

The Facts of Death

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IAN FLEMING PUBLICATIONS

FOR MY PARENTS
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Prologue

It was supposed to have been routine.

In early October, Carl Williams, a fifty-eight-year-old African-American, had gallbladder surgery at Veterans Hospital in Los Angeles. He needed a blood transfusion to make up for what he had lost during the procedure. He was type A, and there was plenty of that in supply. The operation was a complete success, and he spent an hour in the recovery room before being wheeled back to his bed.

Several hours later, as his wife sat by his side reading, Williams began to choke. At first, Mrs Williams thought some juice he was sipping had gone down Carl's windpipe. She slapped his back, but it didn't seem to work. Carl's eyes started to bulge and he panicked. Mrs Williams screamed for the nurse.

A code blue was declared. A doctor rushed in and attempted to save the patient, who went into cardiac arrest just as they were fitting an oxygen mask over his face.

Carl Williams died fifteen minutes after the onset of the symptoms. His wife was hysterical. The hospital

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staff were shocked and bewildered. The doctor ordered that a postmortem examination be performed.

The next morning, Mrs Williams was sitting in her kitchen in Van Nuys, trying to make sense of what had happened to her husband. It must have been the hospital's fault. She was going to speak to a lawyer that very day.

As she stood up to pour some more coffee, she inexplicably felt her throat close. Gasping for air, she lunged for the telephone to dial 911. She managed to get through, but could barely speak into the receiver to tell them where to send the ambulance.

When the paramedics arrived, she was dead.

Halfway across the metropolis of Los Angeles, in Culver City, the nurse who had first attended to Carl Williams's emergency also died of respiratory failure and cardiac arrest as she was unloading groceries from the back of her car. Fifteen minutes later, in Pasadena, the doctor who had rushed into the room to help the nurse collapsed of the same ailment. He had been on the fourth hole of his favourite golf course.

By the end of the day, eight more people who had come into contact with Carl Williams were dead.

The next day there were several more.

By the third week of October, health officials realised they had a crisis on their hands. Although they tried to keep the mysterious epidemic a secret, news leaked out and was reported in the *Los Angeles Times*. A small story ran in the *Times*, but few people in London paid much attention to it.

PROLOGUE

By the end of October, thirty-three people had died. Health officials were stumped and scared.

Halfway around the world, in Tokyo, Hiroshi Nagawa received his October injection. It was his monthly shot of blood to help combat the leukaemia that he had contracted five months ago. Doctors were hopeful that the transfusions would prolong his life at least another six months. Hiroshi was optimistic, for he felt much better every time he got a shot.

Hiroshi went from the doctor's office to his job as a computer programmer. The day went well, but he began to feel a little dizzy as he got on the underground train to go home. In the middle of the packed train, Hiroshi suddenly felt as if his oesophagus had been clamped with a vise. Thankfully, the train was just pulling into a station. Choking horribly, he pushed his way through the crowd of people to the opening doors. He stumbled out onto the platform and collapsed a few feet away from the train.

Everyone in the subway car with Hiroshi that afternoon was concerned, but they went about their business and let the medics handle the situation. Little did they know that in twenty-four hours, they too would be in the morgue.

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The Smell of Death

The tableau of pain and suffering might have been a freeze-frame from a macabre dance of death.

The twelve men – three corporals and nine privates – were sprawled about in various positions in the barracks room. They were fully dressed. One man was half on, half off a cot. Three were piled together, clutching one another in a final embrace. All of them had vomited and bled from the nose and mouth. They had clearly experienced a horrible death. The team of four investigators dressed in protective clothing made a thorough search of the premises. Each wore a Willson AR 1700 full face gas mask with respirator and ‘in-cheek’ filters, airtight goggles, a hood, an impermeable butyl rubber suit, eighteen-gauge rubber gloves and boots. Every inch of skin was covered. The investigators were thankful that the gas masks blocked out the stench of death. They were sweating profusely beneath the suits, for in late October, it was still hot in southern Cyprus.

James Bond peered through the eyepieces of his gas mask, taking in every detail. Twelve soldiers had been

killed by an as yet unknown chemical agent, possibly administered through the air ducts. It seemed the only possible explanation. Equally disturbing was the number '3' painted in red on the wall of the room. Beneath the number, on the floor, was a six-inch-high alabaster statuette of the ancient Greek god Poseidon.

Bond watched the two British SAS investigators do their work and then followed them outside into the sun. One investigator, the sole Greek in the team, remained inside to finish making notes and to take photographs.

The men removed their gas masks and hoods. The temperature was already eighty-five degrees. It would have been a good day for a swim.

The British Sovereign Base Areas in the Republic of Cyprus cover approximately three per cent of the island's land area. The Western Sovereign Base Area, which consists of the Episkopi Garrison buildings and the Akrotiri RAF airfield, and the Eastern Sovereign Base Area – the garrison at Dhekelia – remained under British jurisdiction when the Treaty of Establishment created the independent Republic of Cyprus in 1960. Prior to that time, Cyprus had been a British crown colony.

Bond had been dispatched to Cyprus shortly after midnight and had been shuttled to Akrotiri by a Royal Navy aircraft. He had been met by Captain Sean Tully and taken directly to Episkopi, the area which housed the Sovereign Base Areas Administration and the headquarters of the British Forces Cyprus. James Bond always thought the island was a lovely place, with its beautiful beaches, its rolling hills in the north, its

near-perfect climate, and its quaint and colourful cities. It was unfortunate that Cyprus had such a turbulent recent history.

It was an unnamed British officer who had drawn a line with a green marker across the map in 1963, when tensions between the Greek and Turkish Cypriots culminated in violence. The United Nations moved in shortly thereafter in an attempt to keep the peace along the aptly named Green Line. Eleven years later, as a result of an attempted coup by the Greek government and the Turkish invasion of the northern part of the island in reaction to that attempt, the island was divided not just by a symbolic Green Line, but by a physical and political one. Today, Her Majesty's Government, along with the UN, recognises only the government of the Republic of Cyprus, which administers the southern two thirds of the island. The so-called Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, which illegally occupies the north-east third of the island, is not recognised by any nation other than Turkey. The situation has been a source of tension, mistrust and conflict for over thirty years.

The current disaster had struck in a barracks near the Episkopi helicopter landing site. Bond had been joined by two SAS forensic identification specialists from London and, at the last minute, by a member of the Greek Secret Service. He was a bit puzzled by the presence of the Greek agent, who was still inside the barracks taking notes. M had advised him that a Greek agent would be contacting him in Episkopi, but this was obviously a British matter, as it involved British military

personnel and occurred on territory governed by neither the Republic of Cyprus nor Greece.

Winner, one of the London investigators, wiped the sweat from his brow and asked, 'Commander Bond, do you have any preliminary impressions?'

'It was some kind of aerosol agent, I would imagine,' Bond said. 'The number on the wall and the little statue are some kind of signature that the killer or killers left behind. I understand there was something similar at Dhekelia two days ago.'

'Right,' the second man, Ashcraft, said. 'A small squad of men was killed by a nerve toxin called sarin. The same stuff that was used in a Japanese underground train recently by a religious fanatic.'

Winner added, 'And then there was poor Whitten two days before that.'

Bond nodded. He had been briefed. Christopher Whitten had been an MI6 operative in Athens. His body had been found by the Greek police sprawled on the steps of the Temple of Hephaisteion in the Ancient Agora near the Acropolis. He had died by an as yet unidentified poison, but Forensic Toxicology believed the cause of death to have been ricin, a deadly chemical derived from the simple castor bean plant.

In all three cases, the perpetrators had left a number painted near the body or bodies. The number '1' had been scrawled on a rock by Whitten's head. The number '2' had been painted on the wall of the Dhekelia barracks where the small squad of soldiers died the other day. A similarity to the Episkopi incident was that another

small statuette of a Greek god was left at the Dhekelia scene.

Ashcraft said, 'And now we have the third attack in four days. Looks like we've got a serial terrorist or something. . . . One complete section and half of another from the platoon were killed. That's three corporals and nine privates – three fire teams. It happened late last night after they had come in from drill. What do you make of the condition of the bodies, Ray?'

Winner rubbed his chin. 'From the amount of bleeding the victims experienced – from nearly every orifice of their bodies – it appears to be Tricotheneces. Wouldn't you agree?'

'Yes,' Ashcraft said. 'We'll have to get the lab to verify, of course. Terrible way to go.' He turned to Bond. 'Tricotheneces is a poison that causes radical bleeding from the eyes, ears and mouth, internal bleeding, burns, convulsion and death – all within half an hour.'

Bond was familiar with the various types of chemicals used in terrorist attacks and in warfare.

'Is it my imagination, or can I smell their bodies from out here?' Winner asked.

The Greek agent emerged from the barracks, still wearing the gas mask and protective hood. Now out in the fresh air, the gas mask and coverings were quickly removed, revealing a head of long, black hair. She had Mediterranean features – tan skin, thick eyebrows, brown eyes, full lips, a large but not unattractive nose and a long neck. She was unusually tall – nearly six feet. Bond and the other two men were surprised. They

hadn't realised the agent was a woman when she walked into the barracks after them. She hadn't spoken and the protective uniform covered any hint of female shape.

'Are you from the NIS? You're Mirakos?' Winner asked.

'That's right,' she said. 'Niki Mirakos of the Greek National Intelligence Service.' She pronounced her first name 'Nee-kee.'

'What are you doing here, exactly?' Ashcraft asked. 'If you don't mind my asking.'

'I'm investigating these terrorist attacks, just as you are,' she said with a look of disdain. 'Your man Whitten was found in a public area of Athens – in a national park that was a holy place for the ancient Greeks, no less. These attacks are not random. There is a purpose behind them. My government has an interest in what has happened.'

'Maybe you can fill us in on your hypothesis, then?' Ashcraft said.

'Later,' she said. 'I want to get out of these hot clothes and take a shower.' She turned to Bond. 'You're 007, aren't you?'

Bond held out his hand. 'Bond,' he said. 'James Bond.'

'We're supposed to have a little talk,' she said. She glanced at the two other officers and added, 'Alone.'

Bond nodded. He led her away from the other two toward the building in the barracks that had been assigned to them as temporary quarters. As they walked, she unzipped her coveralls, revealing a white T-shirt soaked in sweat. Her full breasts were perfectly molded

into the shirt. Bond couldn't help stealing a glance or two as they walked. She wasn't 'beautiful' in the cover girl sense, but she exhibited an air of sensuality that made her extremely attractive.

'We believe this to be the work of terrorists specialising in chemical and biological weaponry,' she said. 'The targets thus far have been British, but we believe there is something behind the attacks which will ultimately involve Greece.' She had a fairly thick accent, but her English was very good. Although most people under the age of forty in Greece have learned English, very few practice it on a daily basis.

'Do you have any idea who these people are?'

'No, and that's part of the problem. We're still investigating the death of your man Whitten, with the cooperation of your government, of course.'

'Is there a significance in the site where the body was dumped?' he asked.

'Perhaps. The Ancient Agora was the Athenian marketplace. You know about the coin?'

Bond nodded. 'Whitten had an ancient Greek coin in his mouth.'

Niki continued, 'That's right. The ancient Greeks believed that the dead should have a coin handy to give to Charon, the boatman on the River Styx, so that he could ferry them across the river to Hades. A dead person was usually buried with a coin in their mouth to use as fare.'

'So the body placement, the coin, the number . . . are all symbolic,' Bond said.

‘Of what?’ she said. ‘If we can find the connection between that murder and the incidents here on Cyprus, it would be a big help.’

‘The statuettes could be a substitute for the temple,’ Bond said. ‘Ideally, maybe the killers wanted to send some sort of message linking the deaths to ancient Greece. That’s why Whitten’s body was dropped where it was. Since they couldn’t do that here on Cyprus, maybe the statuettes are supposed to symbolise the equivalent. Whatever that is.’

‘That’s an interesting point, Mr Bond,’ Niki said. ‘The statuette at Dhekalia was that of Hera, the queen of the gods. This one was Poseidon. I wonder if that means anything.’

‘I’m no ancient Greek scholar,’ Bond said, ‘but I do know that Hera was a vengeful, jealous god.’

‘What do you make of the numbers?’

Bond shrugged. ‘It’s a definite indication that these three acts were committed by the same group . . . and that there will probably be more.’

They had now reached two three-story white buildings of brick and plaster, some two hundred metres from the Helicopter Landing Site. The orange wind sock could be clearly seen blowing in the wind. The sound of an approaching Westland Wessex Mark II search-and-rescue helicopter was growing louder. They glanced up toward the sun and saw it descending from the sky, its silhouette resembling a humpback whale.

‘I’m going to take a shower,’ Niki said. She looked at her watch. It was just after noon. ‘Let’s meet in the

mess at one? We can compare notes before we meet the base personnel at two. They will want answers.'

'Fine,' Bond said. 'I'll take a shower too. Perhaps we can go for a swim after the debriefing? And then maybe dinner?'

'You work fast, Mr Bond,' she said with a slight smile.

He shrugged. 'I leave in the morning.'

'We'll see,' she said as they separated. Bond went up to the second floor of one building, normally occupied by a platoon. As he passed the showers, he noticed a sign on the door proclaiming that the plumbing was out of order. Bond turned and shouted to Niki, who was entering the barracks across the road.

'I need to use one of your showers! Mine are out!'

Niki waved and gestured for him to come over.

Bond had been assigned a room that was currently vacant, although bits of the kit of three soldiers were still there. The rooms were all alike – sparsely furnished with three cots, three cupboards, a sink, a ceiling fan, two strips of fluorescent lights and a dozen posters on the walls of various popular pinup celebrities. He grabbed his open carry-on bag and made his way across the road to Niki's barracks. Bare shouldered, she stuck her head out of her door as he passed by, and said, 'You can use the next room. The showers are a few doors down. You go first, I can wait.'

'Why not join me? We could do our part in conserving Cyprus's precious water supply.'

The door shut in his face.

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Bond entered the room, removed his clothes and threw his bag on one of the cots. He hadn't brought much with him, as he knew that he would be on a plane back to London in the morning. As an afterthought, he had thrown in his swimming trunks and a diving utility belt that Q Branch supplied to agents normally working near water. Perhaps there really would be some time for that swim with the lovely Niki Mirakos. . . .

Bond wrapped a towel around his waist and walked out of the room to the showers.

There were five shower stalls, two baths and toilets. No one else was around. Bond dropped the towel and stepped into one of the stalls. He twisted the knob and turned on the hot water. It got warm very quickly and he felt the spray begin to wash away the sweat. As he reached for the soap the water suddenly turned cold. He ducked back and held his hand under the spray. Suddenly, the water cut off. In a few seconds, warm water burst out of the spigot. Bond chalked it up to poor plumbing on a military base and moved under the spray once again. When the water turned cold a second time, he became suspicious and stepped out of the stall. Immediately the smell of ammonia enveloped the room. Smoke funnelled out of the stall as some kind of abrasive chemical poured onto the tiles on the floor.

Bond ran out of the room naked. He ducked into his temporary quarters, taking a few seconds to grab his swimming trunks and slip them on. He grasped the

utility belt, which also held his new Walther P99 in a waterproof holster, and ran back outside. Niki, a towel wrapped around her shapely body, stepped out of her room in time to see him leap over the railing and gracefully land on the grass below in his bare feet. A couple of perplexed privates in uniform were standing beside a jeep watching him.

Paying no attention to them, Bond ran around the building in time to see a figure dressed in camouflage fatigues running away from the barracks toward the helicopter landing site. The Wessex that had landed earlier was still there, its rotor blades spinning. Bond took off after the running figure, who was wearing a gas mask and protective hood.

The figure made it to the Wessex and climbed into the open door. The helicopter immediately began to rise just as Bond made it to the HLS. He leaped forward and just managed to grab hold of the trooping step, the metal attachment used as an extra step to assist soldiers entering or leaving the aircraft. The Wessex continued to rise, with Bond hanging on for dear life. Within moments, they were flying over the base toward the Mediterranean.

The door was still open, and Bond could see two camouflaged figures from his position. One was holding a gun to the pilot's head. The aircraft had been hijacked!

The gas-masked figure he had seen earlier leaned out of the door and saw Bond hanging onto the trooping step. He pulled a large knife from a sheath, then squatted down closer to the floor of the aircraft. Holding onto

the inside of the cabin with one hand, the figure leaned out with the knife in the other. He swung the knife across Bond's knuckles, slicing the skin. Bond winced with pain but forced himself to hang on. The helicopter was a good two hundred feet above the ground. He would surely fall to his death if he let go. The assassin leaned out again, but this time Bond was ready. As the knife swung, Bond lifted one hand off the trooping step and grasped the piece of metal beneath the step mat fastened onto the helicopter. It wasn't as good a handhold as the step itself, but it was shielded from the assassin's knife. He then inched out onto the wheel axle and wrapped his legs around it. The killer would have to venture out of the aircraft to get him now.

As the helicopter flew over the RAF airfield at Akrotiri, the pilot was ordered to maneuver the vehicle wildly in an attempt to throw Bond off. The pain was almost unbearable, and the blood from the cuts dripped onto his face. But he hung on tightly. If only he could manage to keep hold until they got over the water . . .

The figure leaned out of the door again, this time holding an automatic pistol – a Daewoo, Bond thought. Bond swung his body up under the helicopter as the assassin fired at him. The bullets whizzed past him as he swung back and forth. Fortunately, the jerking movement of the helicopter spoiled the man's aim and he shouted angrily back at the pilot.

The helicopter was now over the Mediterranean, flying south. The water below was choppy and rough.

The assassin did what Bond was afraid he might do:

he crawled out onto the trooping step. Now that the chopper was flying level, Bond could be shot at point-blank range. He couldn't see the assassin's face behind the gas mask, but he knew the man was smiling in triumph. The assassin raised the pistol and pointed it at Bond's head.

Bond used all of his strength to swing back underneath the trooping step and used the momentum to push himself away from the helicopter. In midair, he somersaulted so that his body ended up in the diving position. He heard the shot ring out above him as he soared down to the sea. The impact might have killed an ordinary man, but Bond's graceful Olympic-style dive smoothly cut through the surface of the water.

He swam up for air and saw the Wessex continuing its trek south-ward. He looked at the shore, which was at least a mile away. Could he swim back? The water was very rough. It would be a challenge for even the strongest of swimmers. It was lucky that he had thought to take the utility belt.

While treading water, Bond unzipped the belt and removed two coiled rubber items which, when shaken, opened out to their proper size. They were portable flippers. He quickly placed them on his feet. Next, Bond removed a small can the size of a shaving cream container. Two long elastic bands allowed him to strap the can onto his back. A flexible tube uncoiled from the top of the can, and he stuck the end in his mouth. The can was a ten-minute version of an aqualung, which would be helpful in swimming through the choppy

water. He hoped that the current wasn't so strong that he couldn't make headway toward shore.

Bond began the slow crawl toward land, thankful that he had brushed up on his diving skills a couple of weeks ago. He was also grateful that Major Boothroyd was indeed a genius.

He fought the sea as best he could, but it was a case of two steps forward, one step back. Still, he was an expert swimmer and extremely fit. An ordinary man might have drowned by now. Five minutes later, Bond estimated that he was about half a mile from shore. The air would last him another five minutes and then he would have to depend on short, deep breaths stolen from the choppy surface.

The sound of another helicopter grew nearer and its shadow blocked out the sun. Bond stopped swimming and treaded water. A Gazelle was directly above him, and a rope ladder was being lowered to him. He took hold of it and swiftly climbed up into the small, round helicopter. To his surprise, it was piloted by none other than Niki Mirakos. An RAF airman had manned the ladder.

'What kept you?' Bond asked.

'You said you wanted to go swimming!' Niki shouted over the noise. 'I wanted to make sure you had a little time to enjoy yourself.'

The Gazelle pulled away toward the shore and back to Episkopi, passing two more Wessex helicopters heading out to sea in pursuit of the hijacked aircraft.

Back at the base, Bond and Niki learned that whoever it was wearing the gas mask had managed to attach a tank of cyanogen chloride to the water line. The chemical was classified as a 'blood agent' because it attacked blood cells and spread quickly throughout the body. If it had made contact with Bond's skin, he would have been a dead man. Investigators believed that this same assassin was responsible for the attack on the fire teams. More disturbing was that it was a blatant attempt on Niki Mirakos's life.

That evening, the search-and-rescue personnel made their reports. The hijacked Wessex was found abandoned, floating in the sea about a hundred miles south of Cyprus. The saltwater flotation cans had been activated, allowing the helicopter to land on the water safely. The pilot's body was found on board. He had been shot in the back of the head. It was surmised that the killer and his accomplice had somehow hijacked the craft and forced the pilot to fly them in and out of the base. It must have been met by a boat or a seaplane, for there was no trace of them.

After the briefing, Bond and Niki rode in her rented Honda Civic into town. They found a loud, festive restaurant, but managed to be seated at a small table for two in the back, away from the noise.

'How do you feel?' she asked. The candle on the table cast a glow across her bronze face.

'That fight with the sea today exhausted me, but otherwise I couldn't be better,' Bond said. 'I'm hungry, how about you?'

‘Famished.’

They shared a Cypriot mixed grill – ham, sausage and beef burgers – and *halloumi*, a chewy cheese, all grilled over charcoal. The house wine was Ambelida, a dry, light wine made from the Xynistri white grape.

‘Why is it that Cypriot cuisine normally consists of an enormous amount of meat?’ Bond asked.

Niki laughed. ‘I don’t know. We eat a lot of meat in Greece too, but not this much. Maybe it’s the reason for the high level of testosterone on this island.’

‘Why do you think someone tried to kill you in the shower, Niki? That dirty trick was meant for you,’ he said.

‘I don’t have a clue. Someone obviously knew I would come to investigate. I’ve been on this case since they found your man Whitten. Maybe whoever’s responsible knew that. Don’t worry, I can take care of myself.’

‘I’m sure you can. When do you go back?’

‘Tomorrow morning, same as you,’ she said.

Bond settled the bill, even though she wanted to pay for her own meal. In the car on the way back to the base, he asked her if they would see each other again. She nodded.

‘My middle name is Cassandra,’ she said. ‘Believe it or not, I think I’ve always had the ability to see into people’s hearts, and sometimes into the future.’

‘Oh, really?’ Bond asked, smiling. ‘And what does the future hold for us?’

‘We’ll see each other again at least once,’ she said as they pulled into the front gate of the base.

After saying goodnight, he returned to his barracks

room and slipped under the blanket of one of the cots. He was about to drift off to sleep when a knock at the door jarred him awake. 'Come in,' he said.

Niki Mirakos, still wearing civilian clothes, stepped into the dark room. 'I told you we'd see each other at least one more time. Besides, I wanted to make sure you were all right. You must be very sore after that fall into the sea.'

She moved closer to him. He sat up in the bed, about to protest, but she gently pushed him back down. She turned him onto his stomach and began to massage his broad shoulders.

'This will work out all the . . . uhm, how do you say in English . . . kinkies?' she asked.

Bond turned over onto his back and pulled her down on top of him. 'The word is "kinks",' he said, chuckling. 'But I'll be happy to show you what "kinky" means. . . .'

With that, his mouth met hers and she moaned aloud.