

A POST-APOCALYPTIC SINGAPORE,  
A SECRET COMPUTER CULT AND  
ONE MAN'S DESPERATE SEARCH FOR HIS SON

After a geomagnetic storm, Singapore is plunged into near-total devastation. With Fusionopolis the high-tech base of the secret society conglomerate that has taken over control of the island, Singapore in the aftermath is an unrecognisable nightmare.

From Woodlands Checkpoint, Greg Lin travels along the ravaged MRT lines to find his son who has been kidnapped for experimentation. Along the way, he joins forces with a computer cult that seeks to find the last of the world's data that can help rebuild society. Together with the remnants of the SAF forces, Greg storms the triad's secret facility at Marina Bay, in an explosive climax where he makes a staggering discovery.

Searing, unsettling and at times, darkly funny, **THE LAST SERVER** is at once a riveting thriller and meditation on what we take for granted, when the possibility of disaster is always just on the horizon.

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H.J. PANG

THE LAST SERVER

"An intriguing story of a post-apocalyptic Singapore completely broken, dismal, joyless. The characters are always roving, the tension is palpable, the action pumping. Join this expedition, and ride it out to its rewarding end."

- Desmond Kon Zhicheng-Mingde,  
author and poet

# THE LAST SERVER

H.J. PANG

THE  
LAST  
SERVER

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## PROLOGUE

GREG CLUTCHED HIS right arm, wheezing hard with his back against the wall. Blood ran down its length, soaking into a battered elbow guard. The sounds of semiautomatic gunfire echoed from the other side of the room, their loud echoes bouncing off the electromagnetically shielded walls. Right across from him was a dead commando of the Old Guard, lifeless eyes staring accusingly back at Greg.

He knew the end was near. Who was he to believe that he could take on the might of an entire triad crew, with only the help of a computer cultist and an old commando? The 418 Dragons triad may not be as well trained, but they were far better equipped and prepared than a washed-up soldier like him.

Right in the centre of the room was humanity's last server, its superclocked processors humming serenely in the midst of shouts and gunfire. Before the control interface stood the computer cultist, Wesley, his body trembling as countless streams of data passed through his cerebral datalink. Even for a steadfast devotee of the Code, the security protocols of the server were fast taking its toll on his mind. Several figures

lay upon makeshift beds set in a circle around the access point, maintaining their unconscious vigil. Wires trailed from their heads to the central control point.

“Get down, Wesley!” yelled Greg, yanking his last grenade out from a pouch. He fumbled with the pin, but without warning, the wall to the server room was blown in, showering him and Wesley with fragments.

Greg lay groaning on the cold, hard floor with a sharp ringing in his ears, praying that if he and Wesley were to die that day, all they had worked for would not be in vain.

The fate of the people rested on them both.



## WHAT HAPPENED AFTER

*Two and a half days ago*

GREG'S GRANDFATHER ALWAYS said he never liked the Causeway. To him, it represented a precarious dependence on another. It was at this border crossing that billions of litres of water had flowed through pipes, the daily lifeblood of an island nation until it realised that having it home-made was so much less trouble. It was across this bridge that countless traffic jams occurred, every single day, where frustration and sheer boredom threatened to kill those in line. After all, the two countries' mobile data plans weren't interchangeable.

And here Greg now was, standing atop an old SBS bus overlooking its entirety. Up above shone the late morning December sun through a patch of clouds. Ahead of him, millions of dollars worth of COE lay rusting and abandoned, their value further depreciated by the long-looted engines and headlamps. Once something only the well-to-do could afford, these cars were now discarded like trash on the broken road. An old billboard six years out of date advertised the Singapore Airshow. Upon the horizon lay the hazy outline of what used to be home to Greg, but now all he could feel was a sense of trepidation

as he surveyed the skyline, once filled with looming structures, now with hills of rubble. No city had ever looked more forlorn to him, not even the dilapidated facade of Johor Bahru. This was how things were in the world now, a world he had wished his children would not see. But it was far too late for that.

The way across the old Causeway was treacherous, and Greg was impressed that the structure still stood, six years after The Storm. Sections of bridge had been pulled apart in places, noodles of rusty rebar holding them together like precarious threads. Breaking into a run, Greg leapt across a gap, landing hard onto the hood of an early-model Toyota Avanza. He stiffened as the underside of the car groaned against the tarmac, shifting from its years-long rest. Greg scrambled quickly across its rusty surface as the vehicle pitched over the edge of the bridge, his feet landing on concrete just in time. He looked back at the car in its descent, which landed with a resounding splash in the murky water.

That was close. Even on water, a fall this high could kill. But a larger gap loomed ahead, with only the concrete dividers by the side still intact. Steeling himself, Greg held onto the railings, sidling his way across slowly but steadily. Twice, the concrete beneath his feet crumbled, and he had to quickly reaffirm his grip.

His arms and feet were already aching by the time he got to where the car inspection areas were. The cars were parked permanently at their eternal graves, no chance now of ever clearing customs. Their windows long since smashed in, not even the seats remained. Entire conduits of wires had been ripped out and pilfered for applications in the post-Storm economy.

“Eh! Who are you?” demanded a voice.

Greg turned quickly, dropping into a crouch. He had gotten careless. Three men emerged from behind the surrounding pillars and an old immigrations booth. All wore the signs of hostility and hard living: dust-coated skin and eyes that always seemed to glare. Unlike most wastelanders Greg had encountered, however, these guys lacked that hunger in their eyes. Yet the weapons they wielded betrayed their potential for trouble. He could handle the two parangs, but the scratched Taurus 85 police revolver posed a problem.

“It’s okay! I’m not here for trouble!” Greg raised his hands and tried to back away towards the edge of the bridge, but the one with the revolver stepped towards him, weapon sights raised to his face.

“I asked who you are! You better answer!” he snapped. Despite being the smallest of the three, he carried himself confidently. Most likely the leader. He was the only one who wore the same grey jacket that Greg did.

“I’m a runner from the 418 Mines! I’m on your side!” Greg said. “Here, let me show you!” He drew the sleeve of his jacket up slowly, exposing the armband he wore beneath. A crudely-dyed image of a flame between a hammer and pickaxe showed itself, clinging tightly to a well-toned bicep.

The trio’s leader looked towards his armband briefly. A look of mingled surprise, along with shock crossed his face as his men shuffled their feet.

“You’re with the Minelords?”

Greg nodded.

“From whereabouts, exactly?”

“The mine of Teluk Ramunia! I’ve come bearing a message for this outpost. So if you’ll let me ...” He gestured to the satchel by his side.

The guard leader turned to a scruffy, bearded man with a scar across his left cheek. “Rashe, go get that from him. Shen Ren, cover Rashe. No funny moves, understand?”

“I’m Greg. Greg Lin,” said Greg, forcing a smile. “I’ve also brought some treats for you all. Goreng pisang from a stopover point.”

“Goreng pisang? Gimme lah!” snarled Rashe. He snatched the satchel from Greg, and turned it upside down. A short parang and half-full bottle followed by two sheets of folded paper and a bundle landed with a thump. While Shen Ren picked up the messages, Rashe tore apart the bundle’s wrapping. He was already munching as Shen Ren handed the papers over to his leader. The leader read the folded messages as Greg waited.

At long last, he lowered his gun. “Good of you to bring these to us. I’m Liang. We haven’t heard anything for a long while from the other 418 outfits. How long did you take to get here? Did someone drop you off?”

“A few hours,” lied Greg. He followed as the leader beckoned them to follow him. Already the tension was dissipating. “A truckload of our enforcers were passing by, so I managed to catch a lift near to wherever they were going.” The quieter of the two peons, Shen Ren, took a swig of water from Greg’s bottle before passing the satchel back to him. “You’re the 432 for this outpost?”

“49er in command,” corrected Liang. The Minelords were under the umbrella of a larger triad called the 418 Dragons. After The Storm rendered much of the populace defenceless, the once-divided secret societies formed a union. By killing off all the other bosses, the current leader established himself as the Dragon Head, the highest position in a triad. No one knew what his real name was, but his vision had allowed for much of



the surviving population in what was Southern Malaysia and Singapore to be enslaved for the triad's interests, one of which was tin and bauxite mining, which fell under the purview of the Minelords. And within a triad were separate subgangs called crews, or outfits. A 432 denoted the rank of "Straw Sandal", which was basically a liaison officer between the separate crews. A 49er may be a rank-and-file member, but senior 49ers like Liang were effectively crew supervisors. Although the triads of old traditionally conversed in various Chinese dialects, most had switched to English after The Storm. After all, there were non-Chinese gangsters and slaves as well.

They approached a cluster of shacks in the style of zinc-roofed attap houses, which had made a comeback after The Storm. It didn't take much except the simplest of materials and skill to put together. Smoke billowed from behind a shack, accompanied by the smell of rancid cooking.

"Well, Liang, one of the messages is meant for 418 HQ, so I'll need it back," said Greg, sneaking a glance at Rashe and Shen Ren. They were more engrossed in the pisang than the conversation. "I wouldn't want to forget to bring it to them."

"Eh, you new or what? All messages to HQ will be forwarded by us," Liang finally turned around. Up close, Greg could see a coldness in his eyes that his two raggedy men didn't have. "We will allow you to stay here at this checkpoint for no longer than the next morning. By then, a transport should arrive back at your designated pickup point for you to return back to Teluk Ramunia. And while you're here, you're not to stray from the checkpoint, understand? And we'll hold onto your parang for you. Here, you're already under our protection."

Greg contemplated this. He had to get to the 418 Dragons HQ at Fusionopolis, and that was a long way into the island.

But these guys were already wary of newcomers, and he wasn't going to get anywhere with their eyes on him.

"Go get something to eat from our cook," said Liang. "Rashe will show you around after you're done. Water rations will be handed out at 3pm today, and right before you leave tomorrow. Dismissed!" He stalked away while Shen Ren and Rashe accompanied Greg to a shack. Thick white smoke was billowing behind it.

If this was the way the 418 treated their own people, Greg had no doubt that he would fare much worse if they knew what he actually was. Slaves from the mines didn't have any rights.



Rich or poor, no one was spared when The Storm happened. No one truly understood what actually transpired. What was agreed on was that it had happened on a Saturday night in Singapore. One moment, life went on as normal. The next, entire power grids went out. Then came the fires, which started from the explosions of vehicles and fuel containers.

But that wasn't the least of it. Buildings collapsed into themselves, their rebar interiors twisting apart by strong magnetically-induced forces. Entire city centres and HDB estates crumbled, and many said this alone resulted in the loss of more than eighty percent of the population.

It wasn't only the destruction that awaited the survivors, but also the lack of information on what had happened. Any communication devices that weren't fried received no signal. With conventional methods of relaying news out for the count, mass panic ensued. No one knew if the country was at war or even if a natural disaster was responsible. Nobody knew if it

was just Singapore, or if the same thing was going on in the rest of the world. Rumours about a solar storm or electromagnetic pulse attack ran abound, and no one was able to dispel such notions. On the plus side, there was no social media to give rise to more panic.

The Home Team and SAF were in disarray themselves. Having relied on radio and phone communications for years, their attempts at relaying orders by hand were further complicated by the burning heaps of vehicles in their possession. And the citizens themselves hadn't been idle. Some mobbed the governmental buildings, whether to complain or receive free aid. Others started looting stores and establishments, emboldened by the mass disorder. The more sensible ones tried to leave the country.

Greg still remembered the day it all happened. A day he wished would not replay itself over and over in his mind. He had awakened to the sound of crunching concrete, and managed to rouse his Lee Ping and the kids in time to evacuate their HDB building in Tampines. As they huddled at the car park along with their neighbours, it was clear that the four-storey building would not collapse completely. All it suffered were deep cracks throughout.

Greg's three-year-old Toyota Lancer, the one he had bought with years of savings, was now a burning wreck. A few vehicles stood intact, but they didn't have the keys in them. Greg could see the taller twelve-storey flats weren't as lucky as his building had been. Entire HDB blocks and high-rise buildings had collapsed, and it was only months later that he found out that unlike shorter buildings, the weight of the high-rises caused them to exert more weight on their cracked foundations, resulting in their ruin. The screams of crushed residents filled

the neighbourhoods, and Greg had to keep urging his family to move. Several times they were almost robbed by looters, and Greg's military training had proved to be more than useful. By the tenth collapsed building, Greg realised they might have a better chance in neighbouring Malaysia. They had to head to the Woodlands Causeway.

It took them until the next night to reach there. It was far more crowded than he had ever seen it, far worse than the queues for the National Day Parades. Not so much with vehicles, as had generally been the case, but with throngs of people desperate to get across. Police and army personnel tried and failed to maintain order as members of the crowd attacked and pushed past each other. Then police vehicles were set on fire, the heat and smoke spurring the crowd to greater violence. Barricades, soldiers and police officers were pushed over and trampled. Greg knew he should be helping his fellow soldiers, but he had a wife and two kids to think about. Several times during the dash across the Causeway, he could hear gunshots. Twice he was almost separated from his kids in the surging mass of people, and he even had someone try to snatch his bag from him. That person had regretted it ever since.

Everyone had believed things were better on the other side of the Causeway. But they were soon proven wrong. Perhaps Greg's family would still be together, had they stayed where they were. And perhaps, he would not be on this quest to find his missing son.



The thing about The Storm, or the apocalypse, was that it came a long time after mankind believed technology would always

exist. With so much depending on computers and electronic infrastructures that sustained the once-modern world, it was bound to happen sooner or later.

Like many of the settlements Greg had seen, this checkpoint wasn't so different, utility-wise. The nearby immigrations building was now a collection of ruins, but a camp had been built up around it. Construction canvas screens wrapped into cones fed morning dew to old plastic pails for drinking. Pieces of plywood and office partitioning formed the shacks. An open manhole topped by a chair with a hole made up the toilet, and Greg wondered what anyone would do should it ever get clogged. But all these were far better than the amenities back in the mines.

Though there were about six shacks here, Greg couldn't see or otherwise hear anyone else within them. He followed Rashe around the shack that was emitting the smoke.

Here, the smell hit him the hardest. With only walls on three sides, the building was laid out in the style of a kopitiam, reminiscent of a village-style eating place. Red plastic chairs stood around two tables made up of stacked concrete slabs. Old Tiger, Heineken and Carlsberg beer bottles decorated the sides, along with an old, tattered flag of the opposition party. Behind a long counter made up of two stacked benches was a kind of stove made up of concrete blocks. At the fire fuelled by scraps of wood, a bare-chested cook tossed some rice about a wok. On his back was emblazoned the head of a snarling Chinese dragon, ringed with skulls. Without counting, Greg knew there were eighteen of them. He'd been slogging in the mines long enough to count the skulls every member of the 418 Dragons had.

"Eh, uncle! We got visitor! Liang say you give him something to eat," blared Rashe. The cook turned around.

“He from where?” he asked. Greg could see that his tattoo was replicated on his chest. “Wah, you got pisang don’t want share with me?”

“How I know you want? Here lah, here lah!” Rashe picked out a piece with a grubby hand, tossing it over to the cook. The cook snatched it deftly, popping it into his mouth. He crunched the snack with evident pleasure, eyebrows raised to Greg. With greying hair and a pockmarked face that always seemed to smile, the cook looked to be about fifty. Despite his evident gang affiliation, Greg couldn’t quite picture him as a foot soldier.

“I’m a runner from Teluk Ramunia,” confirmed Greg. “A raiding party gave me a lift to the other side of the Causeway.”

“Must be hard to come here,” said the cook. “I don’t think now have enough bridge left to cross.” Like many of the older people Greg had met, he spoke Singlish in the old style.

“Where got enough bridge,” Greg replied. “A car almost took me along when it pitched forward.”

The cook laughed, slapping his hands onto his rotund sides. “Wa kau. Someone’s COE gone forever liao. But then, the gahment always tell people don’t buy car.”

Greg forced a smile, and the cook continued, “Really sibeijjalat, but probably no longer his pasa. We haven’t got runner come for very long time. You ride on truck so long then cross bridge, must be very tired. Here, you come eat.” He held up his wok, scraping the rice out onto a large dried banana leave. “Uncle give you extra fish I catch yesterday.” He plopped a small fish on top.

Rice wasn’t all that common after The Storm. What little rice was available was now grown by slaves primarily in the fields of Selangor. And the slaves didn’t get any of it. Although fish was plentiful in the rivers and sea, the fact that few remembered

traditional fishing methods meant that gathering it was too much effort to feed a settlement of any size. An exodus of people travelling in search of food meant many were scattered far from their hometowns.

The ikan kuning and rice had the faint smell of unrefined palm oil, which was the cause of the rancid smell, but Greg wasn't going to turn down a free meal. He took the leaf bundle gratefully, and rolled the contents into a cone. He then proceeded to eat it Minelord-style, biting the rice wrap, leaf and all. As he chewed, his tongue found the leaf fragments and spat it out.

"So what's your name, and how long've you been a mine runner?" asked the cook. "You want you can call me Uncle Ong."

"I'm Greg Lin. It's been about three years."

"So what you do to prove yourself?"

If he wasn't that well-versed in triad traditions, Greg would have been taken aback. "I pursued an escaping slave and killed him. I had to track him through tough terrain. Very swampy."

"Wah, really shiong, sia," said Uncle Ong as he scratched his belly. "Very easy have foot rot like that. So how? You 49er now? Got family or not?" Greg's mouth opened, then closed. "No, I don't."

"Guy like you, how can not have? You go other mining town cannot find meh?" Uncle Ong laughed. "Not just lucky for you, also lucky for her. Your kind of looks very hard to find, confirm can get one. Uncle tell you, find someone higher, then you yourself can go higher easier."

Greg chewed his fish carefully. "As you say, Uncle," he replied. He looked around his surroundings. Rashe still sat at the corner, sifting through the stray pisang crumbs at the bottom of the packaging. He couldn't see the other two gangsters he had met

earlier, so he took the chance to ask, “How often does anyone come down here? It’s hard to believe you just grow and fish for your own food. Is it just the four of you here?”

“Of course not lah,” said Uncle Ong. “There are actually ten people stationed here. Not including me, Uncle old liao but still can cook. Each outpost by the right have someone bring rice and other barang-barang every two weeks. But then here rarely got people want to go through Causeway, what more very hard to reach.” Uncle Ong gestured towards the open side of the kopitiam. A wide expanse of broken highways and buildings went as far as the eye could see. A faint haze stood in the air, and somehow Greg knew it was the wind stirring dust from the old concrete.

“I mean, here got what?” continued Uncle Ong. “So end up we have to go collect our food and extra water ourselves. Bur what to do? Our Red Pole say do then must do lor. So six of our guys are now coming back from The Mountain with the makan and water.”

“How do you know they’re not still there?” Greg asked carefully. He figured The Mountain had to mean the 418 Headquarters, but confirming it would only lead to suspicion. Suspicion that could get him killed.

“Aiyoh, three days already! Go there only need two days mah,” said Uncle Ong. Having reclined on one of those rubber-threaded deckchairs similar to what Greg had seen his grandfather use years back, the plump cook was now fanning himself with a plastic fan sporting a faded logo. “Hopefully this time they manage to get some Coca-Cola.” He licked his lips.

Greg was glad the 418 didn’t keep in contact with this outpost by radio. Few working electronic devices were available after The Storm, and certainly not two-way radios. The only electronics



that had a chance of surviving the geomagnetic storms that made The Storm a reality were those that had been kept in metal containers. From the radio equipment he'd seen back at Teluk Ramunia, the 418 must have been resourceful enough to raid the police and military stores for it, and repurposed them for their own uses. Despite being secured by near-indestructible Abloy locks, an abandoned camp and police station could only hold out scavengers for so long.

"So how do the guys go to The Mountain? Do they walk across the Old City?" asked Greg.

"They have ways. That's all you need to know." Uncle Ong winked.

Greg didn't know it at first, but he had made his first mistake. After looking over his shoulder for last few days, getting the chance to relax had made him lower his guard. He should have noticed that Rashe, who was supposed to be watching him, was now at the entrance to the kopitiam with his leader and Shen Ren. The hostile glares they directed at him told him something was up. As he made to stand, the click of a revolver hammer reminded him of his place.

"You know, I just realised something strange," said Liang thoughtfully, the eyes behind his revolver glittering with malice. "You say you're delivering messages from the Ramunia mine. And yet, they didn't have the coloured logo of our brotherhood. Take off his jacket!"

"I'm one of yours!" protested Greg as Shen Ren came forward, his own parang raised. Uncle Ong looked worried, but didn't get up.

"Then you won't mind showing us the Tattoos of Loyalty!" yelled Shen Ren.

Greg slammed the sharper end of his spoon into Shen Ren's

neck as he neared. Shoving the spluttering Shen Ren forward as a shield, the 49er jerked as he took two shots from his boss before bowling Liang over. Rashe screeched as he leapt atop a table, swinging a plastic stool into Greg. The ex-soldier grunted as the sun-bleached plastic shattered, but otherwise remained standing. Knowing that it wouldn't be long before Liang got back up, Greg flattened his left hand, slamming it hard into Rashe's throat. The thug let out a strangled gasp just before hitting the floor.

Greg reached Liang just as the 49er pushed the motionless Shen Ren off him. He fired off a deafening shot as Greg dodged, and the two of them scrabbled for the gun. Greg knew that ammo was scarce, so he slammed Liang's hand hard against the uneven concrete. The gun fell with a clatter, and Greg then set about demolishing the crew leader with his fists. Rage from years of being locked up in those foul mines exploded out of him, and soon all that was left of Liang's face was a dark, crimson mess.

Greg sat astride his victim for a while, panting. He took hold of the revolver, and checked on Rashe. He now lay with his head at an unusual angle. No way had he survived that. Greg was about to search the place for anything of value when he heard panting from the back of the kopitiam. Raising the sights of his revolver before him, Greg rounded the corner.

Uncle Ong was sprawled against a mess of broken wood, one of the piles that had fed the cooking fire. He was clutching his leg as he grimaced, and by the look of the swelling on his ankle, it had gotten twisted during his escape. His eyes opened wide as Greg came closer, the worn revolver posing an unspoken question.

“Don't shoot Uncle Ong! Uncle Ong never fight you ...”

whimpered the old gangster.

“How do I get to Fusionopolis?” demanded Greg. “What?” Uncle Ong’s face looked confused.

“Don’t pretend you don’t know!” The toe of Greg’s boot slammed into Ong’s ankle, causing him to yell. “Where is the HQ of the 418 Dragons? You want me to shoot, is it?”

“You mean The Mountain?” gasped Uncle Ong. “Only Liang and the others know the route. I old liao, never go there before ...”

“I can always shoot you and find the way there myself,” shouted Greg. He didn’t have much time; if what Ong had said earlier was true, he had only maybe an hour to search the place before the rest of Liang’s crew turned up. Even with fully-loaded gun and parang, it would be presumptuous to assume he could take on a group of seven and live. “Does Liang have any maps? Where the hell are his quarters?”

“No maps.” Uncle Ong slowed his breathing, wincing as he moved his leg slightly. “There’s no easy way to walk across the country. The guys have their own route through the old HDB estates. But then ... look, Uncle also don’t want you to die. There are raider patrols all across the island, and the old HDB places sibei dangerous.”

“I’m touched. Is there another way there?” demanded Greg. “I don’t think my finger can hold on any longer.”

“W-w-wait! Got another way!” Uncle Ong’s eyes flickered. “Nearby here got an MRT station. I think called Woodlands Checkpoint. It leads underground to the Brown Line. From there you can make your way to your Fusionopolis.”

It looked like there was no escaping the use of the MRT even after The Storm. The rapid transit network of Singapore’s public transportation system was mostly underground, and could

have bypassed much of the topside's destruction. A number of these stations were designated bomb shelters, after all.

"Why don't the guys use it?" Greg asked. A trap, perhaps. All these criminal types were well known for that.

"A lot of barang-barang block the way ... the guys need to bring stuff through ..." wheezed Uncle Ong. "Also, they scared got things down there ..." The old triad member looked up. "Look, I already say what you ask. I even warn you the place damn dangerous. I go now, can or not?"

Greg lowered his gun. He remembered his family being taken from him. He remembered his wife being beaten and killed as her murderers laughed. He remembered his children being taken away, never to be seen again.

He really hated the triad responsible for that. Greg raised his gun and fired.



Greg would normally have cleaned up after himself, but here there wasn't any point. Even if he removed the corpses, there was way too much blood for him to clean off, and the disappearances of the remaining guards would raise suspicion anyway. There wasn't much of value in the shacks—it was obvious that even among their own triad, nobody trusted each other enough to leave their valuables behind. Greg found a Swiss army knife and several water bottles, taking care to fill them up at the water points he had seen earlier. He also got hold of a small, china-made alarm clock that had somehow escaped the ravages of The Storm and a roll of nylon rope he recognised as SAF-issued tenting line. He was down to his last round of ammunition for his revolver, and Liang didn't seem to have any more. However,

the 49er had one of those angle-headed flashlights the army used to issue, that appeared to be powered by home-made batteries made of electrical tape, washers and salt water. The triad members also carried at least two pieces of gold and silver each, along with some differently-coloured leaves of paper. Greg peered closer and saw the insignia of the 418 Dragons at the top, followed by a serial number. This had to be their in-gang currency. A search of the shack that Liang kept locked yielded a poster with the 36 Oaths handwritten in English, a fresh set of clothes, and some dried strips of meat, but no ammunition or even an empty speedloader. Guns must either be in really short supply, or reserved for the best 418 fighters. Greg knew he didn't have long to leave, but something Uncle Ong said bugged him.

There had to be a reason why the guys didn't use the MRT tunnels. Perhaps there were parts that were structurally unsound, and all that was needed was a careless scavenger to loosen enough of the rubble. There would be loose wires and faulty electrical components along the stretch of the track, but Greg doubted there would be any electricity left after all these years. But he was in unknown territory, and he wouldn't last long out in the open. Skulking in the tunnels would be the best option for now, and he could always get out at any station along the way. Greg recalled what he remembered about the route, and walked into the old immigrations building.

The MRT network of Singapore was so ingrained in Singapore infrastructure that many of its exits led straight into public buildings like malls and hospitals. During the planning of new train routes, a member of parliament had proposed that an MRT station leading directly to the basement of the immigrations building would ease the daily jam faced by the vehicles queuing across the causeway. He couldn't have been

more wrong. The ease for day-trippers heading into Malaysia had resulted in a threefold increase of visitors to the checkpoint, and getting one's passports stamped had taken longer than before. Incidents of people illegally walking across the Causeway multiplied, and the MRT station then known as Woodlands Checkpoint soon became something of a joke.

Large gaps that had sprung in the immigrations building allowed Greg to enter. He found himself in what was once a vast hallway, now criss-crossed with crumbling sections of wall and columns. Being a short building, it hadn't fully collapsed under its own weight. Halfway across the hallway were the faded immigration booths and automated gates, with a ray of sunlight illuminating them. Several skeletons littered the floor, their mouths open in silent screams; one was sitting against the wall, his bony fingers raised in the grasp of a phone long-since stolen. A section of metal ceiling covered him below the waist. He was probably trying to tweet about it—#apocalypse #ohgodwhy #woodlands #rockandhardplace—when The Storm happened. The silence was reminiscent of a graveyard. And in many ways, Greg thought, he was in one. Reaching the booths, Greg saw that anything of value, including the fingerprint and passport scanners, had long been stolen. Two Immigrations and Checkpoint Authority officers could be found among a few other civilians near a broken side door—probably died trying to herd them out of the building. Greg found two biometric passports and a couple of pens on the ill-fated travellers, and pocketed them. He could do with something to write on. And perhaps one day, the passport's ID page could be placed in a memorial to those who had passed on.

Greg had never alighted at this MRT station, but he was able to follow the dusty signs that led towards it. The LED

display signs that used to show train departure times lay over the escalators leading into the station. Greg half-expected the signs to indicate that the train service in all lines were currently disrupted, and to expect ten more hours of travelling time, but The Storm had done its job well. With most of the metal steps and steel sheeting gone, exposing the broken screws and sharp edges within, Greg treaded his way carefully down into the station entrance. The shutter doors that had once kept out intruders had been wedged open by a concrete slab, with a couple of gouges suggesting where others had pried it open. Peering cautiously into the unlit tunnel, Greg crawled into the belly of the beast.



The mines were a harsh, unforgiving place. It was a place where people worked, lived and died. It wasn't like they had any other choice. All who worked there were slaves.

Greg had been slaving away for five years by then. In the first week after The Storm, he and his family travelled far enough to find a village to stop in. There wasn't much to be done, but the local police sergeant understood the value of a man like Greg. Along with a few other able-bodied refugees, he was given a job as a militiaman, while his family helped out at the palm oil plantation and farms. The Storm did not seem to have altered any natural life in the slightest, and life still went on in the farming towns. About half of the palm fields were razed and turned to farming food crops for the village. Several times, the village saw soldiers of the Malaysian army pass through on bullock carts, stopping long enough to load them with food and other supplies. No one had ever thought they would see the old

modes of travel make a comeback, but almost all motor vehicles were toast after The Storm.

The first few months after The Storm were chaotic. Refugees and soldiers alike could be seen passing the roads, including members of the Singapore Army. There were always wounded to see to, and those who didn't seem to have any useful skills were turned away whenever they tried to settle. More times than he could count, Greg and the other militiamen had to intervene when bands of looters raided the village—he still had the scars to show for that. He had since learnt to keep his parang close. Eventually, even the soldiers stopped passing through.

One year was a very long time. Long enough for the organised gangs to build and equip their standing armies. Long enough for them to start looking for greener pastures. And Greg's village was in their way.

There was nothing a twenty-man militia could do against a war party of two hundred. And parangs and hunting rifles were no match to armaments that would put any police department to shame. The village of Shumai was razed and pillaged, and those who weren't killed in the raid were led away in ropes and chains. Greg knew then the fight was lost. He would have fled, but he had a family to take care of. They would wait for their chance to escape.

That chance was lost when they were led into the mines of Teluk Ramunia. Deep in the tunnels, the only way out was death. Greg was the only one known to escape alive.