

THE FORSAKEN CHALLENGE: first chapter

Who the fuck would live in such a hole – he thought as he looked at the wall in front. There was a crack the width of an arm decorating the wall, ceiling to knee height, Russell thought he saw a movement, a slight ephemeral reflection of tainted sunshine, he peered inside tentatively. A swarm of black shiny ants was slithering quickly in a seemingly arbitrary frenzied rush of a busy marketplace. The inside of the crack was carpeted with their shiny bodies. Russell spotted an ant that has just entered the crack carrying a silver crumb in its jaws and followed it with his gaze as it made its way thru traffic. At one point it stopped by another ant and exchanged a few antler jitters. A couple of inches into the brick wall on the side, he saw the ant slide into a small tunnel and disappear dragging the silver crumb with it. He could swear he heard a faint click. The bad taste in his mouth. The parched post-cigarette dryness in the back of his throat that wouldn't even comply with an attempt to gather the muck, mingled intimately with a dizzy guttural vibration. The fridge would not contain juice, booze or cold coffee, merely fetid cold puddles of defrosted fish fingers dripping from a freezer.

He was sweating with no effort, no breeze, and no movement. He scratched his shoulder thru his jumper with a prickly arm and tasted his palate producing a click tick sound with his tongue. Food would be good now. He hasn't eaten a thing since before he boarded the flight in St. Petersburg ... A plate of fine country goats cheese with fresh rye bread and Beluga caviar. He played with the caviar on his plate with the fork, forming a snortable line of the shiny black balls, looking hauntingly similar to the wide living crack in front of him, while nodding sympathetically to Teresa who was babbling of her latest choice of some household accessory or something. Russell, she said, I just can't seem to catch the right ones for me. Yes, he nodded, whatever. He often admired his ability to contain his total disinterest and consequent aggression while still seemingly engaging in conversation, and in a friendly way. There were times of course, in the distant smelly past that he could not, he was never caught but had a few narrow escapes. He recalled a drug-fueled chase in Petersburg zoo including a cold long wet wait under the shrubs in the moat at the bear cage. The bears, luckily, were drugged too.

That life was behind him now and Russell Pocket was a man

who welcomed change like he would welcome a three-course meal now. The prickly hairs on his cheek scraped floorboards as he attempted to move. That slight movement triggered a massive jolt of pain to his neck and head and he relapsed to a thought numbing hyperventilation as a result. The pain was too strong to be taken lightly, located in the left side of his head and neck. Between pulses of nerve-fizzing jolts he tried to reconstruct his idea of the situation. Don't move – hit on the head – fukt – remember black leather seats and smell of fresh car tree freshener. The pain subsided and he could now climb further into the coagulated tunnels of the prison of his psyche visiting his memory cells, questioning for clues. There was a car and a girl with a dark complexion and an airport baggage blunder that made him stay too long in the terminal. Maybe if he tried to roll over on his back – sweating from the humidity and pain he rolled onto his back freeing his arm from under his weight and feeling the pricking needles as the blood streamed thru the veins. He swam for a while in the lava of pain that filled his senses and resurfaced to see a ceiling fan, neon light and a cockroach walking languidly directly above him. He couldn't smell anything apart from rubbish fermented by the heat as he remembered the destination he has arrived to – Bangkok. Sak – where's Sak? – It must be daylight – something has obviously gone horribly wrong. There was a sound of distant footsteps, a door opening and the cockroach dropped, limbs akimbo, down on his chin. Russell yelped as the scurrying of tiny legs irritated his chin and lower lip, a quick wipe with his hand followed by a thick heavy kick to his side folded him in two discharging the molten lava of pain all over his head again. He involuntarily let out a cry.

Good mo'ning Ahmed weddy to tok?

There is no control but if you're cool about it then there's total control

Standing on the bridge with the bag in her hand. A landslide of thoughts filled the cabin of her mind. The same cabin that was lit by a fireplace on a winters night just yesterday, she opened her thighs to her revealing the furry purring peach of her pleasures. What was it exactly that instigated the fiery fumbling of clothes and the consequent lapping of lust. Teresa was still there in her bed; she had to leave the house to gather her thoughts. Charlotte's idea of sex was often linked to bearing the weight of a gyrating bulk of meat grunting in her

ear and pulling her hair from behind, she admitted to herself only recently that she had never once got off like they do in the movies or in wide eyed stories that Pertina told her over a coffee at their lunch break. Men were one thing she could handle, sex with them was another. Every time it was like another sack of coal stacked in her memory's log cabin weighing down any sense of pleasure that some primordial sense of erotica unrelentingly attempted to sprout. Now Teresa popped up and unveiled the face of lady lust that was laughing at her for years of depravity.

This truly is shit, making them believe I'm not this Ahmed guy, who is obviously in lots of trouble. ' Hey whats all this about? who are you?' Russell says to the Thai faces that stare at him from above. Klchink!! A barrel of a handgun eyes him sternly in response 'Whoa! What do you want to know?' wide-eyed frightened Russell. ' You no fuck wid us Ahmed whe' virus?! WHE?' The screaming Thai guy puts one foot on his crotch, increasingly shifting weight to it. ' OK! Ok! I tell you, lift your foot from my balls first ooof' 'Now first, I'm not Ahmed, you g..' the sound of a shot blasts him half way through the sentence, Russell feels a really sharp pain in his left hand, he quickly brings the hand to his sight and grabs the bloody wrist, a white flash blinds him mouth wide open mid scream. A smiling Thai guy with a white baseball cap retreats blasts a sentence of flashes from his digital camera. Russell is in agony writhing with pain when the voice asks again 'You tok now o' I shoot you in other hand and you give yo'self good hand job, betta than ladyboy hahaha'. They all find it very amusing and laugh, talking in Thai as the photographer snaps a close-up of Russell contorted face. 'Wait wait, I'll tell you, its in a hardisk in one of three places, I have to go pick up an envelope from someone at the market on Tuesday' Russell hoped it was indeed Tuesday so he could get out of there.

The pain was like a fire stick was stuck in his hand burning all the nerves all the way up his arm. The Thais exchanged a rapid chat in Thai during which Russell counted four of them. The least scary of them was the photographer with the white cap who didn't seem to say much or if he did then someone would butt in and start talking to the others. The guy with the gun and the 'sense of humor' who kicked him was the meanest of the lot he seemed constantly pissed off and stressed waving his gun everywhere as he screamed in a broken squeaky Thai voice. The other two were an older man of 60

something who was smoking and wearing a blue flowery shirt looking like he's well connected respected and seen some hardcore shit in his life, he had a massive scar all along his arm when he talked even the trigger happy fucker was silent. The fourth guy had slightly darker skin and Russell thought he looked Cambodian. He kept pointing at him and talking really fast and angry. Russell figured he bought some time at least and could leg it in the market. The four Thais seem to have reached some agreement because the older guy suddenly broke into a weird toothless smile and ashed his cigarette on Russell. 'OK, you sit now' BOF! Kick to the side. Russell was helped up and sat on the sofa. The photographer snapped again blinding him with the flash as the Cambodian guy threw him a dirty rag from the floor with which Russell wrapped his dripping left hand. He looked up as he heard the door shutting and bolting and realized he was left alone in the room. The room was windowless with a neon light and ceiling fan.

He got up painfully and started to rummage through the junk on the floor. He found lots of rags, some dirty bowls, old vomit, broken TV, brown plastic kangaroo with burn marks, some stained Thai porn mags, needles and a charred black human arm! That could come in useful, he stashed a few needles in his shirt pocket and moved towards the dark crack in the wall. He examined the multitudes of ants. Zooming in to notice their antlers and feelers twitching as they communicated. He blew a gust of wind from his mouth at them thinking a climatic change will send a tremor of disarray in their smooth liquid uni-motion and reveal the silver crumb he thought he saw earlier. He was convinced the crumb was off the orb, it was easy to find out because the orbs never broke off but divided and formed miniature clones like a ball of Mercury, so if the crumb was a perfect sphere and matt silver-light blue he was not far from it, and in a city like Bangkok that was pot luck. He didn't expect to come across it so soon after his arrival but then he often found that by following his instincts with the goal and vision set in his minds eye he often stumbled on serendipities. The ants merely stopped for a bit as if to fasten their grip and shut their eyes against the unexpected gale. Russell started tearing down bits of the wall around the crack with his good hand. It crumbled under his pull. Small tunnels and wormholes crawling with ants and white larvae collapsed at his feet, panic was strewn all over the colony. With every pull he checked the debris for the silver crumb. There were millions of ants scattered in frenzy, trying to save their young and still no sight of the silver crumb but to his distress he noticed a bunch of larger ants, double the size, with a

red mark on their back marching towards him from two flanks. He thought he heard glass break from outside the door and some squabble in Thai.

He quickly broke off more of the wall scanning each crumble for a silver speck. He felt a sharp needle prick on his shin, there were the two platoons of ant warriors crawling up his shoes followed by millions of shiny black, scrambling, pissed off ants. He whipped the ones already on him with the rag on his bad hand shaking them off while using a super vision on the wall crumbs he destroyed with his other hand. The silver crumb was big enough to be spotted with a glance and he concentrated all his efforts and focus on that letting the pain from the bullet and the ants and the head and the ribs which was so intense, to flood him and fill his being and by that dissipating it away from him. It sounded as if someone was getting beaten up outside, he heard cries in Arabic and recognized a few swear words. Most of the wall was exposed now and the ants were swarming between his legs and deeper behind the wall clutching their larvae in their getaway. His fingers scraped quickly between a bunch of crumbs and wheat-like shreds and ants until he saw it, a tiny glistening silver orb winking at him. He reached for the wee pocket sown inside his underwear not minding the ants that were now everywhere, biting him, and withdrew a small box opened the latch and placed the tiny orb along with the other one on the velvet lining. Then quickly stood up and started undressing whacking himself nervously with the rag. He had a collage of red spots and dark blue patches all over his body he hopped while dusting the last of the ants off him. On the other side of the wall he saw another wall at some distance, most the ants now gone, he peered down between the walls and realized it was a closed off narrow alleyway. A bit of outside that was walled off and kept prison in a between-buildings gap. He could no doubt squeeze in there and hope it led somewhere. It was pretty dark apart from the light that seeped in from the room he was in another phased light about 10 meters to the top right. Without wasting any time he leaned with his good hand on the opposite wall and pushing himself with his feet quickly turned over leaning his shoulder blades and on one wall and his feet on the other inching himself towards the light from the other window

Some crumbs as big as pebbles fell from the giant mouth Some of them were sharp edged splinters some were silver and smooth textured They spread over a small area forming a nondescript constellation

Russell Pocket and Teresa Brinkmann were pacing within the white washed walls in the house on the cliff. The blue skies topped nicely the dark blue liquid underneath in the air woven goblet of the horizon. The light white curtains blew lightly from the balcony. The room was furnished with a solitary globe. Russell Pocket went thru hell trying to get it. 2 and a half years on the trail of hear-say and half burnt notebooks. It was the original magnetic globe made by Franklin Von Brinkmann in 1618 And now holding the engraved box in his hand he glanced at Teresa with a look that said it was time – Your ancestral right is about to be reimbursed – He lifted the lid of the box carefully, a thin vapor of black granular smoke slithered out and mixed with the light Mediterranean breeze. Teresa felt a chill run up her spine and she heard it think – Russell stepped on the lever at the bottom of the globe podium, which made the globe spin in an instant. With a swerve of the wrist he chucked the contents of the box at the globe. The breeze blew the cloud of black dust at the globe and the earth was shroud in a black dusty veil as if showered by a hail of cosmic dust. As the globe slowed down they could see several silver dots appear on it. The floor underneath was flaked with small shiny black crumbs. The globe slowed to a halt and boasted its speckled visage. There were 8 shiny silver crumbs magnetized on the globe forming a geographical constellation. Teresa took out a pen and wrote down the locations...

by Joel Cahen 2003