it up. “This is a cobalt drill bit, the hardest drill bit on the market.” Switching it on, he lowered the press down and the drill bit hit the buckle. It exploded into bits that went flying over the workshop in every direction. Luckily for everyone, they were all unscarred. One could see the frustration building on Jimmy’s face now as he stroked his thick grey beard harder. “Couldn’t burn it so we’ll freeze the sucker and smash it into chunks.”

“How are you going to do that?” asked Spence.

“With carbon dioxide,” said Jimmy.

“What is that?” questioned Summo.

“It’s the scientific name for dry ice,” Spence responded.

Jimmy put on long rubber gloves and a face mask to protect himself from the dry ice. The dry ice was stored in a big cylinder over in the corner. Picking up the buckle with a pair of tongs, he lifted the lid of the cylinder. The dry ice fog came rolling out. Dropping the buckle in the ice, Jimmy turned to them. “Let’s give it a good five minutes before I break it in to little tiny bits.” He smiled.

After the five minutes passed, he reached back in with the tongs and pulled out the buckle. Putting it on the bench, it was round two with the hammer, and he gave it another mighty whack. Jimmy ended back on the ground, just as he did the first time. The boys tried to hide their laughter.

It was quite funny to see a large man sprawling on to the floor like an upside town turtle.

“Frank, what did you say this was made out of!” yelled Jimmy, lying flat back on the cement floor.

“I didn’t tell you what it was made of,” Frank said as he held out a hand to pull him up to his feet. “I think I need to bring out the big guns. Follow me, boys. We’re going out back to the boom-boom room.” said Jimmy.

“What’s the boom-boom room?” asked Summo.

Jimmy didn’t have to answer the question, for they walked up to it outside the back of the shed to a large solid building.

“This will prove whether this buckle is unbreakable,” announced Frank.

Frank clearly didn’t like to lose; just like Leaf, they had to win. The room was triple lined with metal and doubled lined with cement wall. The room was stronger than a bomb shelter.

“So what happens in there?” asked Spence.

Jimmy pulled out a stick of dynamite and winked at him. The boys took a step back; none of them had been around dynamite before.

Jimmy entered the room, rigged up the dynamite to the buckle, and hooked it up to the detonator. They stood behind a concrete barrier out of the room for safety reasons. Jimmy handed the detonator to Leaf. “You do the honours.” Leaf held the detonator in his hand. He had never blown anything up before and felt very nervous.

“Fire in the hole!” screamed Jimmy as he tapped Leaf on the shoulder.

Leaf pushed the detonator, and they heard an almighty boom that shook their bodies and sent dust scattering around them.

“All you princesses okay?” called Jimmy, laughing at them as he saw the weird expressions on each of their faces. “Come on, lads. Let’s see what’s left of the puny belt buckle.”

Jimmy pushed the makeshift concrete door out of the way. All that mass he was carrying came in use opening the boom-boom room. Dust was still all around the room, and nobody could see anything. “Let’s give it fifteen minutes to clear out,” said Jimmy.

All of a sudden, Frank turned to Leaf and said, "I bet you five grand that the buckle is destroyed."

Leaf was stunned. He hadn't expected that. He wasn't a gambler at all. Summo looked at Leaf and nodded his head. Spence was shaking his head in disagreement.

"You have the money now," egged on Frank.

That part's true, but it wasn't his money and it was there to find Xonarye, thought Leaf. He thought about what he just said in his mind. His mind had already decided to believe that Xonarye was real. "I'll take that bet," said Leaf.

"Holy moly!" blurted out Jimmy. "That's a fair few clams."

After fifteen minutes of waiting for the dust to finally settle and a whole lot of attention, the dust finally came to rest. They all entered the room with wide eyes, trying to be the first person to spot any remains of the buckle. "You see it anywhere?" Jimmy asked.

There was complete silence in the room, nothing but crickets.

"Boom-boom room strikes again," yelled out Jimmy with great vigour.

"I told you I would destroy it." bragged Jimmy. Leaf looked at Frank, expecting a sly smile of I told you so. Instead, he was looking straight up at the ceiling. Eventually, everyone else looked up.

Summo jumped on Leaf's back and screamed, "Leaf, you were right, man."

"Oh no," moaned Jimmy, dropping to his knees, looking shattered. Leaf could see the buckle fully intact, sticking out of the concrete ceiling.

Frank trundled over and stuck out his hand to shake Leaf's hand. "You won the bet, Leaf. I have one question for you, though."

"What's that?" questioned Leaf.

"What do you know about Cuba?" Frank asked. Leaf was dumbfounded by this question.

"Now you believe in fairy tales?" inquired Spence.

Frank walked around the room. "I believe we can't destroy the buckle which matches the book Leaf found. I also know that we know more about the moon than the depths of the ocean due to pressure, so

I believe, Spence, that this is very plausible.” “Plus, you owe Leaf five grand,” boasted Summo.

“Really, Summo, do you think that’s the most important thing to say at this moment in time?” wailed Spence.

They said farewell to Jimmy and thanked him for his help. He was still disappointed that he couldn’t break the buckle and asked them if they found any more of the same material to send him some.

Making their way back into the heart of the city, Frank again asked Leaf, “What do you know about Cuba?”

“Um,” stammered Leaf, “America and Cuba don’t get along, they make Cuban cigars, and Fidel Castro is the leader”. “What language do they speak, what is their currency, how do you get there, what visa do you need, what’s the weather this time of the year, and do you know any idea what you got yourself into?” fired out Frank.

CHAPTER 11

Leaf was speechless, and his face said it all. Spence defended his mate, “Leave him alone. Why are you being so harsh to him?”

“You think this is harsh, going to a country you know nothing about with your blinkers on, thinking everything will just fall into place, and what about this organization that wants that material that buckle is made of?” continued Frank. “If you’re contemplating about going on this journey, you need to think about it and be logical. I’m your advisor and want you to be safe.”

“I agree with Frank,” said Spence. “We have to have a plan and do our due diligence in Cuba.”

Leaf sat there in silence, listening to what was going on in the car, taking it all in.

Summo leaned over and whispered to Leaf, “You okay, mate?”

Leaf nodded and smiled at his friend. He was glad he had his mates by his side. “Can we go somewhere to eat? It’s mid-afternoon, and I’m famished,” said Leaf.

None of them had thought about food, and they decided it was a good idea. They pulled up to the little cafe they meet the day before. They were all staving and scooped their food down reasonably quickly. Also, all of their minds were ticking over about what had happened that day and what was going to happen further down the track. Leaf got up and decided that he would walk back to the motel by himself to get some fresh air.

Frank asked the other two left at the table if Leaf was okay. "Yeah, he's fine," replied Summo. "He's just getting some clear air."

"What is clear air?" questioned Frank.

"It's when he goes off by himself and clears himself of the noise around him." answered Spence.

"You guys will have to keep an eye on him. He has a massive burden to carry," remarked Frank.

"We know," said Summo. "I hope you understand that he will need your help to lean on at certain stages." Frank nodded slowly back at Spence and Summo.

Walking along, Leaf's mind was jumbled from what had happened so far; he just couldn't clear it. He reached down and ran his hand along the buckle, feeling the raised X on it. He heard a text come through on his phone. Unlocking the phone, he saw that it was from his boss, Red Reid. It read, "Hey, Leaf, can you come by my place tomorrow? Need to catch you up."

"Sure thing, boss. Will swing by when I get back from Adelaide," Leaf texted back. It was odd to get a message from Red, and he wondered what he wanted. Just another thing to be piled onto his brain, just what he needed.

Upon returning to the motel after his walk, he saw that Spence and Summo were already waiting for him. "Clear your mind, mate," said Summo. Leaf shook his head. Spence handed him a business card. It was Frank's card, with all his details. "He told me to give you this and to contact him anytime you need him." It was reassuring to know that Frank had his back and believed that there was a possibility Xonarye existed.

Spence's phone started ringing. He answered the phone. It was Frank. "Put me on speakerphone," he commanded. "Did you tell anyone what you were doing in Adelaide?" he asked. All the lads responded with only are parents. "Does anyone know where you're staying and what name your room is booked under?"

Again, the answer was only are parents from them. "The name is under my name," said Spence.

"What's going on?" asked Leaf.

“I need you to pack your bags now. There will be a blue sedan out front to pick you up. I will meet you where the car takes you and then explain everything to you all then. You have five minutes to be out front.” Frank hung up the phone.

The lads looked at each other with mystified faces. They scrambled to their bags and chucked everything in, scooting downstairs. The car was waiting for them already. They jumped in, and the car zipped off. They had no idea what was going on, where they were going, and they were showing a massive amount of trust in Frank.

“We’re heading out of the city and back in the direction of Naracoorte,” said Spence.

“Where are we going?” Summo asked the driver. There was no response from him. Spence tried ringing Frank, but it kept ringing out.

“We’ll just have to wait until we get to our destination,” said Leaf.

“What about my car?” spluttered Summo. “We left it at the motel.”

“I know we did, Summo. We just have to trust Frank that this is all for a good reason,” said Leaf in a calm manner.

“For a guy who wasn’t sure of him, you are showing him a lot of trust,” replied Summo, who was clearly irritated by the situation.

“I don’t think we have a choice but to trust him. We should consider the situation,” chimed in Spence.

They were heading out into the rolling Adelaide hills, away from the city.

“I think we must have been in some kind of danger,” said Leaf.

“Why else would Frank make such a drastic move for someone who is very calm and logical?” continued Leaf. “That clear air you got, mate, has seemed to have heightened your intelligence,” laughed Summo.

They veered off the bitumen road and headed down a dodgy dirt road that was bumpy as all sin. Finally, they arrived at an old cottage at the end of the road. The driver handed over the keys to Leaf and said that Frank would be here shortly. “Oh, and check the garage. Your car will be in there.”

“You didn’t think to tell me when I was talking about it earlier?” blasted Summo, who was almost frothing out his mouth.

Spence put his hand on his shoulder. “It’s okay, mate. It’s here—that’s the main thing. The car is here.”

Unlocking the door, they saw that the place was as if it had been trapped in a time capsule. There were flora patterns everywhere, on the lounge suite, curtains, and the cushions. There were loads of blackwood timber furniture; the details in the carvings would have taken years to make. To top it off, there were pictures of flowers hanging on the walls everywhere.

“You want me to trust someone with taste like this?” snorted Summo.

CHAPTER 12

The boys checked out the rest of the house and picked out their rooms while they waited for Frank to make an appearance or at least make contact with them. Leaf was lying on the bed, waiting impatiently. *What to do to pass the time?* he wondered. Then it came to him that he hadn't finished reading the book in the wall. There was still "Currency and Population" to read. The population did intrigue him due to the fact he wanted to know how many people had passed away from the deadly virus. However, there was sickly feeling in body because he hasn't ready to know how many people passed away. Currency would be next.

Our currency was all made out of silver coins of different shapes. The currency was called Xped and revolved around the number seven. The number seven is seen as a very special number in our society. Seven Xped is represented by the shape of the triangle. The next shape is a square and is worth twenty-one Xped. Forty-nine is next, and the shape is an oval. Pentagon is the next shape in the currency and is worth seventy-seven Xped. The last Xped coin is the most expensive; it's a Heptagon that has seven sides and is worth 105 Xped. On all the silver coins is the X symbol of Xonarye; the X is raised on the coins and is on both sides. In the top

right-hand corner on each side is the monetary amount of Xped. The coins were hand-forged in the twin cities to make it easier for distribution across the country. When Xzed was discovered, many people, countries, and Reblick believed the coins were being made out of Xzed. There were lots of robberies and attempts to raid the twin cities before they realized their blunders that the coins were actually forged from silver.

Leaf could hear raised voices downstairs. It was Spence and Frank. Obviously, Frank had arrived at last. Moving the book to the bedside, Leaf heard a clinking noise coming from the book. This was the first time he had heard this noise. Picking up the book, he shook it again and defiantly heard it again. He was perplexed by this. He put his ear up against it and shook it some more, trying to figure out where the noise was coming from. After a few minutes, he made the deduction that it was coming from the spine of the book. He heard Frank calling him to come downstairs.

Making his way downstairs, he saw the three waiting for him. “Now that Leaf is here, can you tell us why you made us rush out of our room and hide us in the middle of nowhere?” asked Spence.

“When we were testing the buckle at Jimmy’s shed, Wilfred at the bank had a visitor,” responded Frank. “And it was a female asking about the number seven lockbox.”

“Don’t you think that is more than a coincidence that the day after we opened the box, someone is in there asking questions?” said Summo, who was clearly still annoyed about the whole situation. The three lads looked at each other. Spence’s annoyance quickly turned to dread.

“So, you moved us for our own protection,” said Spence.

“Correct,” said Frank. “Wilford rang me and let me know that a female was asking questions and, more to the point, left a business card. On the card was the company name Reblick and the name Tamina Suva. Somehow, they found out that we had been there.”

Leaf took a deep breath and sighed.

“So, what does this mean, then?” asked Spence.

“It means, gentlemen, that Reblick are watching and we need to be prudent moving forward.” answered Frank.

“In other words, be careful,” said Spence.

“Moving forward, we don’t talk to anyone else about Xonarye. Don’t message me or each other about it either,” scolded Frank. He pulled four brand-new phones out of his bag and tossed one to each of them. “On these phones, we have each others’ numbers and that’s it. You don’t add anyone else’s number, text, ring, Snapchat, or anyone else. I don’t want anyone else seeing these phones. This is the only way we will be able to communicate with each other regarding Xonarye.” Frank was so serious and stern. It felt as if the lads were getting told off by the parents for doing something wrong. “Do you understand?” boomed Frank at the lads. They nodded back in silence. All three of them understood the seriousness of the situation now. “You will stay here tonight and head off in the morning back home. There is some food in the cupboard.”

“Thank you,” said Leaf. “We’re very lucky to have you as our advisor.”

“Have a look at the bromance between these two,” jeered Summo.

“Does he take anything seriously?” asked Frank.

“Yeah, only three things: selling cars, money and his looks,” joked Spence.

“Hey, that’s not true,” retorted Summo, looking hurt.

“Come on, mate. I’m just joshing with you,” said Spence with a wink.

“Money ...,” Leaf said. “I was reading about money in the book when I heard some clinking noise coming from it. I think it was coming from the spine of it.” Handing Frank the book, he gave it a shake, and he and the other two lads heard it as well.

“What do you think it is?” questioned Summo.

“I think there’s something in the spine,” responded Leaf. Tapping on the spine from top to bottom Frank assessed the top was hollow.

“Someone grab a knife,” said Frank.

Summo came back with a knife and handed it to Frank. Frank carefully cut a hole in the top of the spine of the book. He turned the book upside and shook it on top of the coffee table. Four silver objects tumbled out. They came to rest flat on the table. They all stared at the silver objects.

“I know what they are,” said Leaf. “I just read about them in the book. Those are Xped coins.”

“What our Xped coins!” exclaimed Summo.

“Xped is the currency of Xonarye,” explained Leaf, “and those are the four coins. The four coins are multiples of seven, and all four separate shapes show their value.”

“There is a triangle, oval, pentagon, and heptagon,” pointed out Frank.

“What is a heptagon—never of heard of it,” blurted out Summo.

Spence picked up the heptagon coil and tossed it to Summo. “That’s what a heptagon is, a seven-sided shape.”

“Why would someone put coins in the spine of the book?” quizzed Leaf.

“Everything so far has been done with a purpose, so we must remain patient until their purpose is revealed,” said Frank. He sounded like a preacher doing a sermon at church.

CHAPTER 13

Calling it a night, the three guys hit the hay and Frank headed home. He would be in contact if he heard any more information. On the trip home the next day, there was a sombre mood in the car. It was a complete 360-degree turn compared to the excitement on the way up. Leaf spent most of the trip asleep in the back seat. He was mentally exhausted from the trip. So much had happened, from the bank, getting the buckle, meeting Jimmy, the coins, moving hotel, Reblick, and having their advisor in Frank.

“Hope he’s okay,” said Summo to Spence.

“I think he’ll be okay,” responded Spence. “We’ll have to keep an eye on him, like Frank asked us to.”

Leaf was glad to be home. However, he still needed to catch up with Red before the day was over. Leaf heard a noise like a text coming on his phone. He checked it, but nothing was on it. Then he remembered the other phone that Frank had given him. Frank had sent him a text, checking in on him. Leaf messaged back that he was okay, just tried.

There was a knock at his bedroom door. It was his dad. “How you going, mate? How was Adelaide?” he asked.

“Yeah, I’m good. It was good catching up with a few people. Got to catch up with Red now as well,” replied Leaf.

“Say hi to Red when you see him. I heard he hurt himself on Friday at work—hope he is okay,” said his dad.

“Hurt how?” asked Leaf.

“Not sure. You’ll have to ask him yourself,” said his dad.

“I’d better make a move and go see what’s going on.” Leaf made the move around to Red’s. Red was in his mid-sixties, with a stocky build, brown hair with grey starting to show through. He had worked hard his entire life. He was happy to see Leaf. He hobbled up to let Leaf in his house.

“You okay, boss? What happened to your knee?” asked Leaf.

“I was coming down a ladder, slipped on one of the rungs, and landed awkwardly, twisting my knee,” said Red.

“How bad is it?” asked Leaf.

“I’ve torn my ACL, PCL, and meniscus in my right knee,” answered Red.

“So ... what does that mean for work?” stammered Leaf.

Red was staring at the ground; he couldn’t bring himself to look at Leaf. “The doctor said it will take eighteen months to have surgery and then do rehab. That’s only to walk, and at my age, the doctor recommends that I should retire,” explained Red.

Leaf’s heart dropped, and he felt queasy in his stomach.

“I have spoken to some builders and put in a good word for you. They are expecting a phone call from you,” said Red, handing over a bit of paper with the builder’s names and phone numbers on it. “I am sorry this has happened, Leaf. You’re a great kid and a good worker.”

Leaf thanked Red for all his help and wished him the best with his knee. He drove five minutes down the road and pulled over. His body felt numb, cold, and seemed lost on what to do next. He just sat there staring out the windshield. He felt embarrassed that he didn’t have a job, even though he had no control. What would he tell people? How would they react and what would they think of him? He was so bitterly disappointed about what had happened. What would his dad, mum, and friends say? His mum would be devastated. She was so proud of him when he got the apprenticeship. The numb feeling in his body was intensifying making him like he could throw up. He was overthinking everything in his head and had given himself a headache. He didn’t want to go home. He didn’t want to go anywhere; he wanted to go and hide from everyone in the world. Leaf felt he was just an overall disappointment.

He heard his phone ringing. It was his dad. Leaf let it ring out. He rang a couple more times, and each time he let it ring out. He couldn't talk to him. He felt his body tightening up, and breathing was becoming harder to do. He was freaking himself out. Was he having a panic attack? He started hyperventilating in his car. He noticed a car coming down the road. It pulled over to the over side of the road. His breathing was all out of whack, and then he noticed the figure coming over from the car. It was his dad. "Leaf, are you okay, mate? I need you listen to my voice. Breathe slowly. Listen to me. Everything is okay. Just take deep breaths."

Listening to his dad's voice, he started calming down and his breathing began to go back to normal. His dad gave him a big hug. "It's okay, mate. Hop in the car. Mum's waiting at home to see you. You know we will get through this together as a family. You have done nothing wrong, and we're proud of you."

Normality started to come back to Leaf's body, with the numb feeling fading and the headache getting duller. "Thanks, Dad. That means a lot to me, but how did you know what happened?"

"Red rang me after you left and explained the situation—then you didn't come back home or answer your phone, so I came hunting for you," said his Dad.

As he pulled up in the driveway, he saw his mum waiting at the front door for them. She gave Leaf a big hug and a kiss on the forehead. "We are here to help. We're a family, and we stick together," said his Mum.

The numb and almost hollow feeling had left his body. He was very lucky to have such caring parents who loved him dearly.

"This is just a bump in the road for you, Leaf. We have bumps along the way in life," said his Mum.

"Go have a shower; it will make you feel calmer," said his Dad.

Going back to his room after his shower, he did feel one hundred times better.

He sent a text message to Summo and Spence to let them know what had happened with the job. The boys sent back supportive texts to him. It felt that the world wasn't going to end now, and he felt like a bit of a drama queen for the way he had acted.

CHAPTER 14

Leaf slept well for the first time compared to the last couple of nights. It was Monday, and he didn't have to work. It was a feeling of loss and the unknown of what to do with himself. His parents had already left for the day; he was home alone with no plans. He had the paper with the builders' names and numbers for him to call. He didn't feel the urge or the need to call any of them; he needed time to come up a plan. The plan at this moment was to go back to sleep.

Waking up after his morning siesta, he saw that he had five missed phone calls from Frank. Something must be going on for him to ring five times. Leaf tried ringing back three times, but Frank didn't answer. Hmm, odd, thought Leaf. Maybe it wasn't that urgent because he didn't answer. He messaged Spence and Summo to see if they'd heard from Frank. They both messaged back no. Spence called Leaf, asking what was going on. Leaf explained that he had missed five calls from Frank.

"Well, if you hear from him, let me know," said Spence.

Leaf achieved nothing that day. He spent it swanning around the house, watching TV and surfing the Internet. Summo rang Leaf to check on him and to see how he was travelling. It was good to know his mates were there for him. This was what Leaf needed after a full-on past couple of days: to chill out, experience normality and no stress. He needed to get his car from yesterday, and it was a nice day, so he walked down the road and around the corner to get it.

When he got back to his house, he saw a black coupe sports car parked out front. Leaf had never seen that car around town. Parking his car, he saw someone exit the car. It was Frank. "Frank, what are you doing here, and what's the go with all the phone calls?" asked Leaf.

Frank looked on edge; he kept looking around to see if someone was watching. "We need to go inside and talk," said Frank softly.

That relaxing day Leaf was thinking about was all about to change.

"What's going on?" demanded Leaf.

"You remember Wilford, the bank manger?" asked Frank.

"Yes, of course. Why?" responded Leaf.

"He's dead," said Frank sadly.

Leaf was in shock and didn't know what to say.

"He was in a car crash. The car was rigged with some sort of explosive," explained Frank.

"When did this happen?" quizzed Leaf.

"Last night. I only found out this morning after my law firm was broken into and ransacked," continued Frank.

"Are me and friend's safe?" inquired Leaf, in a quivering voice.

"Yes. There is nothing at work that has any link to you or Xonarye; it's all stored on my personal laptop," said Frank. "I'm guessing he received an after-hour visit from the lady from Reblick. They must have made him talk, leading them to me once they had the information. He was a loose end. So I am the only link to you. To answer your question from before, yes, you are safe."

Leaf let out a massive sigh of relief. Then he thought about Frank and his well-being. "What are you going to do, Frank? If they went after Wilford, you're next."

"I need to disappear for my safety and your safety as well," said Frank.

"What about your family and your law firm?"

"Well, I don't have a partner or kids, so there is no problem," said Frank. "And I am the last of the Dells, so I can just sell the firm and go wherever my heart desires."

"You don't have any family? Don't you get lonely?" asked Leaf.

“I have always put my time and effort into work, so there wasn’t a lot of time for everything else. I think I might head somewhere overseas, somewhere warm like Fiji,” said Frank with a laugh. Frank could see Leaf was concerned with the news of these revelations. “Leaf, you are safe, and I am still going to be contactable by phone. I am your advisor.”

Leaf gave a half smile, it was good knowing that Frank was still going to be contactable. “Is there any way that they are tracking you now?” asked Leaf.

“Now you are starting to think like you should,” Frank said with a smile.

Leaf was puzzled by Frank’s reaction.

“You need to think about your surroundings and be observant so you are safe and stay a step ahead of the game.”

“Game, what game?” said Leaf. “This is my life.”

“Life is a game, Leaf. There are winners and losers everywhere in life as you go. What did you see when you first saw me today?” said Frank.

“You were in a black sports car,” answered Leaf.

“What else did you notice about it, Leaf?” responded Frank.

Leaf wasn’t sure where this was going and was felling frustrated. Frank noticed this by his body language.

“It’s a new car, so they don’t know it belongs to me. I paid in cash, so it can’t be tracked to me,” explained Frank. “What am I wearing?”

“You’re wearing sneakers, blue denim jeans, a grey hoody, and your earning is gone,” observed Leaf.

“What else?” coached Frank.

“They are all new,” said Leaf.

“New car, new clothes, new look, and I will get a new name,” said Frank.

“These are important things you need to keep in mind when you go to Cuba and beyond,” continued Frank.

Leaf hadn’t thought much about Cuba due to the fact about not having a job at the moment. “What do you think I’m doing here in the middle of the day in trackies and a hoody?” asked Leaf.

“I don’t need to think—I know,” said Frank with a wink.

“What do you mean, ‘you know’?” snorted Leaf.

“Summo and Spence messaged me to let you know that due to an unforeseen workplace mishap to your boss, you have some spare time on your hands to plan for Cuba,” explained Frank putting a positive spin on the situation.

“They messaged you that?” asked Leaf. “No laughs, Frank—that’s the way I have worded it.”

“Have you looked at the circumstance you are in? Things happen for a reason,” said Frank. “You found the book, you have the buckle, the coins, and then your boss has to retire. It’s a sign, Leaf, to take the plunge.”

Leaf took a deep breath in and thought about what Frank was saying; it did make sense. A guy who didn’t believe in fairy tales is now telling me things happen for a reason. Leaf smiled as he Frank patted him on the back.

“What did I say before, Leaf? New look, new me.” Leaf looked at him I can see everything you say makes sense now with your look and car. Frank could see Leaf was taking all the new information in so he let him think for a minute.

What was going though Leaf’s head was man he met a couple of days ago had been killed due to him finding a book, which was still sinking into Leaf’s skull.

CHAPTER 15

“**W**hat’s the plan from here?” Leaf asked Frank.

“To make a plan, we need to get the other two up to speed and take it from there,” answered Frank. “Can you organize dinner somewhere tonight with the other two?”

“Yeah, I can do that, Frankie. Do you want to eat in or go out for dinner?” asked Leaf. Frank didn’t look impressed at all with Leaf. “Did the Frankie part take the new me too far?” asked Leaf.

“Yes, it did,” said Frank. “I had a kid at school call me Frankie, and I hated it. That kid knew it.”

Leaf could relate. “I had a kid at school call me ‘Petal.’”

“Petal,” repeated Frank, looking confused. He thought petal and Leaf were close enough. They looked at each other and burst out laughing. “Let’s eat in, mate. I will let you know where and when, and you can fill in the other two.”

Leaf decided to wait until five o’clock to talk to the guys. There was a lot going on, and they didn’t need to hear straight away while still at work. Leaf’s phone rang. It was Frank. “Meet me at the motel on Smith Street at eight o’clock, room seven.”

“Righto. Will meet you then and will bring some pizza.” replied Leaf.

He got hold of the two boys; they would swing round in a bit.

Leaf heard the front door close. His mum was home from work.

“Leaf, where are you?” she called out.

“Just in my room. Will be out in minute,” he hollered back.

Walking out to the lounge, he saw his mum waiting for him. “How did you go with ringing up those builders today?” she asked.

“Well, Mum, I didn’t ring them today. I just needed a day to take stock of everything.”

His mum gave a half-smile. “I understand. Just promise me that you will ring them tomorrow,” she said. He nodded in agreement.

Just then, the boys rolled up to the front door and made their way to Leaf’s room. Leaf explained the situation to Summo and Spence: the death of Wilford, Dell being ransacked, and Frank being in town.

They were both flabbergasted by what Leaf was telling them. The real part that hit the most was the death of Wilford. At such a young age, they hadn’t dealt with death before.

Spence asked Leaf, “Did he really die because we were there?”

“No, it’s not because of us, Spence. It’s because of a greedy organization that Reblick that wants Xzed. If someone rolled up fifty year earlier or in two hundred years from now, I believe they would have killed someone.” The feeling in the room was sombre.

“We need to grab the pizzas and meet up with Frank,” said Leaf, at last breaking the lingering silence.

Summo ran into the pizza shop, and they made the move to the motel. Pulling up in the parking bay, Leaf noticed that the black sports car wasn’t in sight. Summo was about to hop out. “Stop, Summo. Wait. Something isn’t right.”

“What’s wrong, mate?” asked Spence.

“I need to ring Frank.” Said Leaf.

“Evening, Leaf. Where are you? I’m famished,” answered Frank when he picked up his phone.

“Your car isn’t in the parking lot. Are you okay?” asked Leaf.

“Very good. You’re being observant,” answered Frank. “The red SUV down the back is what I am driving. Now you’re safe to come in.”

“Okay, we’re good to go boys,” said Leaf. The other boys were a bit complexed by what had just happened.

Summo knocked on the door, and Frank opened it. “What took you guys so long?” he said as he winked at Leaf.

“Well, someone was acting kind of strange,” said Summo.

“No, he has just taken some advice and is learning a new skill,” Frank replied.

“Either way, I need to eat before I fade away!” exclaimed Summo.

They all chowed down on the pizza to fill their bellies. Frank was wearing a white tank top, and Leaf noticed that he had a tattoo on his right shoulder. “The tattoo on your shoulder ... What does the writing say?” quizzed Leaf.

“You are learning, which is good to see,” Frank said with a smile.

“You didn’t answer my question,” fired back Leaf.

Frank sighed and looked at Leaf as if he didn’t want to discuss it.

“It obviously means something deep and meaningful to you,” said Leaf.

“It does—and something very painful as well,” said Frank.

“Do you want to talk about it?” chimed in Spence.

“I was representing a client in court who had links to the underworld, and I lost the case. That didn’t go down to well with him or the rest of his people. They wanted to make an example of me so other lawyers knew what happened when they didn’t win.” said Frank.

“So, they decided to hit me where it hurts the most and take out my family.” Said Frank with sadness in his voice.

“I didn’t think you had a family”. said Leaf.

The look on the others’ faces said it all. They could see the pain in Frank’s face as he spoke.

“I had a wife, her name was Lalina Dell and the tattoo is her name her, birthday, the day we meet in Latin”. continued Frank.

Spence was almost in tears. Summo had tears rolling down his cheeks. Leaf, surprisingly, kept his emotions in order.

“Do you know understand the severity of the situation? Reblick are willing to kill people to find this country,” said Frank changing the subject.

Summo and Spence looked at each other nervously, whereas Leaf seemed to be taking it all in stride. He seemed to be getting used to dealing with bad/interesting news. Whether or not that was a good thing, time would tell.

“The main reason we are here is that you three need a plan moving forward.” Said Frank with the sadness now gone from his voice.

“We three? What about you, Frank?” queried Spence.

“Frank needs to disappear for his and our own safety,” said Leaf. “He’s the only thing or person that links to Xonarye.”

The other two looked at Leaf oddly. They could see that Leaf was becoming more confident in himself.

“Frank, I’m really sorry to hear about your wife,” said Leaf. “I didn’t mean to upset you.”

Frank smiled. “It’s okay, Leaf. I asked you to be aware of your surroundings, and that’s what you are doing. Anyway, thinking of her brings me happiness and joy to know that she was in my life.”

“I’m sorry as well,” said Summo.

“Me too,” said Spence.

“Thank you, guys. I’m sure she would have liked to meet you three,” said Frank.

CHAPTER 16

"Now, who has been overseas? Who has a passport? Where is Cuba? Gentlemen, tonight will only finish when I say we are done," proclaimed Frank. He grabbed some beers and handed them to the lads. "Here's to a hard night's work," cheered Frank.

"I already worked hard today," groaned Summo.

Frank looked at him and laughed. "Did you get to work with your best mates and have a couple of beers?" asked Frank.

"Well, no," responded Summo.

"What Frank is saying is that this will clearly be better," clarified Spence, giving him a nudge.

Frank whipped out a long ream of white paper ripped it up into different pieces and tacked them to the motel wall.

"Why does this remind me of school already?" complained Summo.

"Did you drink beers in class?" asked Frank with a sly smile and a wink.

Spence and Leaf cracked up laughing, pushing and shoving Summo.

"Now I know what your teachers must have felt like," exclaimed Frank with a laugh.

A loud chorus of "Ohhhhhh" came from leaf and Spence.

"If I had a piece of paper, I would put a spitball on the back of your head," carried on Summo.

“Really, Summo? You don’t like me that much,” said Frank. Then the voice of reason came up in the room.

“Can we make the plan?” asked Spence. “I have to work tomorrow.”

“That’s a great idea, Spence. Let’s do this,” said Frank, grabbing a black texter. “Right, boys. We need to make a list and work from there. What do you need to travel?”

The guys took it in turns, coming up with some good ideas and some that were better off not being repeated. The list looked as follows:

- Visas
- Passports
- Insurance
- Injections
- Medicals
- Phones/chargers
- International licence
- Currency
- Credit card

“Looking at these, we need to make sure all three of you are covered,” explained Frank.

“Wait up. We are all going and when?” asked Summo. “I’ve just started a Job that I love; I don’t want to lose that.”

“When would be going? We have a lot going on at the farm right now, and I can’t leave the old man in the lurch,” said Spence.

Leaf and Frank looked at each other, like WTF. They both thought the other two new what they were getting in to.

“The sooner the better would be ideal for everyone’s safety and well-being,” said Frank.

“What are you going to tell your parents?” Spence asked Leaf. “We all know Mum will not be a fan of you travelling.” Leaf knew that talking to his parents would be hard—and even harder not to be able to tell them the truth.

“You both know that I have wanted to travel since forever and a day. With the job and finding the book, it all adds up,” Leaf explained.

“Still want to see and convince your mum?” chirped Summo.

“How long before you think you can leave?” asked Frank.

“Well, it all depends. I have to get the things on the wall ticked off,” answered Leaf.

Frank smiled. He could tell that Leaf was starting to think about things more serious.

“How do you get to Cuba from here?” asked Spence. “Let’s make another list about Cuba.” Everyone turned and looked at him in surprise. “Oh, come on, guys. Every now and then, I have a good idea.”

“Once a year, maybe,” laughed Leaf.

“All right, let’s get this back on track. I want some sleep this year,” said Frank. “What do we need to know about Cuba?”

“How to get there, language, currency, government type, capital city, weather, time difference, and population safe. So, on top of that, we need to get there to get all the information on Cuba we can for Leaf.” said Frank.

“Hey, why can’t you do this?” Frank questioned Summo. Frank put his head in hand and shook it. He looked at Summo. “Because I am your advisor, not your goddamn mother, Summo, so pull your head in,” said Frank, giving him a clip on his head.

“Just like school,” laughed Spence and Leaf simultaneously.

“Oh well, it was worth a shot,” said Summo, rubbing his head.

“Leaf, you need to sort out the travel since you will be the one doing the travelling, and it’s vital that you have all the information,” said Frank. Leaf nodded in agreement.

“Spence, you can do the research on Cuba,” said Frank.

“Sure. I can do that,” said Spence energetically.

“What about me?” asked Summo. “What can I do to help?”

“You can offer moral support to them,” said Frank.

“Really? You don’t think I can help?” said Summo crossly.

“There aren’t enough things to do, plus you don’t seem like the sort of person that enjoys homework,” justified Frank. “Look, boys, it’s getting late. You two have work tomorrow, and there is information to gather.”

“Also, you need your beauty sleep,” said Summo, mocking Frank.

Getting home, Leaf was getting pretty tired but couldn't sleep. He was going to travel to Cuba, which was exciting to him; however, he was going to be doing it by himself, which made him nervous. He thought about the things he had to do tomorrow on the list. He had a passport already. He'd decided to get one as soon as he was eighteen, much to his mother's displeasure. She had refused to get him one. She didn't want him gallivanting around the world being a bum, in her words.

It would be a challenge to talk to his mum about it, compared to his dad, whom he knew would be supportive of him. Not telling them the truth would be even harder since they had always been there for him with love and support. They both knew that he wanted to see the world and have life experiences. Eventually, Leaf was able to drift off into a deep peaceful sleep.

CHAPTER 17

Waking up mid-morning for the second day in a row of no work, Leaf stumbled into the kitchen and yawning his head off to get a glass of water. On the fridge, he noticed a yellow sticky note with some writing. It was from his mum. It read, “Leaf, you promised me to ring the builders today. Love, Mum.” Leaf rolled his eyes. That was the last thing in the word he felt like doing.

He heard his phone go off. It was a text from Frank. It was a picture of the wall from the list. “We need this to get yourself organized,” the message read.

Leaf got down under his bed and dug round to find an old shoebox. In the shoebox was his passport. He hated his passport; he looked like a criminal in it. First thing checked off the list. On to the next. The international licence was a lot easier than he’d thought. He found the website, filled out his details, and paid just under fifty dollars for a three-years licence would be in the post in ten days. The medicinal didn’t seem that important for him, seeing that he was a fit young nineteen-year-old, so he checked off another thing done.

The currency was the Cuban peso, and every Australian dollar converted to 0.68. The best way was to take money over and get it converted to Cuban pesos at the Cuban BFI Bank. Insurance was straightforward; that was done online as well. Everything was a lot easier than Leaf had thought it was going to be. He found a phone adaptor online as well. Bam! he thought knocking the list out of the park.

Then he remembered that he had not sorted out his visa yet. That was easy as well; you could apply for a thirty-day tourist visa. Thirty days, pondered Leaf. Thirty days to find a Nila Runika relative and learn where they lived in Cuba. Now, this could be a major problem, and none of them had thought about or discussed this issue yet. This was not only going to be his biggest hurdle here in Cuba but in all the countries, and Cuba wasn't that big compared to other countries on the earth.

His phone went off again. It was a text from Summo. "Since you guys have missed some things, I have filled in the holes."

What is Summo on about? pondered Leaf.

Another message came through from Frank. "Let's meet up again tonight at the motel again and go over all the information we have."

"I'll blow your mind tonight," came through another text from Summo.

Frank sent a text again. "What the heck is Summo on about?"

"I have no idea," responded Leaf and Spence simultaneously.

The day had flown by, and Leaf only realized that when his mum's car pulled up in the driveway. His mum came through the door. "Afternoon, Leaf. How did you go talking to the builders today?" she asked.

Leaf was going to have to lie through his teeth to his mum. "I spoke to all three of them; two didn't have any work for me, and the third was going to get back to me," said Leaf, trying to convince her.

"Hmm," she said, looking suspiciously at him.

"I do have some good news," he followed up. "I have some work out on Spence's farm in the meantime." He knew that would keep her happy while he worked on his plan to go to Cuba.

Rolling up to the motel that night, Leaf was excited to see what the others had come up with. He also wanted to see what the plan was with finding the person in Cuba. Pizza and beer were out already, and everyone else was there. Handshakes all round was the order of the night.

"So, boys, how did we go with all the information from last night?" asked Frank.

"Come on, Frank. Can't we finish our food first?" asked Summo.

"You know, Summo, that's a great idea," said Leaf with a laugh.

After they filled the holes in their stomach with pizza, it was time to get down business. "Who wants to go first?" asked Frank.

“I will be in the cab off the rank,” said Spence. Doing my research on Cuba, I found out that they speak Spanish and the capital city is Havana, with a population of just over two million. Getting to Cuba, there are no direct flights, so you four options: one, you can go via Canada; option two is via the US; the third is via Mexico; and four is going via Chile. We need to work out which will be the best for you. I presume, Leaf, that you have figured out the currency is the Cuban peso and you know the exchange rate.”

Leaf answered with a couple nods of the head. “Cuba is a communist state like North Korea, but nothing like the crazy rule over there, and it is a safe country to travel to.”

“The season over there at the moment is winter and averages twenty-five degrees,” said Spence.

“Is that all? That’s not a winter temperature compared to here,” remarked Summo.

“Before I was rudely interrupted, you missed out on hurricane season, so that is a massive plus for you, mate. With the time zone, there is a thirteen-hour time difference, so you will be backwards, so enjoy the jetlag,” said Spence with a smirk.

“Thanks, Spence. I always know you’re a good bloke when you’re asleep,” said Leaf.

“Do you have all your things organized Leaf?” asked Frank.

“I have everything sorted and researched”. responded Leaf.

“Righto. Enough of this. It’s time for what you have been waiting for,” announced Summo. Frank just shook his head. No one knew what to suspect about Summo.

“So after the other night of giving me nothing to do,” said Summo, looking straight at Frank, “I have done so many handy things that will help Leaf. I have signed him up to an awards card for airlines and hotels. My genius doesn’t end there,” boasted Summo. “Does Leaf speak Spanish? Hmm, the answer is no. I’ve found the best English to Spanish app for his phone. Boom—drop the mic.” He walked out of the motel room for dramatic effect. After a few seconds, he walked back in with a beaming smile on his face.”

“Summo, I can’t believe I’m saying this, but you have done a great job, especially with the app. That’s so helpful,” said Frank.

CHAPTER 18

“Now the rest is up to you, Leaf,” said Frank. You have to sort your parents out and fly off to Cuba.

“Frank, you make it sound so bloody easy,” responded Leaf. “I do have a concern, something that we’ve overlooked.”

“What’s that?” asked Spence.

“How do I find the relative of Nila Runika in the whole of Cuba on a thirty-day visa,” quizzed Leaf.

The question went unanswered, with nothing but crickets in the room. Summo look bewildered. Frank and Spence were clearly deep in thought about the question that was suggested.

Much to everyone’s surprise, it was Summo who spoke first, with an idea that was again actually great. “Why not try and find them on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or LinkedIn?”

“Where the hell did you pull that from?” asked Spence.

Summo was smiling ear to ear. Clearly, he was very proud of himself. Frank was lost for words, for what he witnessed from Summo tonight with his idea of the Spanish app, and now his idea to track down the next person in Cuba.

“After tonight, I will have move on from Naracoorte and go into hiding,” said Frank. “If something should happen to me, remember that I am your only link and Rebllick might be tracking me. Do not come to me,

or if something should happen, no matter what, don't come," he warned them.

The guys were going to miss having him and his wisdom around. Spence got up and shook Frank's hand, followed up by Summo. Leaf stood up and gave Frank a hug. "Thank you for all your help, and hopefully we will cross paths soon."

Frank smiled. "I just want to find somewhere warm," he said with a wink.

Leaving the room to head to the car park, Leaf grabbed Spence's shoulder. "Hey, mate, if you hear from my mum at all, I told her I was working out on the farm."

"Yeah, no dramas, mate," said Spence.

The next day, Leaf was up early, pretending to go to work. He hated to be doing this to his mum, but he couldn't see another way at the moment. He pulled up to a park, where he would wait until his mum went to work. Leaf nodded off, waiting for his mum to leave for work.

Back home, he set up his laptop, looking for the name Nila Runika or anyone with the last name Runika in Cuba. Starting on Facebook, he searched in Cuba. He was high on confidence that he would find someone with an unusual last name. Much to his surprise and his frustration, he came up with absolutely nothing at all. Next was LinkedIn, and he had the same result—nothing. "Third time's the charm," he told himself as he started looking on Instagram. Bam! He had a hit at last. A wave of relief swept over his body as he let out a massive sigh. He decided to have a gander on twitter as well however only came up with the same result on Instagram.

What he found was a small café that served traditional Cuban food in the heart of Havana. Well from what he could make out, he could translate from Spanish. He could tell that the language barrier was going to be an issue. Maybe he could hire a translator once he got there; however, that could mean a trail for someone to follow or, even worse, another death. Leaf couldn't have that on his conscience. The app idea that Summo came up with was going to be invaluable to him. He realized he could also learn some Spanish however time could be a big factor in that plan.

Now he had somewhere to start when he reached Cuba. Which way would be best? Going to the US would be a dream come true for Leaf;

however, there would be more paperwork with visas. Also, Reblick was watching and that may be too obvious, for the same reason going via Canada was out of the question. That left going via Mexico or Chile. He had a good feeling about going to Chile; he didn't know why just felt right in his soul. Also, where would he fly in to Chile? The capital Santiago sounded really cool to him.

The next part would be the hardest, telling his parents that he would be traveling, also not telling them the whole truth. He decided it would be better off tackling them together rather than by themselves as individuals. He would need his father's support to sway his mother. He had the money in the bank account, but they didn't know that, and he couldn't risk telling them, for their own safety. Leaf knew he would have to show the money he had saved and sell his ute. That would put his mum's mind at ease and reassure her that he could finance the trip himself.

It was Tuesday. He would have to wait until the weekend when his dad was home to tell them what he was going to do. The next few days were the same routine: get up in the morning and leave, pretending he was going to work; wait until his mum went to work; come back home and do more research and plan everything out. The one thing he was trying to figure out was whether to contact someone at the cafe, but he decided not to. He might come across as some crazed Aussie that should be committed to asylum. At least face-to-face, he could see their reactions and read their body language.

It was Friday afternoon, and he was ready for Saturday to have the talk with his parents. His phone rang. It was Spence, and he sounded frantic. "Leaf, there was a car crash in Brisbane yesterday. They just released the name. It's Frank."

"What do you mean?" asked Leaf.

"Frank is dead. He died in a crash," repeated Spence.

Leaf dropped the phone in complete shock.

"Leaf, you there!" shouted Spence.

Leaf just stood in shock; his body felt numb again, and his mind went blank. He could hear Spence's voice in the room, but it sounded as if he was on another planet.

CHAPTER 19

After what seemed like hours but was only a matter of minutes, his brain kicked back into gear. Leaf slowly bent down and picked up his mobile. “Yeah, I am here, mate,” he responded with a slow stammer in his voice. “Let’s meet at my place after work. Let Summo know to meet here but don’t tell him about Frank.”

“Righto, mate. Will meet you there,” answered Spence. Leaf laid down on his bed staring at his white painted ceiling, his mind running in complete overdrive.

Leaf couldn’t believe Frank had passed away. Spence said a car accident. That’s how Wilford had died. It clearly wasn’t a coincidence. Reblick must be involved. Leaf just felt sick deep inside his soul. Frank had just started to help him grow as a person in such a small amount of time. He wasn’t just an advisor; he had become almost like a mentor to him and, more importantly, he felt like he was becoming a trusted friend.

The boys arrived at Leaf’s parents’ house. Summo could tell something was up by the mood in the room. Leaf and Spence were acting strange. “What’s going on, guys?” questioned Summo.

“Summo, there’s something we have to tell you,” said Leaf in a low sad voice. Frank was involved in a car crash, and has passed away.”

Summo’s eyes glazed over and tears started trickling down his cheeks. Leaf gave him a hug. “I know, mate, this suck,” he said. Summo had become very fond of Frank, especially of their back and forth banter.

“What’s the plan Leaf?” asked Spence. “I think we need to go to his funeral.”

Leaf shook his head. “Don’t you remember what he said, not to come, no matter what?” The other two nodded their heads in agreement.

“We should do something to honour him, don’t you think?” asked Spence.

“Yes, we should,” said Summo, wiping his eyes of his tears.

Leaf heard what sounded like a bump from outside his door. He put his finger up to his lips, indicating for them to be quiet. He slowly tiptoed over to his door and whipped it open quickly. There, to his surprise, was his mother, who had clearly been trying to eavesdrop. Mum, what the heck are you doing?” asked Leaf, raising his voice at her.

“I wanted to know what’s going on with you. You haven’t been yourself lately,” she responded Sharpley.

“Mum, people change and grow in life for the better. If we don’t change, we can’t become better people,” said Leaf.

His mum smiled at him, however quite surprised by the response. She had never heard him talk like that in his life. “So, you will tell me what’s going on? I know something is going on,” she said.

Leaf smiled back. “Give me a couple of days to sort something out and I will tell you mum.”

“Okay.” She nodded back at leaf with half a grin.

“Can you give me and the guys some privacy?” requested Leaf.

“Yes, of course,” she replied giving her son a hug.

They were back in the room with their privacy now back intact. Let’s meet at the park tomorrow at ten, and we can do something then,” said Leaf.

“Sounds good to me, mate,” said Spence.

“Can we make it midday?” asked Summo. “I have to work in the morning.”

“Yeah, I can do that, mate,” said Spence, and Leaf nodded in agreement with Spence.



The next day, there was a weird feeling in the house. Leaf's mum was waiting for him to say something. His mind was on honouring Frank, even though he only knew him for a short time. It was a nice sunny day outside, it was like it knew it was an important day and it was as if the day itself was paying homage to Frank's life. They all rolled up at midday, ready to have a little ceremony on their own. They stood in a small group together, heads bowed, waiting for someone to speak.

Leaf cleared his throat. "We are here today to pay tribute to Frank Dell's life. We only had the pleasure and joy in knowing Frank for a short amount of time. We all would have loved to spend more time with him. He was a very knowledgeable person who gave his time to help people better themselves, which he did with his great sense of humour. We know he will be looking over his friends, loved ones, and us."

"That was beautiful, mate," said Spence. Summo smiled in agreement as he gave Leaf a pat on the back.

They decided to head to the pub to have a beer. They raised their glasses and clinked them together for Frank. "So tomorrow you let the cat out of the bag to your parents?" inquired Spence. Leaf nodded his head.

"Nervous?" asked Summo.

"I was until the other night, until I looked into my mum's eyes. I feel it will be a lot easier now," said Leaf.

Arriving home, he saw that dad was home from being away all week driving his truck. "Leaf, can you come into the lounge?" he called.

Oh, what does he want? thought Leaf as he trudged into the lounge room dragging his feet all the way. Both his parents were sitting in their armchairs waiting for him. I guess this talk is happening now, he thought to himself.

"Leaf, what's going on, mate? Your mum is very concerned with your behaviour this week," asked his Dad.

"Well, with the injury to Red and subsequently losing my job, I have done a lot of soul-searching," said Leaf.

"You both know there is something I always wanted to do," his mum interrupted. "You want to go bloody traveling and gallivanting around the world, don't you?" she scolded.

“What do you have against travel? I have money put aside, and I can sell the ute,” said Leaf starting to fire up. “Are you worried about money, safety, or can’t you let me go?”

She was clearly surprised at the way Leaf was responding. Leaf had been thinking about it and was prepared for the conversation. She changed her tact. “Where are you thinking of going?” she questioned.

Leaf and his Dad almost fell over in utter shock after what she just said. “Can ... you repeat that?” stuttered his dad.

“Look, he obviously has made up his mind and has been preparing to go,” said his mum.

His dad smiled at Leaf; he knew this meant a lot to his son. His mum still had a concerned look on her face about him going.

“Well, where are you thinking of going?” she asked again.

“South America and the US,” said Leaf, partially lying. “I have looked at insurance, visas, currency, languages, weather, time difference, car licence, and making sure it is safe.”

“When are you looking to fly off?” asked his father.

“I’m still working on a time frame,” Leaf told him. “I haven’t even put the ute up for sale yet.”

His mum still looked a concerned look on her face even though her son had done his home work.

“Mum, you know I’m a smart kid. I don’t do rash stupid things,” said Leaf trying to convince her it would be all okay.

She nodded her head, getting up out of the chair and wrapping her arms around son to give him a big long hug.

CHAPTER 20

Leaf slept well knowing that he had finally had the talk with his parents. It went so much better than he could have dreamed of. The next morning, he woke to his phone ringing. Looking through his sleepy eyes, he saw that it was Spence.

“Hey, mate, you ready for the big talk with the parents?” asked Spence.

“I had it yesterday,” replied Leaf.

“What happened?” quizzed Spence in a surprised voice.

“They ambushed me yesterday when I got home, and we had a surprisingly good chat,” explained Leaf.

“That means they’re on board?” asked Spence.

“Yep, they are, mate. Just have to sell the rocket and away I go,” said Leaf in a confident voice.

“What are you asking for it?” Spence asked.

“I’m not really sure yet. Haven’t got a number,” answered Leaf.

“Surely you must have some idea on a figure,” said Spence in a pressing voice, trying to get an answer out of Leaf.

“Maybe you’re interested, maybe around ten grand,” said Leaf in a sarcastic. It clearly was an unrealistic price to see if he could get Spence to bite.

“Are you on drugs?” replied Spence.

“Oh, come on, mate, you know it’s worth it,” said Leaf, trying not to laugh.

“I’ll give you five grand,” chimed back Spence.

“Oh, come on, mate. You’re trying to lowball me,” said Leaf slyly.

“You have how much money in the bank to hunt Xonarye? You’re not short of a dollar now,” said Spence.

“Very true, but I love pulling your leg,” said Leaf with a laugh.

“Do we have a deal at five?” Spence asked pushing the negotiations.

Leaf didn’t answer straight away; he wanted to make Spence sweat a bit. There was nothing but silence on the phone. “Yeah, mate, we have a deal,” said Leaf at last. “Come around in a few days to sort it out.”

The weekend moved fast, for Leaf since he had talked to his parents and sold his ute. The next step was to look at flights and arrange visas. This is really happening, thought Leaf. I’m going on a treasure hunt, and I am really going to travel the world. He let that sink in, which made his face light up with a huge smile. He could fly out of Adelaide to Brisbane, then on to Santiago in Chile and his final destination, Havana, Cuba.

There was a big sticking point that Leaf had to deal with, and that was flying. He had only flown once, and that was to Queensland when he was about twelve. It was a horrible experience, it still haunts him until this day. He flew out of Adelaide for that trip. The majority of the trip went well; the bad part was coming in to land. Instead of coming in smooth like an escalator rolling down, it was like someone thumping clumsily down a flight of stairs. The feeling of weightless in your body as if you are falling out of the sky is a frightening experience that he will never forget.

For the rest of the week, Leaf actually went out and worked on Spence dad’s farm. It was pretty cushy just driving around in a tractor listening to tunes. It felt good for him doing some work instead of doing nothing and sneaking around his mums back. Also, it was good to spend some more time with Spence before he left and he was unsure how long it would be before he saw him again.

When he got home Friday after work, his mum called out, “Leaf, there’s mail for you.”

Grabbing the mail, he saw that there was one from the bank and the other one was a postcard. Then he realized where the postcard was from: Fiji. No way. That's where Frank was going. Could he be alive? wondered Leaf. Turning it over with excitement, he read, "Found somewhere warm. Ring the Kepu Kepu Bar at eight o'clock tonight and ask for Franco."

"No way. He's alive," said Leaf to himself. "How is he alive? I need to tell the boys—they will be super pumped. Maybe I should wait until after I talk to Frank, just in case Frank wants to keep it a secret."

Leaf checked the time difference; Fiji was two hours ahead of Australia, according to the searches on the internet. He would have to wait an hour before he could call. Leaf was excited to talk to Frank. He paced back and forth in his bedroom, going stir-crazy. Patience wasn't one of Leaf's strong points, clearly.

Finally, it was time for Leaf to call the bar. The phone rang three times, and a deep voice answered. "Kepu Kepu Bar."

"I was wanting to talk to Franco in the bar," said Leaf.

"Is there a Franco in the bar? Phone call for Franco!" bellowed out the deep voice. "No Franco here," said the unknown man's voice, and he hung up the phone, much to Leaf's shock.

What now? wondered Leaf. Was he there, was he running, or did Reblick find him? His mind was spinning over and over.

After ten minutes of thinking it over, Leaf decided to ring the bar back. The same guy answered the phone. "Kepu Kepu Bar."

"Is Franco there yet?" asked Leaf.

"Hmm, you again," said the deep voice. "Phone call for Franco!" bellowed the voice again.

Leaf waited for the phone to get hung up again, but much to his pleasant surprise, he heard a familiar voice on the phone.

"Petal, is that you?" asked Frank in a cheeky voice.

"Well, I was looking forward to talking to you, but after that remark, I am not now," Leaf said. "What the heck is going on?"

"I found somewhere warm to soak up the sun, and I was in the toilet when you rang the first time," said Frank, deliberately avoiding Frank's question, trying to work him up.

Leaf didn't bite. "You know what I mean," he said. "Stop being a smart-arse."

"All right, I will come clean on what's going on," answered Frank. "When I left you three, I drove to Melbourne for a few days just to unwind and relax for a bit, something that is very foreign to me. After Melbourne, it was on to Sydney. That's where I realized that someone was following me. So, I had to make a plan to lose them and get out of the country. In Brisbane, I met a former client who got me a new passport and devised the car crash plan. Now I am here at my bar in the sun and drinking beer," laughed Frank.

"Where did the body in the car crash come from?" asked Leaf.

"I don't know," responded Frank. "My former client sorted that out, sometimes you don't ask questions that you don't want to know the answers for."

CHAPTER 21

“Well, either way, I am bloody happy you’re alive and to be talking to you,” said Leaf.

Frank laughed. “I am even happier to be alive.”

Leaf could tell Frank was happy and relaxed from the tone of his voice. “So, it’s nice weather to be having a drink in the bar,” asked Leaf.

“Yeah, its gorgeous weather, the bar is beautiful and now I own it” said Frank in an extremely jovial voice.

“What spluttered out Leaf you bought a bar”.

“I always wanted a bar, and the business opportunity came knocking while I have been here,” answered Frank.

“If your dead how do you legally own a bar in Fiji,” questioned Leaf.

“Damn good question, Leaf,” snapped back Frank, “You’re using your head now and I own it. I signed it with my new legal name Franco Delmario.”

“You sound like a mob boss,” chuckled Leaf. “Beggars can’t be choosers. That’s what my former client came up with and Anyway, I think Franco Delmario sounds classy.” Leaf snorted with laughter.

“Where are you at with your plan to go to Cuba?” asked Frank changing the subject quite dramatically.

“I have everything sorted out. Just need to book the tickets and I will jet off to Cuba,” responded Leaf.

“When are you leaving?” Frank asked.

Leaf paused. He didn't have the answer. He'd given Frank all the information he had at this stage.

"Book it today for two weeks. You can't put it off anymore," demanded Frank.

Leaf was taken aback by the sharpness tone in Frank's voice. "Okay, Frank, I'll book the flights after I get off the phone," he answered.

"Good lad," said Frank. "How are the other two lads going?"

"They are well. At the moment, it all hit us hard when we heard about your death," said Leaf.

"I thought it would; however, it was a necessary evil to get rid of the person on my tail," said Frank.

"Do you think it was Reblick?" asked Leaf.

"I would put your money on it," said Frank.

"How do I contact you if I need to talk to you? Can I tell the other boys you're alive? —and how come the guy who answered the phone didn't help me more when I rang?" fired off Leaf.

"One thing at a time, Leaf. Ring the bar to get hold of me. How about we keep me being alive under wraps for the moment for everyone's safety? Didn't you like Berenado's people skills?"

"I think he has some work to do on that front," remarked Leaf in a snarky voice.

"Berenado is a good bloke; he has my best well-being at heart. I need to go. I have a bar to run, and a drink is calling my name as well," said Frank. "Look after yourself."

"Talk soon, Mr. Delmario," said Leaf with a chuckle, hanging up the phone.

He hopped on his computer and started looking at flights. He heard a knock on the door; it was his mum. "I have some things for you for your trip," she said. She came in to Leaf's room with her hands behind her back. "I know that you might be short of money, so I bought you a suitcase and a backpack," she said as she bought the items from behind her back.

Leaf felt awful inside. He had a tonne of money but couldn't tell his parents. His parents very conservative with the money they did have, so

he knew this was a big gesture. "Oh, Mum, you shouldn't have done this," he said, giving her a hug.

"I see you're looking at flights," she said, seeing the computer screen.

"Yeah, I am," replied Leaf. "Looking to ship off in a couple of weeks."

There was an awkward silence between the two before his mum spoke. "Well, I will get out from under your feet so you can get yourself organized."

Leaf knew his mum was struggling and was putting on a brave face in front of him. He opened up the suitcase and backpack to have a good look at both items. He then went back to his computer to look at airfare prices and times. He finally locked in his flights. He would fly out from Adelaide to Brisbane; Brisbane to Santiago, Chile; and finally, Santiago to Havana, Cuba. Leaf felt good to have booked the flights and even better to have talked to Frank today. Leaf knew that he would get a good sleep now that he had all his ducks were in a row.

Waking up and feeling fresh from a deep slumber, he noticed his dad sitting on a chair in the corner of his room. Leaf was taken aback by his dad just sitting there watching him sleep. "Are you okay, Dad?" asked Leaf in a confused voice.

"Leaf, I know you're excited about the trip and this is something you always wanted to do; however, I get the feeling there is something you are not telling us," said his old man.

Leaf had been trying so hard not to give anything away with how he talked or acted around his parents. Thinking on his feet, he said, "Dad, there is one thing I haven't told you and Mum, more Mum than you. I'm going to go to Cuba."

"Cuba, really," said his dad, who was a bit surprised by this news.

"Yeah, it's a place that really interests me and would be amazing experience," explained Leaf.

Leaf continued on before his dad had a chance to speak "I know the country has a checked past with issues with the USA, I've done my homework, Dad, and it's safe to go. I know I should have told you both. I just didn't want Mum to stress any more than she already is."

His dad smiled. "I get it, Leaf. She is all over the shop right now. How about we keep this between you and me."

Leaf took a deep breath as his dad left his room. He seemed to be lying through his teeth a lot and keeping many different secrets under his hat at the moment. So much had happened lately that he just needed some time for himself to chill out. He spent most of the day at home watching TV and lying in his bed. Near the end of the day, he felt like going for a walk to get some fresh air, which was something he hadn't done in weeks. It was nice to have some fresh air in his lungs, stretch his legs, and feel the sunshine radiate on his skin. In order to relax, he needed this day to recharge his body and, more importantly, his mind mentally.

On Sunday, Leaf decided he would pack his bags to make sure he had everything organised and nothing would be left behind. The temperature would be in the mid to low twenties, and he would have missed hurricane season as well. He had all his paperwork sorted out for his passport, visas, and international driver's licence, plus he had plenty of cash to exchange when he got to Cuba. Now all Leaf had to do was wait, something he hated doing.

CHAPTER 22

The next week and a half were straightforward—get up, drive a tractor, come home, sleep and repeat. It was the Wednesday night before he left that Friday for Brisbane. Leaf was catching up with the boys for a meal and a beer before he left for Cuba. There was a weird feeling at the table between the three of them. Finally, Leaf broke the silence. “What’s going on? I can tell there’s something is going on.”

Spence and Summo looked at each other and then Leaf. “Well, there is something we need to discuss with you,” said Spence. “We know you’re going to fly off by yourself in a couple of days, so we decided that someone should go with you.”

Leaf was surprised by this and was intrigued of who this someone was. “what do you mean someone is coming with me?” he asked curiously.

Spence smiled. “It’s me,” he said, pushing Leaf’s shoulder.

“Really? No way. But how can you come now? We wouldn’t be on the same flights, said Leaf and what about the farm.”

“I talked to the old man, and we sorted out that I can have a holiday for a few weeks,” said Spence. “To answer your second question, you sent me a copy of your itinerary remember, so I just booked the same flights and motel.”

Leaf was thrilled to have Spence going with him. “That’s great, mate. This is going to fantastic that you are coming along.”

“I know, right?” said Spence, giving Leaf a big high five.

“I can pay you the money back you spent so you are not out of pocket,” said Leaf.

Leaf noticed Summo hadn’t said anything, and his body language was not very happy. It dawned on him that Summo was the only one who wasn’t coming and he was going to be left behind. “You okay?” he asked.

Summo looked at Leaf. “You know, I would love to come, and I feel like I’m letting you guys down,” he said glumly.

“You’re not letting us down,” said Leaf.

“That’s what I told him,” chimed in Spence.

“I am following on how I feel,” said Summo. “This job is my dream job, and I don’t want to give that up. Another trip I would love to be involved in ...”

“I get it,” said Leaf “you have talked about this job since we were little kids.”

Summo gave them each a hug as the night ended. He didn’t know when he would see them again, especially Leaf.

It was Thursday, the day before Leaf and Spence would fly off on the big adventure. Leaf was going over everything he’d packed, making doubly sure he had everything packed. There was a knock at his bedroom door. It was his mum. “Spence is here, ready to go? Your father is getting the car sorted out, ready to take you to Adelaide,” she said. She had that worried look back on her face again.

Leaf walked up to her and gave her a big hug. “I’ll be fine, Mum.”

“I know,” she said. “I love you and will miss you deeply. “Also, stay safe,” she added sternly. “And don’t forget to have fun.” She gave Leaf one last hug before he left. Leaf could feel her squeeze the oxygen out of his body briefly.

Spence and his dad were waiting in the car for him. Leaf stood there looking at the house he had grown up in, wondering when he would lay eyes on it again, before hopping in the car. Leaf sat in the back seat of the car. He liked being in the back for the extra legroom and so he could think. His mind was thinking a lot on the trip towards Adelaide. He was leaving behind everything he had ever known in his whole life—family, friends, comfort, familiarity, and safety. It made him feel uneasy and unsure of what lay ahead of him on this journey. What was he going

to gain would it make it worth while he thought, which made him feel excited, plus he had one of his best mates coming with him, so he was bringing something from home with him. That made the uneasy feeling start dissipating from his body.

The trip was straightforward, up the highway to the big city, where they would stay the night before flying out in the morning. Pulling up to the motel, they unloaded their luggage. Spence made his way to the lobby, leaving Leaf with his dad to say their goodbyes.

“Well, mate, this it,” said his dad, “what you always wanted. Make sure you have a good time. Can’t wait to hear all about your trip.”

“I can’t wait to tell you about it,” said Leaf as they embraced each other with a big hug.

“I better get a move on. I have a bit of a drive ahead of me, and you need to get yourself settled in for the night,” said his old man.

Leaf watched him drive off around the corner before going in to catch up with Spence in the lobby. “You okay, mate?” asked Spence.

“Yeah, it’s hard saying goodbye,” said Leaf, “but you know how it feels.”

Spence nodded. “It’s not easy saying goodbye to loved ones.”

Checking into the motel, they made their way up the elevator to room 42.

CHAPTER 23

They settled in to get a good night's sleep. Lying in the bed, Leaf could hear the traffic echo up the concrete walls of the other buildings. It was a lot different from the open spaces in a small country town that he had come a custom to. They had to get up the next day to get organized to get to the airport early so they didn't get stuck in traffic or security checks. Knowing that the flight was for midday, if they got to the airport about ten o'clock, it should leave them ample time to the gate. It was a nice sunny day as they stood out in the front of the motel, waiting for a taxi to collect them.

In the cab, the driver whizzed in and out of the traffic with so much ease that it made Leaf's head spin a bit. Pulling up to the airport, there was plenty of hustle, with cars, busses and people going in every sort of direction. They could hear the planes about to take off to their destinations. Weaving in and out of the people around the airport, they made their way to check in. Checking in was straight forward for both of them and they made their way up to the security check. The line would take some time to get through, as it had backed up. It was defiantly a good move to get in early.

"Well, this may be a while," said Leaf in a grumpy, glum voice.

"Relax," said Spence. "There's no rush, and we have plenty of time."

They slowly shuffled up the line, which seemed to take forever. Leaf was getting very impatient. He started tapping his foot like Sonic the Hedgehog. Spence gave him a nudge. "Chill the heck out, mate."

“How about you chill out?” snapped Leaf.

Spence raised his eyebrows at him as if to say, *Really, mate?*

Finally, they reached the start of the security and emptied anything with metal out of their pockets and into the tray to get scanned. Walking through the detector, Spence went through without a hassle. Leaf was not so lucky. It went off when he stepped through it. A security guard approached him. “Sir, can you please check your pockets? Also, if you are wearing a belt, make sure you remove it.”

Leaf checked his pockets. They were all clear. He then realized he still had his belt on. On the belt was the Xonarye buckle. He felt nervous talking it off and placing it in the tray to get scanned. Walking through the scanner again, there was no problem, and the belt went past without a hiccup as well. Leaf felt relieved that there were no hassles with the buckle.

Collecting his things and placing them back where they belonged, another security guard came up to him. “Sir, can I get you to step over here so I can pat you down?” he asked.

Leaf was surprised. He had never had this done to him before.

Spence could see that Leaf felt uncomfortable and was having a chuckle to himself. The guard was patting down his arms, torso, and his legs. “You are free to go,” said the guard with a smile.

Leaf could see Spence was still chuckling away to himself. “Funny, is it?” snapped Leaf.

“It’s the highlight of the trip so far,” jeered Spence.

Wandering around in the sea of people, they found their gate, so they knew where to go when it was time to check in. Making their way back, they swanned around in and out of a few shops before they spotted the airport bar. They didn’t say a word but just looked at each other and started walking over to it. With time to kill before the plane was to take off, a couple of cheeky beers would go down a treat. Also, it would help with Leaf’s nervousness about flying. The cold beer was nice and refreshing, just what the doctor ordered. The boys smiled at each other. “Here’s to a safe trip,” Spence said with a smile as they clinked their glasses together.

Meandering back towards their gate, Leaf noticed that Spence kept looking around as if he was paranoid. “What’s up with you?” asked Leaf.

“Just checking that we’re not being followed,” answered Spence.

Leaf shook his head. “You couldn’t look any more suss, could you? Plus, there is nothing linking us to Frank.”

“You can never be too sure,” answered Spence.

“Take some advice you gave me earlier and relax,” said Leaf with a wink.

Checking in at the gate and moving down the tunnel onto the plane, they went to their separate seats on the plane to get ready for the take off.

Leaf was sitting in his seat, listening to the flight attendant running through the safety spill. He started to feel twitchy in his seat. The plane was sitting at the end of the runway in readiness to fly off into the blue sky above. As the plane sped up the runway, Leaf could feel himself sink into the seat and his hands tighten around the arm supports. After a few minutes of being in the sky, he started to relax and felt a heck of a lot calmer. Settling in for the trip, he put his headphones on and picked a movie to watch.

The flight was going smoothly, and time seemed to fly by as he watched the flick he’d picked out. The captain’s voice came over the speaker, saying that they were making their approach to land shortly. This brought back the memories of the bad landing he had on his first flight. He started to sweat a bit, and his fingers dug into the armrest in anticipation for the descent. Bracing himself as he felt the plane going down towards the ground, he started breathing heavily. It was a nice smooth descent, and he could feel the wheels touch the ground. There was the sound of the brakes screeching hard against the ground with tremendous force. They were on the ground. “Hallelujah,” said Leaf to himself as he started breathing normally and his fingers loosened their grip on the armrest.

Making his way off the plane and into the airport, he was glad to see Spence and have his feet back on solid ground. “You all good?” asked Spence.

Leaf just gave a solitary nod to let him know it was happy days.

CHAPTER 24

It was a beautiful day in Brisbane or, as Summo would say, “Bris Vegas,” clearly in reference to Las Vegas in the States. Grabbing their bags, the boys made a beeline to the taxi rank. Getting to their motel quickly was a high priority so they could get settled and have a solid night’s sleep before the big flight the next day. Spence had never been to Brisbane before, and his head was on a swivel in the taxi, trying to take in all the sites he could. Leaf smiled at his mate. He could relate to that feeling, as he had been in that position before in the past.

In his room, Leaf could hear Spence talking on his phone. He presumed it was his dad; they were very close. He decided to call his parents to let them know he was there safe. His mum answered the phone call. “Hey, mum. How are you?” asked Leaf.

“Oh, Leaf, are you okay? How was your flight?” she asked, skipping over Leaf’s question.

“I’m fine, Mum, and the flight was all good. I just wanted to touch base,” he said.

“I’m glad to hear,” she responded. “And you’re all organized for the flight tomorrow?”

“Yes, Mum,” moaned Leaf. “Anyway, we are going to get some food. Say hi to Dad. Love you both.”

“We both love you,” she replied as she hung up the phone.

Making his way to the lounge area, he saw Spence sitting there playing on his phone. "You talk to your dad?" asked Leaf.

"Yeah, I did," said Spence. "Just wanted to let him know everything was fine and ask what was happening on the farm."

"I just did the same thing, except I spoke to Mum and there were no farm questions," said Leaf cheekily.

"We should give Summo a buzz," blurted out Spence with excitement.

"Let's take a picture of the view out the window first and send it," said Leaf slyly.

Putting the phone on speaker, they heard Summo's voice loud and clear. "You pricks."

They burst out with raucous laughter. "Yeah, laugh it up, you two clowns. Make me feel even worse," Summo said.

"Oh, come on, mate, that was pretty bloody funny," said Spence, trying to calm him down.

"Yeah, I will pay that," said Summo.

"Do you miss us?" asked Leaf.

"No, not really," said Summo, "especially after a pic like that."

"How's everything there, mate?" questioned Spence.

"You know the drill, boys. Same old same old. Not many much changes," he responded. "You boys having fun?"

"Fun? All we are doing is traveling, mate. Not too much time to get into trouble," said Leaf.

"Anyway, lads, I got to make a move. Mum's calling out to me. Speak to you soon," said Summo.

"See ya, mate," shouted Leaf and Spence simultaneously.

"Well, we'd better get some grub as well," suggested Leaf.

"Let's just order some room service so we can relax and not have to go anywhere," said Spence with a yawn.

"Am I keeping you up?" teased Leaf.

"Always," answered Spence in mischievous voice.

When the food came to their room, they chowed down. "Fill a hole, mate?" asked Leaf.

"Heck yeah," said Spence, happy with the choice of food.

“We need to get a good night’s sleep before the flight and try to fight off jet lag as well,” said Leaf, who now was yawning.

Leaf was lying in bed and was about to drift off to sleep when he heard his phone ringing. It wasn’t his personal one; it was the one that Frank had given him. He answered the phone groggily. It took him a couple of seconds to figure out whose voice was on the other end of the phone. “You getting some beauty sleep?” laughed Frank.

“Someone thinks he’s funny,” sniggered Leaf.

“You all prepared for tomorrow?” asked Frank. His tone had gone into serious mode.

“Yes, all set and ready to go,” said Leaf. “And I have a travel partner now as well.”

“Hmm, is that so?” asked Frank cautiously.

“Spence is now coming.”

“Excellent news,” said Frank. “You will have another pair of eyes to watch your back.”

That statement jogged something in the back of Leaf’s mind. “Frank, did Wilford give you a description of the lady who came to the bank to see him?”

“Well, it’s about time you asked that question,” blurted back Frank quite loudly. If Leaf wasn’t awake before, he definitely was now.

“First thing, the lady’s name was Tamina Suva—that’s important to remember,” said Frank in a strong manner, trying to drill into Leaf the importance of it. “Wilford said she was of an islander descent from somewhere in the pacific, judging from her skin and the way she spoke. Had short black wavy hair that was shoulder length. She was built stocky, like a rugby player; her eyes were a brown colour; and there was a small scar just below her left chin and a very detailed tattoo in traditional Islander form of what he believed to be a hummingbird on her right inside forearm.”

There was silence on the phone for a second while the information settled in Leaf’s noggin. “That’s a very detailed description that Wilford gave you,” said Leaf at last.

“Well, being a bank manager, you have to have a great eye for detail on a daily basis,” commented Frank. “Plus, if someone was to rob the bank, every little detail would be vital.”

“I’ll have to keep my eyes out for her,” responded Leaf.

“Also, be aware in case someone else is following or watching,” warned Frank.

“Can I tell Spence this information?” asked Leaf.

“That would be a logical thing to do, Leaf,” said Frank.

“I just wanted to be sure that’s all because I haven’t told anyone else that you are alive, so hence me asking you the question,” said Leaf tiredly.

“There is one more important thing before you fall asleep,” said Frank loudly, making sure he had Leaf’s full attention.

CHAPTER 25

Leaf shook his head in an effort to keep his eyes from rolling shut. “Are you there, Leaf?” asked Frank in an even louder voice.

“Yeah, yeah, I’m here, mate,” responded Leaf.

“I have gone and hired someone to watch over you and protect you if need be,” explained Frank.

“What do you mean?” asked Leaf shaking head to stay awake.

“This obviously has the potential to get dangerous, and neither of you have ever been in a foreign country,” said Frank.

Leaf took a moment to think about this new development before he responded.

“Leaf, are you there? You better have not fallen asleep,” warned Frank.

“I’m here,” answered Leaf.

“Well?” said Frank.

“Well what?” snapped back Leaf.

“What do you think about this?” asked Frank.

“I’m trying to figure out if you have faith in me or whether this is for our safety,” said Leaf.

“Leaf, if I had no faith in you or the other two lads, there would be no way you would be about to fly out of the country,” responded Frank.

“Okay. I just wanted some reassurances,” said Leaf. “When will I meet this person?”

“She will meet you tomorrow at the airport, and you three will fly out together,” answered Frank.

Leaf was quite surprised by this. He spluttered out, “She?” In his mind, he was expecting a male.

“Yes, Leaf, it is a female,” said Frank. “Is there a problem with that?”

“No, no, not at all,” answered Leaf promptly. “It’s just not what I was expecting—that’s all, Frank.”

Frank had a laugh. Never underestimate anyone’s capability as far as their gender, age, or race,” said Frank sternly. “Do you understand what I’m telling you?”

“Yes, I get it. How do I know who she is?” questioned Leaf.

“She will find you before you find her,” answered Frank.

“Oh, okay. Do I at least get a name?” responded Leaf.

“I can give you that. Her name is Selina Delacruise,” stated Frank.

“Selina Delacruise,” repeated Leaf to himself.

“Yes,” said Frank. “Now get some sleep. You have a big couple of days ahead of you. I’ll talk to you soon,” signed off Frank.

“Thanks,” said Leaf with a yawn. A few moments later, after putting down the phone, Leaf was sound back asleep.

The next day, Leaf wandered into the lounge area, where Spence was sitting on the couch waiting for him, all packed and ready to go. “Morning, mate,” said Leaf cheerfully.

“Who were you talking to last night? I could hear you on the phone,” question Spence.

What do I say? ran through Leaf’s head. Frank didn’t want anyone else to know, but he was carrying a lot on his shoulders. Leaf let out a big sigh. “I will tell you, but you have to promise me you won’t tell a soul.” Spence raised his eyebrows in surprise. “I have been put in a spot where I’ve been told not to tell people about certain things,” he said.

Spence sat there in silence for a few seconds before he answered, “Even from me?”

“I wanted to tell you, but I was told not to,” responded Leaf.

“Who told you that?” quizzed Spence.

“Frank did,” answered Leaf sheepishly.

“Turn it up, mate. He’s dead,” said Spence, sounding slightly annoyed.

Leaf sat down on an adjacent seat and looked Spence in the eyes. “Frank is alive. He’s in Fiji. He sent me a postcard and we have spoken a couple of times. He wanted me to keep a secret to make sure we are all safe.”

“What about his death?” questioned Spence.

“He had to fake his death because he thought Reblick was following him,” answered Leaf.

“He really is alive?” said Spence soundings shocked.

“Yes, mate, he is alive and is in Fiji. He changed his name and bought a bar,” continued Leaf.

“Is there anything else going on that I need to know about?” asked Spence sounding slightly annoyed.

“Yeah, there is. I found out last night that Frank has organized us a chaperone for the trip,” announced Leaf.

“Really?” answered Spence sounding suspicious.

“Yeah, it’s for our safety,” replied Leaf. “Are we all good, Spence?”

“Yeah, mate. Just keep me in the loop next time. How can I have your back if I don’t know what’s going on?” said Spence who was sounding less annoyed now.

After they finished their chat, packed up their gear, and made their way to the airport via a taxi. They checked in at the airport and got through security without a hitch this time. “Good to see you took your belt off this time,” teased Spence after the security check.

Now they had a three-hour wait in the international area. Waiting was never a strong point for either of them, especially Leaf. They pulled out their phones, surfed the Net, checked their social media sites, and played some games to pass the time. “How much longer?” moaned Spence loudly.

Leaf checked his phone for the time. Not for another hour,” sighed Leaf. He got up to stretch his legs while he could, before the fourteen-hour flight ahead of them. He wandered about the international waiting area watching the other people pass their time by playing on their phones, looking out the window or reading a book. A woman walked up to Leaf, and he moved to go around her. She went right, blocking his way

way. "Oh, sorry," said Leaf. As he went to go around the other way, she moved back, blocking him again.

She smiled at Leaf. "Nice belt buckle," she said. "When you finish your walk, I will meet you back with your friend." Then she walked past Leaf.

Leaf wondered, Was that Selina Delacruise? He had no idea what she looked like; he knew it wasn't Tamina Suva from Rebllick because this person looked nothing like her description Frank had described to him last night.

Leaf made his way slowly back towards where Spence was sitting. He was sitting there with a perplexed look on his face. "What's wrong?" asked Leaf.

"There's a lady sitting in your seat," he answered slowly.

Leaf looked over to where he had sat before his walk and saw the woman he had run into on his walk. "So you must be our protection for our trip," said Leaf. She sat there in silence and gave a sly smile back to Leaf just chewing her chewing gum.

"Maybe she's mute," Spence said to Leaf.

She let out a loud laugh and replied, "Your friend is clearly not that smart."

"Why is that?" retorted Spence in a huff.

"You made a rash judgment call within about thirty seconds of meeting me," she answered, chewing her gum slowly.

CHAPTER 26

Leaf let out a huge laugh that made some other people turn around and gawk at him. Spence was not happy being made a fool of. The woman just sat there in the seat unmoved, just smiling at what was going on in front of her. She had her head shaved short that had been dyed blonde, brown eyes, three silver loop earring in each ear, a light brown tan, wearing a leather jacket and aviator glasses, looking the meaning of “cool” in the dictionary. “So, does Miss Observant have a name?” asked Leaf after he finished laughing.

“Yes, I do,” she answered, “but where are your manners? You didn’t say please.”

“May I please have your name?” asked Leaf a second time.

She removed her glasses. “Come on, Leaf, you know my name.” She gave him a cheeky wink.

“Selina Delacruise,” said Leaf. “But I don’t know where you’re from, Selina. Your accent is very hard to place.”

“You will have to figure it out for yourself,” she said slyly. “I was picturing you two would be older anyway and I was not being hired as babysitter.”

“Well, you’re not what we thought you would be, a smart-arse upstart,” said Spence with a bit of venom in his voice.

Leaf said, “Spence, that’s a bit harsh, mate.”

“No,” said Leaf. “It’s being observant after a few minutes of silence.” He smiled.

This time it was Selina’s turn to let out a cry of laughter. “It appears I have misjudged you, Spence.”

Spence sat up a bit more in his seat, feeling very proud of himself. He didn’t like people to get the best of him.

“I can tell you and I are going to have some good banter,” said Selina slyly.

“Is your accent Russian?” asked Leaf.

“No. Go fish,” was Selina’s response.

“Uzbekistan?” asked Spence.

“Is this a game now?” asked Selina. “Maybe hangman, perhaps?” She smiled.

“How about Estonia?” questioned Leaf.

“That’s a new one,” Selina said with a grin. “Go fish.”

“Albania,” Spence next guessed.

“I’m getting bored with this game,” she declared. “I’m from Kosovo.”

“Is that even a country?” asked Spence.

Selina glared at him as if she wanted to cause him bodily harm. “As far as I am concerned and the rest of my countrymen.”

“What do you mean?” asked Leaf. “It either is or it isn’t.”

“You have heard of the country that used to be called Yugoslavia?” she asked. Both of them nodded their heads in unison.

“When Yugoslavia started to break up between nineteen ninety and ninety-two, six countries were formed. They were Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Bosnia, and Herzegovina,” she explained. “There also were two provinces, Kosovo and Vojvodina, both located in Serbia. Vojvodina has stayed a province in Serbia; however, we in Kosovo declared independence in two thousand and eight.”

“So Kosovo is a country, then?” asked Spence.

“Serbia, Russia, and some other European countries say no. The argument is that other European countries and the United States say yes,” explained Selina.

“Wow, that sounds really confusing,” said Spence.

“It’s not meant to be,” said Selina swiftly. “What do you two think?”

Leaf wasn't sure if it was or wasn't, but he didn't want to upset her. "I believe it is a country," he said strongly.

She glared at Spence, waiting for a response. "I will do some of my own research and get back to you," he said.

Leaf looked at him like, What the heck are you thinking?

"I can respect that," said Selina. "I hope for your sake you make the right choice."

"So, what's your caper being here, anyway?" asked Spence.

"Easy," she said. "You guys are a job that I am getting paid for simple as that."

"What's the job?" questioned Leaf.

"To keep you alive and safe," she said.

"That simple?" responded Leaf.

"Easy money to me so, it seems." She said with a smile.

It was almost fifteen minutes until they boarded, and the boys were getting impatient. Leaf got up to stretch his legs again. "Don't wander off too far. I have to keep you alive to be paid," said Selina.

He strolled around, stopping to stretch his back and looking back through the glass in the rest of the airport. He looked at the people scuttling back and forth. Then he noticed someone just standing in the middle of the chaos staring at him. It was a female. Then he realized it was Tamina Suva staring a hole through him. Oh, crap, thought Leaf he started making his way back to the other two swiftly. He sat down next to Spence.

"What's wrong?" asked Selina. She could clearly tell something was wrong with him.

"She's here," said Leaf.

"Who?" asked Selina.

"Tamina Suva," said Leaf, sounding rattled.

"Stay here," she said sternly as she got up to scope out the situation. After a few minutes Selina came back to them. "I couldn't see her anywhere," she said. "She can't get in this international area with the security anyway."

"She knows who Leaf is and where we are going?" said Spence in a panicky voice.

“Don’t stress,” said Selina.

“Why not?” asked Spence.

“You have me on your side,” she said with smile and a wink trying to reassure them. Then, over the loudspeaker, was a call for boarding for the plane. “Let’s board the plane and Just leave her to me to worry about,” said Selina.

“How can you be so confident,” asked Leaf.

“This is what I do for a living and no one has ever died on my watch,” boasted Selina.

Leaf sat there with his mind running off in all sorts of directions. What I am I doing here? Am I safe at the moment? What awaited him in Chile? Was Tamina going to be on the plane? Could he trust Selina? What waited for the three of them in Cuba?

“Come on, Leaf. Let’s go,” said Spence, grabbing his arm after noticing him in a trance.

As the three of them made their way down the tunnel to the plane, Leaf looked backed as the door closed behind them and speculated when will home come calling for him?

With the door slowly closing Leaf’s eye caught a glimpse of a tattoo.

Was that really what he saw? Was that really the hummingbird tattoo of Tamina that Frank had described?

