

Ch'i.

The invisible force that moves all around us. Ch'i is the universal energy that resonates through every living creature and permeates throughout the universe. Ch'i is everywhere. Flowing through the environment, indoors and out, on land, in water, over the mountains and through cities.

Ch'i. It is the spiritual energy that is a part of every thing that exists. It runs like water and blows like the wind and is the essential energy that powers the earth. The life of the universe. Cosmic breath.

With knowledge and wisdom ch'i can be used for beneficial and fortuitous practice. Ancient teachings describe how ch'i can be channelled to create an area of auspicious good fortune. To direct the flow of ch'i to enrich a family home or to promote well being and harmony. Harnessing the positive energy to make one's life better, make a success of one's career and perhaps influence one's love life.

But there are some for whom ch'i is used for a darker purpose . . .

Feng Shui Assassin

Chapter one

Harvey Barker thumbed the yin-yang pendant around his neck and stared out across the silhouette of the Docklands in the low winter sun.

He stood in the office of Donald Grace, Stockbroker, situated on the fifteenth floor of Capricorn House. The whole of one wall was a solid glass window with sliding partitions. Standing at the window allowed for a daunting view of the trendy docklands business area and the river Thames. Towering, blue frame office blocks with dark glass windows stood like a mountain range across the cityscape, seagulls wheeling the uppermost peaks.

Far below, wide pedestrian paths led from Canary Wharf, the grandfather of the surrounding concrete spires, to the artificial harbour and the rows of riverside apartments. Colourful awnings indicated popular eateries amongst stylish hairdressers and must-have gadget shops.

Tiny dots of people speckled the pavement like ink, spraying out of the tube station and gathering at white striped crossings, eager to throw themselves between the gaps of slow moving cars. Among them was the soon-to-be-dead Donald Grace.

Harvey turned back to the room. Grace's office was luxurious and spacious. Antique walnut and stained teak furniture gave the impression of a galleon captain's quarters rather than a stockbroker's office. Gilt-framed oils hung on dark wood walls, a marble statuette and brass figurines placed on slender tables around the room. A large mahogany desk faced the door, dominating the office and the attention of anyone entering. A suitable wheel behind which a captain of industry would helm his business.

Harvey also watched the steady flow of chi move through the office.

The chi current was strong. Pouring in through the doorway and expanding out into the room, it navigated the central desk like an obstinate boulder in the path of a river, splitting around the obstacle to continue its cycle. Harvey marvelled at the cascade of moving energy and he waded to the middle of the flow. He spread his hands out wide so that the currents of chi eddied in small swirling patterns around his fingers.

Harvey walked along the river of chi, carefully looking at areas where the flow

faltered. He paused near the desk and waved a hand back and forth. In the corner of the room, pinned between a table and the window, a small tributary split from the main flow and curled about itself, stagnating in a small, static pool. A large oil painting hung above the inert chi.

This was potential weakness he could exploit.

Reaching up, Harvey twisted the painting so it hung at a crooked angle on the wall.

The painting, a leafy vision of two golfers on the thirteenth hole, darkened in slowly spreading damp patches of negative chi. It gathered around the edges of the frame, dark and oily, and seeped into the canvas. The picture misted over as the slick chi expanded, translucent grey circles meeting and merging with each other, draining colour and light and warmth from the painting. Filming over with negative energy.

Harvey paced along the window and placed a blue wire litter bin at an angle to the painting. A weak thread of chi stretched out from the painting to the bin, establishing an anchor hold.

At the front of the desk, Harvey trailed a finger along the dust free surface, flicking the pens into disarray in the pen tidy, tipping a stapler onto its side, turning the calculator face down, shifting the desk diary slightly off centre. Negative karma grew from the irregular angles, darkening the desk surface with patches of polluted chi.

The painting was now completely filmed over with black chi. Small lumps appeared on the canvas, something moving beneath the surface like larvae in a dead bird. One or two bulges at first, then multiplying in a frenzy, growing and expanding and threatening to bubble over the frame.

Raised voices sounded from the reception area outside the office and ripples disrupted the easy flow of chi from the doorway. A woman's voice explained of a pest controller in the office. A male voice barked gruffly, cutting off the woman. Harvey walked away from the desk and stood casually next to the bookcase.

The door opened and Donald Grace entered his office.

Harvey's gaze bore into the man, scorching his image onto his retinas. His features, his attire, his every nuance and posture and shift in movement. He wanted to remember everything, drink in every aspect of the man before him.

Grace blustered past Harvey with barely a glance. He threw a market report onto his desk, seated himself down and started up his computer. If he had taken the time to register Harvey, he may have wondered why a pest control worker wasn't in overalls, but instead wore casual attire more appropriate to a boardroom. If he had been more observant, he may have been aware of the way Harvey stared at him. The cold eyes that followed him to the desk, watching him with an intense malice, as a cat would watch a sparrow as it hopped from one branch to another.

As Grace hunched over his computer, clicking the mouse impatiently, Harvey relaxed, breaking eye contact, and like a movie jump-cut, suddenly smiled pleasantly.

'Won't be long, sir,' Harvey said.

'Yes, yes - I heard about the infestation. Cockroaches indeed. Heard little else

from the babble in the office. You have a timescale? I need you out of the office as soon as possible.' Donald snapped, clipping the end of his words.

'You do have a pest control problem.' Harvey said, making a show of checking behind a leather-bound book. 'An infestation of cockroaches in the building. The last thing you need is a rush job. Eggs from the European cockroach can lay dormant for months before hatching, incredibly difficult to neutralise once they have taken hold.'

'Just get on with it. I have a number of important calls to be made and need you out of my office.'

The area around Grace's desk was now clouded with inauspicious karma. Vines of chi spread to the desk from the painting and wrapped around the legs and the chair. The air buzzed with mites of depression and the floor degraded into a swampy mire of chi. Patches of malignant energy encompassed the trader.

'Everything should be over soon,' Harvey said. 'Real soon.'

'Be sure it is,' Grace grunted, determined to have the last word.

Harvey walked around the edge of the room, the pretence of pest control forgotten as the target's attention was now distracted with a thousand minor irritations. Results from the subtle influence of negative karma.

'Cockroaches are cunning, devious insects. Eat anything, even their own,' Harvey said. 'The heavy rainfall over the past few days has driven roaches up and into the offices here on the fifteenth floor. Have to catch them early before they get out of hand.'

'What is wrong with this computer? Does nothing work in this goddamn office?'

It was starting. The effects of negative karma were taking effect. Already a creeping black cloud fogged around the stockbroker's head and shoulders.

'Tricky vermin, the cockroach. They scuttle higher and higher to get out of harm's way. Feed off anything, and very difficult to exterminate once they've taken hold.'

The negative karma was growing in strength. Anyone within the area would slowly succumb to the depressive atmosphere. At first they would become irritable, snappy and defensive, until slowly but surely the crushing weight of inauspicious energy would take its toll.

Grace sighed heavily and reshuffled the papers on his desk. He couldn't concentrate, he couldn't focus. Instead, he spread paper around the desktop, flicked back to the computer screen and clicked on email receipts. He groaned as every new email seemed full of accusation and urgency. He pulled away and sifted through his in-tray, scattering his pen tidy in the process. Scanning one report after another, he felt the heavy knots of stress with every successive file. Is this what he worked for? Was there no escape from all the paperwork? The mountain of problems seemed insurmountable and it was all he could do to keep himself from pounding the desk in frustration.

Grace loosened his tie in an effort to cool down. Damp sweat patches spread on his crisp white shirt, veins throbbing down the length of his neck. Impotent tension built up as despair took hold and slowly squeezed.

The oil painting bulged with a black misshapen abscess of evil chi. Shapes moved on the other side of the canvas, pushing against the membrane, stretching

it thin in places, probing, attempting to break through. The outline of a blunt claw scraped down the distended painting, then another. And another. Malignant spirits seeking a way into the world.

Harvey sat in an uncomfortable ornate chair between a potted plant and a three foot statue of the Duke of Wellington on horseback. He stretched out and took a newspaper from his pocket, thumbing through the pages until he opened them at the horoscope section.

‘Do you read the stars?’ Harvey asked. From the corner of his eye he saw slurry geysers of karma pop within the fetid swamp. They were small, but Harvey knew that they would grow. He flicked his eyes towards the suffering Grace and allowed himself a smile.

‘What?’ Snapped the broker, his fingers clicking uselessly at mouse and keyboard.

‘Your horoscope. Do. You. Follow your horoscope?’ Harvey said.

‘I - I read the . . .’ Grace’s voice trailed away.

‘I’m guessing the Financial papers. No horoscopes in the F.T. huh. Any suduko? Nevermind.’ Harvey watched the man cower behind his desk, succumbing to the karma. ‘You’re a Capricorn, right?’

An audible pop caught Harvey’s attention. The abscess on the oil painting had burst, an infected wound into the world, and dozens of imp-like spirits from some other place tumbled from the picture, falling to the floor. One of the spirits, quicker or smarter than its brethren, bounced on the heads of the entangled pile and bounded onto Grace’s desk. It stood on its hind legs like a demonic meerkat. Grey, with white shards of bone protruding from its joints, it shook globs of karma from its body and sniffed the air delicately. More spirits fell from the picture and recovered on the floor, scrabbling over each other to climb the desk and follow the scent of depression.

Grace held his head in his hands, shoulders slumped. He was drenched in a rancid karma that dripped from him like sweat. Karma that crushed his will, destroyed his self-respect and created turmoil amongst the emotions.

The phone rang but wasn’t answered.

‘What is happening with this computer?’ Grace screamed, smashing the mouse in frustration.

The first spirit sprang onto Grace’s shoulder and bit into the side of his head. He groaned from the invisible wound, scratching at the place where the teeth sank into his skull. Other spirits clambered across the desk and leapt at him, biting and clawing and raking his flesh.

‘It’s a hobby of mine,’ Harvey continued. ‘I can tell a star sign within minutes of meeting a person. You, for example, you are determined, focused. A businessman. You like certainties in life. Practical and concrete. Capricorn, through and through. You wouldn’t waste time with a new age idea, or abstract fuzzy thinking. You would have to touch it to understand it. Am I right?’

Donald Grace groaned, trying to focus on Harvey through bleary, raw eyes. Depression has a subjective nature, people responding to pressures of life in various ways. Grace was sickened from the emails that he’d read and the stack of uncommented reports awaiting action. Work had suddenly become too much and

he couldn't see any escape. He slumped under the crushing, all-consuming hopelessness.

'I have the paper right here,' said Harvey. 'Local paper, but still has a few cartoons and the star strip. See, your stars for today aren't good. *"How strong is your connection to your inner truth? It's time to ask yourself what really matters in your life, and push everything else to the side. Don't let the small things in your life build up and overpower you. Don't succumb to that feeling of helplessness. A change in direction may be the breath of fresh air you need."*

Grace wasn't listening - his world had collapsed and all he could hear was a loud rushing in his ears and the pounding of his own heart. Like a rapid-fire death knell. 'Please go away,' he said to no one in particular, 'and who keeps ringing? Can't they tell I'm busy? If I haven't answered by the fifth ring, then I'm too bloody busy to talk to anyone.'

'I hear you,' Harvey smiled.

From the turgid swamp of karma movement distorted the carpet. A lump of grey flesh punched up into the room and uncurled into a large clawed hand. The hand braced itself against the desk and levered the rest of its grotesque body up into the office. A hippo-sized abomination dragged itself from the surface of the floor, huffing and puffing with the effort of pulling itself free from the swamp. The abomination rose slowly into the office, its huge head swinging from side to side. Giant and huge bellied, grey and black and green, it squatted on thick, stubby legs next to the desk, its head almost scraping the ceiling. Pinprick silver eyes regarded Grace with a hunger unknown on this earth and it moved sluggishly toward him.

Harvey stood up, neatly folded the paper and headed for the door. He didn't need to see the result of his work.

A scraping noise distracted him and he turned to watch the mayhem behind him. The behemoth slapped at Donald, knocking him toward the window. Imp spirits clung to the staggering man as he rose from his chair and sought escape. Grace leant his forehead against the glass, momentarily feeling relief against the hot, biting inflammation in his head. Imps scampered around, sliding the window open and playfully leading him to the cool fresh air.

Harvey walked from the office and closed the door firmly behind him.

'Did you find any more cockroaches in Mr Grace's office?' the personal assistant asked, flicking from a solitaire game on her screen to an accounts spreadsheet.

'Just one. A big critter and he put up quite a fight.' Harvey smiled brightly. 'But I think that is the last of them.'

He fished the admittance tag from his pocket and dropped it into the glass bowl on her desk. 'I'll, er, escort you out, if you like?' The assistant half rose from her chair when the buzzer intercom from Grace's office sounded. She tutted to herself and grabbed a pad of paper and pen.

'No problem. I'll just ride the elevator to the lobby. I think I can find my way.' Harvey said, the charm in his smile never faltering.

The assistant watched Harvey disappear into the lift, sighed, then entered Grace's office.

Harvey exited the lift at the lobby area and checked his watch. A soft breeze

brought the smell of the nearby waterways as he stepped from the office block. The sound of gulls was drowned out by the metallic screech of an approaching tube train running on tracks close-by.

After a few steps he heard screams, far off, whipped away by the wind. Moments later he felt a wet thud reverberate through the pavement under his feet as the body of Donald Grace impacted on the ground behind him.
