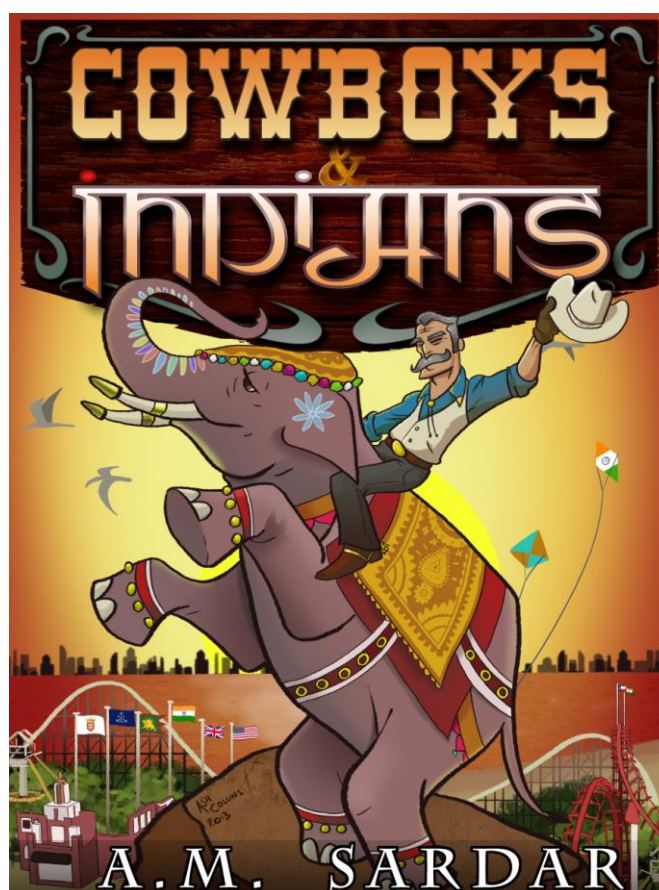


# Cowboys & Indians

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Art by Ash Collins

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## SYNOPSIS

A Texan Construction company is hired by Indian tycoon, Moti Lal, to build the first Cowboy theme-park in Mumbai.

Veteran Project Manager Dallas Jones assembles an international project team, including close friend Gracie Davis, but makes a poor start when his architect is murdered and his assistant, local graduate Avinash, arrives late.

Moti Lal, with his two daughters and extensive relatives, hosts a gala event at his palatial home to launch the project. Jones meets Moti Lal's frustrated flirtatious wife, however the mutual seduction is interrupted when her husband is secretly poisoned by the youngest daughter.

Problems start to build up for Jones; gangsters and a corrupt Police Inspector attempt to extort money by blocking deliveries, aggressive cross-dressing beggars cause a near riot and substandard materials causes delays. The new suave Architect antagonizes Avinash and they clash over their attraction for a colleague.

Jones and Moti Lal's wife embark on an affair but are secretly photographed by Avinash; he eventually tells Gracie who urges Jones to end the affair.

Jones continues the affair and learns Moti's mother tried to force a divorce because they didn't have a son and was now pressuring Moti to leave the business to his younger brother rather than his own daughters. Jones agrees to track Moti's mother on her mysterious trips to gather evidence against her influence.

Moti's life is again threatened when a snake bites him but Jones and Avinash manage to save him. Jones, fearing Moti may be assassinated and the project abandoned, asks his lover to come with him to the US but she refuses and the affair is ended.

Gracie and the Architect both disappear and Jones works with the Police Inspector to track them down. Gracie is recovered uninjured, the Architect's butchered torso is found and the Police Inspector exacts merciless revenge on the gangster responsible. During the search Jones locates the apartment Moti's mother has been visiting and meets a boy who bears a remarkable resemblance to Moti's wife.

Jones confronts Moti's wife, accusing her of an illegitimate child, but she angrily refutes his accusations and he compels Avinash to secretly gather samples for analysis. The affair between Jones and Moti's wife is exposed when Avinash's picture of the pair kissing becomes public. Moti confronts Jones about the affair on a roller coaster during a violent thunderstorm.

Jones eventually obtains the DNA report from Avinash and learns the boy he encountered is the real son of Moti and was swapped at birth with a servant's daughter at the instigation of Moti's mother. At a violent confrontation Moti finally sees the truth about his family and orders them from his home. At an emotional reunion the couple meet their son for the first time.

The Presidents of India and Pakistan attend the opening ceremony of the park as Avinash discovers the Architect made changes to plant bombs at the rides. He works with Jones and the security team to defuse most of the bombs but is caught in the blast from the last device. Terrorists, led by the Architect, attack the Presidents, kidnap Moti Lal and escape in an army tank. Jones chases them down on an elephant and manages, with the help of Gracie, to defeat them.

The assassins are exposed, the park reopens without any fuss, Jones leaves India and Moti and his wife present their new son to the media.

# Chapter 1

*Pardesyon se na akiya milana*

[Never meet the eyes of a stranger]

*Pardesoyon ko ha ik din jaana*

[One day they will leave]

Mohammed Rafi from the film *Jab Jab Phool Kile* (1965).

SHRI Moti Lal leaned back in the luxurious soft leather of the Cadillac as it sped through downtown Dallas towards the offices of Mitchum and Martin Construction Company.

His rotund belly pushed and stretched taut the silk Nehru jacket he wore. It was always good to dress the part when negotiating with Americans he thought; they had such trouble seeing past the skin color or the funny costumes. A red *bindi* brightly spotted his forehead, Aviator sunglasses balanced perfectly on the bridge of his nose, years of betel nut *paan* chewing had stained his gums dark orange, a heavy ornate gold chain garlanded his robust neck and his fingertips were heavily nicotine stained; he was, in all regards, a colorful character.

"We are nearly there," said Gopi, his Personal Assistant.

Moti Lal barely moved his bloated face to acknowledge his PA. He liked Gopi, after all he had educated him at his own expense, given him a job in the company and elevated him to his PA; but you had to keep them in their place.

The black shark-like car stopped in front of an anonymous glass building, the driver opened the door for Moti Lal and a fierce heat wave immediately assaulted his senses. Gopi firmly moved the driver aside, placed a clean handkerchief on his forearm and offered it to the great man. A pudgy bejeweled hand grasped it firmly and he eased himself out of the deep seat. Instantly Gopi opened an umbrella above his head, not to stave off the heat; both regularly endured worst in Mumbai, but to protect Moti Lal's *benna* hued skin; no Indian liked being darker than he needed to be.

Suddenly Moti Lal stopped and it took all of Gopi's instincts to prevent himself tailgating into him. He shifted his gaze downwards to a shiny Yankee coin, Gopi spotted it too and quickly reached down to pick it up, but just as he was about to slip it into his pocket, Moti Lal extended his hand. Gopi instantly realized what was expected; he wiped the coin clean on his jacket and placed it in the Great Man's palm. Moti Lal quickly dropped it into his pocket and carried on unperturbed with Gopi hustling close behind tightly gripping the umbrella. The driver watched the pair enact their strange ritual, muttered a profanity, and returned to the car.

They were expected inside and the corporate hospitality, so beloved of multi-nationals, was swiftly offered and equally swiftly accepted. Cool drinks in chilled glasses and an extraordinary range of finger food were laid before them on the table in the large conference room. Gopi hurried back and forth offering different edibles but Moti Lal either dismissed them without tasting or took a tiny bird's peck and then dismissed them.

"They are late," observed Gopi after a few minutes.

"They are trying to impress us. They are so busy they have to force themselves to meet us; it's an old game and I know it well," replied Moti Lal.

Further conversation was quickly terminated as a large body of people quickly entered the room and started to arrange themselves around the conference table. No one came up to introduce themselves or in any other perceptible way acknowledge the Indians existence. The activity stopped and a false lull settled on the large room. It was obvious someone else was going to come, someone very important, since the large chair at the head of the table was still empty.

Abruptly the door opened and CC Baxter, Chief Executive of the Mitchum and Martin Construction Company, a lean taut coil of a man came in flanked by two assistants. Moti Lal quickly looked at Gopi, his singular PA, and realized he had been trumped in the Game of Assistants.

"Mr Moti Lal, a pleasure to meet you, I'm CC Baxter, head honcho at this here little company," said the lean man offering a hand to the seated Indian.

Moti Lal remained motionless; it was time to play the cultural card he thought.

A little of the self-confidence fell away from CC Baxter as behind him his subordinates wondered why the fat little Indian was snubbing their boss.

"I'm sorry, but Mr Moti Lal doesn't shake hands; my profound apologies," said Gopi with a plastic smile.

"Skin disease?" asked CC Baxter impolitely.

"No, heavens no! Religious stipulations; he is Upper Brahmin, he can only shake hands with an equally qualified caste member," over-explained Gopi.

"Alright, not to worry; we're all good here," said CC Baxter unconvincingly as he and his two assistants retreated back to their side of the table.

"I assume he speaks English?" said CC Baxter with a heavy dose of mocking.

"Of course he speaks," replied Gopi. He was starting to get annoyed; this loud Yankee was mocking his *Saab* after presuming to shake hands with him.

"Well, can't you make him say something?" mocked CC again.

"He will speak when he is ready. Please start," said Gopi frostily.

A mean look flashed across CC's face and he controlled his sharp tongue with a good degree of effort. If their numbers weren't so poor this earning quarter, he would've kicked the little brown curry-muncher out of his office.

"Well, thank you for coming and taking this meeting. Let's have some introductions, I'll start. My name is CC Baxter and, as I said before," a little grimace at the thought, "I'm the head honcho at this company."

The introductions started around the table; people from finance, people from legal, people from indeterminate departments, and managers, lots of managers, until the last short introduction from a grizzled, mean-looking man in his fifties, "Jones, Project Manager."

"That's us done, now your turn," said CC Baxter with a swagger.

"I am Gopi, Personal Assistant, confidant and good friend to Shri Moti Lal, owner of Lal Industries, one of the richest men in India," Gopi concluded confidently.

All eyes turned to the Buddha-like statue of Moti Lal, waiting patiently for him to say a word, any bloody word thought CC Baxter. After a long, uncomfortable pause, he

finally spoke in a lilting accented voice, "I am what he says, and I would like a theme park for my lovely Mumbai."

The spell was broken, the little fat Indian could talk, and everyone started to assess his needs, to calculate his requirements until Jones spoke up, "Why did ya come here? Disney is where you should be. But I figure they turned you down, so now you're slumming it here."

Several sharp glances were aimed at Jones but he brushed them off and eyeballed Moti Lal, challenging him to reply.

Moti Lal beamed, a straight talking Yankee who would get to the point. He took off his glasses and said, "You are quite right. I did approach them but they have their own schedule, which they were unwilling to amend."

"So what do you want from us?" asked Jones.

Several senior managers exchanged coded looks; Jones was taking over the meeting, how dare he? They eyed CC Baxter awaiting his disapproval, but none came; he'd had enough of this pot bellied over-enunciator and was glad Jones was dragging him to the point.

Moti Lal smiled, "I would like an American adventure playground in Mumbai. I have bought the franchise licenses from the Six Flags Entertainment Corporation for my own park. I shall call it 'Six Flags over Mumbai'."

A stunned silence greeted this announcement until Jones burst out laughing, "That's the most dumbass thing I've ever heard. I know them fellas went far but I'm sure as hell certain they never got to, what was that place? My-Bambi?" and laughed again.

"Jones," reprimanded CC Baxter and the laughter quickly subsided.

"You'll have to forgive our Mr Jones, he's a little abrupt at times," soothed CC Baxter.

"Did you know there are over three hundred and thirty million Gods in Hinduism; God as a snake, as a monkey, as an elephant or even as a fish. Do you know there are living Gods too? Yes, it's true. There is even a temple dedicated to the great Indian actor Amitabh Bachchan, who is still very much amongst us, unfortunately; I was always a Rajesh Khanna fan. So you see my Hindu brothers are very adept at believing the impossible, the impractical or the even the very unlikely; so a few cowboys in India is nothing," Moti Lal explained carefully.

He looked meticulously around the room and added, "It'll just be like cowboys and Indians but with real Indians."

"I think you'll find our Indians are real enough," quipped Jones.

"Thanks Jones, well that's clear then; cowboys in India it is. So just what exactly can we do for you?" asked CC Baxter, eager to move the deal forward without any more stories.

"I want you to build it," said Moti Lal and gestured to Gopi hovering on his right shoulder. Gopi swiftly produced a large check book, opened it with a flourish and placed on the table. An Omas Phoenix Platinum pen was produced and placed next to it.

CC Baxter realized with a start the fat little man was intending to sign a check without discussing requirements, dates or anything else, and tried to stop him, "Wooha, hold on there, I can't take anything off you. It constitutes a binding contract in this state and we haven't agreed to anything yet."

Moti Lal looked up and asked, "Do you want to build it?"

"Yes, of course we do," replied CC Baxter.

"And so do I. This is a little deposit to maintain your interest in my project until formal contracts are signed," Moti Lal explained.

The Legal Manager began to speak, "You can't assume contracts will..." but Baxter held up his hand and silenced him quickly, "How little?"

"Is ten million US dollars enough?" he asked snidely.

"Make it fifteen and you will have my personal undivided attention," said a beaming CC Baxter.

"Very well, fifteen it is," and he gestured to Gopi to fill in the amount.

All around the table, disbelief was turning into conviction. They were really going to walk out of a preliminary meeting with fifteen million dollars; in ten minutes they had just pushed their first quarter earnings into profit. Gopi finished writing the check and then smoothly passed it to his boss who immediately picked up the pen, read the check carefully and started to sign it, but then he paused "I would like this gentleman, Mr Jones, to lead it; I will only talk to him about this project."

"Of course, I was going to say the very same," soothed CC Baxter.

"Good," said Moti Lal and signed the check.

Jones murmured "sonovabitch" under his breath, but it was unclear which particular offspring he was referring to.

## Chapter 2

*Buree dhoor se ayeen hain*

[I have come from afar]

*Pyar ka toofa laye hain*

[With a gift of love]

Mohammed Rafi from the film *Samjhota* (1973).

JONES stretched his back, readjusted the saddle-bags on his left shoulder again, lifted his Stetson hat to waft a stray annoying fly and scanned down the immigration line reserved for Non-Indians; it seemed to have been stationary for an extraordinary length of time. He suppressed the urge to curse and resumed waiting impatiently. The line crawled up to the immigration desk and finally it was his turn to face the bored, sullen official. He slapped his passport on the desktop and the dark blue color of the American passport kicked the official into action. He looked at Jones, noting his Stetson hat, the mean olive-green eyes, the long handlebar moustache slowly turning gray and the grizzled unshaven chin; he opened and examined the passport photograph, scanned Jones again, leaned forward to check out his long boots and finally shouted at his two other colleagues, "Raju, Santu, *yeh dekh* [look at this]." His colleagues quickly abandoned their posts, leaving behind frustrated passengers, and came to look at Jones. Finally the first official spoke, "Are you a cowboy?"

"What?"

"Cowboy? Are you a cowboy?" repeated the official.

"No, I ain't a cowboy," replied Jones irritated.

"You have a hat and you wear boots," observed the second official with the Rajesh name tag.

"Don't make me a cowboy. Do you see a horse?" snapped Jones.

"Have you lost it?" asked the third official with the Santosh name tag.

"You need to go to baggage reclaim," added Rajesh unhelpfully.

"No, I ain't lost it; I never had it," said Jones annoyed.

"What is that?" asked the first official pointing at his waist.

"Oh that, that's a rattlesnake belt," explained Jones with great reluctance.

"Is it dangerous?" asked Santosh.

"It's a belt for crying out loud, it keeps my pants up; how dangerous is that?" hollered Jones.

"No, no, no," continued Santosh shaking his head in time to each 'no', "the snake rattle, is it dangerous?"

"Not snake rattle, rattlesnake. And yes it is dangerous," replied Jones making immense effort to control his growing anger.

"Is it more dangerous than a king cobra?" questioned Rajesh.

"I don't know any king cobras," said Jones between gritted teeth.

"I think it is not," said Santosh.

"Do you know Clint Eastwood? He is a cowboy," said the first official.

"He has a horse," added Santosh.

"Aw fer crying out loud; I ain't a cowboy and I don't know Clint frigging Eastwood. Now are yer gonna stamp my passport and let me in or what?" exploded Jones.

A tense note hung in the air between Jones and the three officials, finally the first official straightened up, waved away the other two with a quick *jao jao* [go go], and resumed his bored look from before and asked "What is the purpose of your visit?" "Self-flagellation."

An uncomprehending look greeted his remark, Jones relented, he was too tired to have another idiotic conversation with the Three Stooges, "Business."

Thump smacked down the stamp on the passport and the official handed back the passport with a curt "Enjoy your visit."

"That'll be the day," replied Jones.

He reclaimed his single luggage bag and wheeled the suitcase along the marble corridors until he emerged into the arrival hall. Rows and rows of tired disappointed faces greeted him as he passed along them and then he was among the rows of company drivers. He started to read the courtesy driver signs, some printed and some handwritten, looking for 'Jones Mitchum and Martin'; but there wasn't one. He wasn't surprised, he had been dreading this trip ever since the pot bellied fool had signed the check in their offices, now it was going sour before he'd even got to his hotel; cursing under his breath he headed outside.

The stench of gasoline and a wave of hot air hit him full in the face and he frowned in agitation, cursed even more under his breath, 'goddamn miserable pissant jumped-up shitty cowpat of a country', and dragged his suitcase in search of a taxi. Swarms of men started to quickly surround him shouting, "Buy dollar for rupaaya", "Good rate good rate", "Best rate". Much like Jesus before him, he showed his disdain to the moneychangers and carried on. His progress was marginal before he was surrounded by beggars, orphans and holy men and other exotic creatures drawn to the arrivals lounge at Mumbai's *Chhatrapati Shivaji* International Airport. He barged through them with as much fake politeness as he could muster.

He finally found the taxi rank, and after much head-shaking and pointing from the over helpful natives, arrived at the first taxi. His bags were loaded into the trunk and he slumped with relief into the back and growled "Marriot."

The driver twisted around to face him, his shiny sienna face beaming, "No sir, no, no! Marriot is *tutee* [shit], Hilton is much better, I take you there. My cousin can give you 12% discount."

'Goddamn fucking miserable lentil-eating cattle-loving crazies' thought Jones, and with immense control replied "I don't want to go to the Hilton, take me to the Marriot you monkey nut!"

"I can see you are new to Mumbai, trust me *yaar* [friend] I will get you a good price," he insisted.

"MARRIOT!" snapped Jones and the driver reluctantly turned back.

The taxi pulled away with much bleating of the horns and shaking of fists and joined the other traffic heading towards the city. Jones was too tired to pay attention and pulled the Stetson over his face.

The taxi belched and lurched forward, black fumes pouring from the exhaust, and the



driver started to speak again, "Where are you from?"

"Natural reproduction, now just drive," quipped Jones from under his hat.

"Ha, ha, you are funny. Hat and boots you must be from Ku-naayda. Yes?"

"Canada? Jesus wept," said Jones, "no, I ain't a Canuck!"

"Australian?"

"What the hell!" said Jones sitting up at the suggestion, "I ain't a friggin Aussie, I'm a Texan."

"From Texaco? I know Texaco, good petrol," grinned the driver.

"Not fuckin' Texaco, USA! Goddamn it to hell, what's wrong with you people."

"USA? Ah USA! Aumreekey, ahh, *acha* [alright] aumreekey," repeated the driver nodding his head.

"Yes, 'aumreekey'," mimicked Jones nodding his head.

"Ha, ha, you are funny. I am called Dev, what is your name?"

"Look we ain't getting acquainted, just drive the damn car," ordered Jones.

"Of course I am driving the taxi but what is your name?" persisted the over-eager taxi driver.

Under his hat Jones fumed. Two hours in this country and he hadn't met a sane person yet; finally he relented, "Name is Jones."

"Ah Jones, very good name; what is full name."

It seemed to Jones this guy wasn't going to shut up any time soon, "Its Dallas Jones."

"Dallas Jones? Really?" asked the driver turning around.

"Yes," growled Jones, "any problems with that?"

"Yes sir, just one; why are you named after a TV show?"

"What the fuck! Listen you chappati-chewer, I ain't named after a TV show, I ain't got a brother called Indiana, I ain't a cowboy and my belt ain't dangerous; now just drive this fucking death-trap to the Marriot," shouted Jones from the back.

"*Yaar* don't worry, I will drive car to Hilton," smiled the driver.

Jones reached forward, grabbed the taxi-driver by the back of his shirt collar and hissed "Stop the car."

The driver slammed on the brakes in panic and the pair fell forward and then back again. Jones released the driver's collar and got out of the taxi. Silently he gestured to the taxi driver to get out of the car and get into the back. Slowly the driver complied and sat meekly in the back. Jones climbed into the driver's vacant seat, put on his seatbelt and looked at the driver in his rear view mirror, "Which way to the Marriot?"

"Left," replied the man meekly from the back.

The Concierge at the Marriot had seen many things during his long vigil at the front, but even he was surprised and left speechless when the tall cowboy drove up in the taxi. Dumbly he opened the back door from routine and was even more surprised to see the driver in the back smiling back at him and giving a little embarrassed wave.

Jones stepped out of the car, threw the keys at the driver in the back and said, "I should charge you, you little cocksucker!"

## Chapter 3

*Teri kbatar farishte sur pey ilzaam leyenge*  
 [Just for you angels will accept blame]  
*Hussain khi baat chale tou sub tera naam leyenge*  
 [When they speak of beauty, all will speak of you]  
 Mukesh from the film *Phool Bane Angare* (1963).

*"Rollin', rollin', rollin'*  
*Rollin', rollin', rollin'*  
*Rollin', rollin', rollin'*  
*Rawhide!"*

JONES jerked up as the whiplash crack at the end of the lyrics rang out of his cell phone, he fumbled on the bedside cabinet and finally located it, "Who the hell is this?"

"Jonesy, it's me Gracie; you up yet?" said a female voice on the other end.

Jones struggled to recall where he was, it didn't feel like his Fort Worth apartment, the noises outside were all wrong, too many horns and beeps, and the air conditioning seemed too low and the light coming from the window was all wrong and then it struck him; "Sheet, I'm in India" he groaned.

"What's that?"

"Nothin' nothin', when did you get in?" asked Jones.

"Two days ago, been getting used to the local color, setting up the office; what about you," replied Gracie.

"I got in early evening; say what time is it now?"

"Seven."

"I don't know if I want breakfast but I'll come down and share a coffee with you," offered Jones.

A strange laugh came from the other end, "Breakfast? It's seven at night, you've been asleep for twenty four hours; we're all off to dinner, you wanna come?"

"Shit! I've never slept that much and I'm still cracked; whadda ya mean 'we'?" said a bemused Jones.

"Brad and Sam got in yesterday. The Fantastic Four are back together," giggled Gracie.

"Well, this one isn't feeling so fantastic; call me at eight I'm going back to sleep," said Jones and switched the phone off.

Jones slept fitfully after that and was up and wide awake by 3am. He tried to order room service but the night porter struggled with his accent and in the end he gave up and made a cup of tea with the kettle and the sachets in his room. Jones dragged a chair onto the balcony, smoked a Winchester cigarillo, drank his self-made tea and watched the sun rise over the tower blocks; the eerie early golden light diffusing

through the dusty haze, rising from the ground, gave the place a beauty it didn't deserve. The apartment blocks were unimaginative, cookie-cutter designs quickly thrown up to make money for the developers and the offices were no better, odd grandiose designs poorly executed and ill maintained.

The place reminded Jones of Dallas; it was a transient place. In Dallas people were either on the up and trying to get to California or on the way down and scrambling back to New York; only tolerating Dallas as stop on the way to their final destination. Mumbai was like that, nothing was being built with pride or longevity; God only knew where the mango-munchers were heading, what was their California or New York? He knew this town was all about make believe, the Hollywood of India; Bollywood they called it, what a dumbass name that was, like some of that Tinsel town shine would rub off here. Jones knew Hollywood well, having spent years building out there, and they were the biggest phonies he'd ever met. He didn't think it was possible, but Mumbai looked like Hollywood without the class or taste.

Jones showered, threw on one of his clean white cotton shirts, strapped on his old rattlesnake belt with a bemused grin, pulled his jeans over his cowboy boots, brushed down his Stetson and waited patiently for Gracie to arrive. At 8 sharp the desk rang Jones to inform him he had a guest waiting for him in the foyer. Jones grabbed his old well-worn saddle bags and headed down to the foyer.

Gracie, who wore her thirty plus years well, was idling through a Bollywood gossip magazine when she saw the lean figure of Jones striding through the foyer with his saddle bags thrown over his shoulder. "Jonesy!" she screamed, threw the magazine on the table and jumped up to greet him.

"Hey, Gracie how you doin'?" asked Jones as her willowy blonde figure embraced him.

"I'm good and you?" she said releasing him and stepping back to admire him.

"I ain't had a decent cup of coffee for three days and I ain't met a curry-clown I didn't wanna throw under a bus," said Jones with a wink as Gracie laughed out loud.

"Come on, I have a pot at the office," said Gracie as she grabbed her handbag and they started out of the hotel.

"Where's the other two?" asked Jones.

"They're already at the office, settling in," replied Gracie.

"How's your old man?"

"Ben's good, he's on a sabbatical for six months."

"So you dumped the kids on him and lit out, eh?" teased Jones.

"Not dumped, just some real quality time with them," explained Gracie with a chuckle.

"Sez you; come on where's the driver with the car?" asked Jones as they stepped out onto the curb and were greeted by the roar of the early morning traffic.

"*Jaldi Jaldi* [quickly quickly]," shouted Avinash as the black and yellow auto rickshaw twisted and turned to weave its way through the early morning traffic. The young man wiped the sweat from his face with tissue paper and cursed his luck again. First day on a new contract with a giant American company and he was running late. The rickshaw was an old one, an ancient conversion of a two wheel motorcycle into a three-wheel

cheap taxi; it's hard plastic seat made Avinash slide from one side to the other as the oddity whipped through stalled and stuck cars.

Suddenly the rickshaw headed for a gap between two buses just as it began to close. Avinash's gray-flecked brown eyes widened in terror; the rickshaw's two-stroke engine whined in protest as the driver rammed down the accelerator, the gap narrowed but the rickshaw roared on regardless, "Naaaaaaa!" screamed Avinash as they flew past startled passengers and bumped and scraped their way through.

"No problem," said the driver turning back to smile at Avinash.

Avinash grimaced, bit his tongue, gripped his Tiffin box tightly and sat back. 'If we hit something at least he'll die first' he thought and that thought comforted him a little as they continued their mad dash.

Jones and Gracie were driven up Juhu Tara road and then eastwards until they caught the Western Express Highway and headed north towards West Dahisar and the huge plot of land Moti Lal had purchased secretly to build his park. The driver moved smoothly through the traffic and they cut through Goregaon, with the green lush vegetation on their right contrasting sharply with heavily overbuilt apartment and blocks on their left.

"Do you know what *Goregaon* means *saab*?" asked the driver from the front of the car. Neither of his passengers replied. They both knew this was probably a well rehearsed bit of local color to engage them in conversation, and neither was in the mood for tourist trivia.

"It means White Village; you should live here," he said as he laughed at his own witticism.

"*Gore* means white people eh?" said Jones.

"Yes *Saab*, *gore* lots of white people, *gora* one white people," corrected the driver.

"I guess we're going to hear a lot of that," smiled Gracie.

Avinash braced himself, holding tightly onto the back of the driver's seat as the rickshaw hit a pothole and bucked into the air slamming him from side to side and then back hard on the plastic seat. "*Araam se* [carefully]" shouted Avinash but the driver ignored him and carried on driving like the demented idiot he was.

Jones stepped out of the car, strolled across the newly graveled car park and surveyed the expanse of coarse flat plain before him. Streams cut through the terrain, low coarse grasses and reeds dotted the plain. This would be his home for the next six months; his responsibility to transform it into a pristine fully-working Six Flags theme park. The land was a spur running for nearly twelve miles from top to tip and measuring nearly six miles at its widest point. Although the top part was slightly built on, the lower spike was completely free. Jones smiled; the old goat had chosen wisely. The Arabian sea would bring cooling breezes from the west whilst the gentle flowing inlet would cool from the east. He began to see it now in his mind's eye; the towering roller coasters with giant flags at the apex fluttering away merrily, Mississippi paddle-steamers taking families for rides up and down the inlet, rodeo shows in the arena, gun fights in the mock western town, brawls in the saloon, stunt riders on the plains,

cattle stampedes, food stands, drinks stands, gift stands, dining rooms and trains, buses and cars bringing customers from land and boats bring them in from the sea. "What do you think?" asked Gracie over his shoulder.

"Damn, I think it'll work; where's that coffee girl?" asked Jones striding towards the boxy-offices of Six Flags over Mumbai Trading Company, its name proudly proclaimed on a lopsided banner hastily thrown across the front. The offices were designed to be used by the construction team and once the work was completed they would be turned into administration offices to run the park.

The mood of anticipation and hope lasted as long as it took Jones to reach the main reception because just then his path was blocked by a stunning Indian girl wearing jeans and a pale peach blouse, "We have a problem Mr Jones," she announced.

"We do?" said a slightly bemused Jones as he tried to steer past the girl.

"The architect is missing," she replied quickly.

"Give it time, it ain't even nine yet; who are you anyway? Where's my office? Where's that coffee?" fired Jones. It was an old trick of Jones to ask multiple questions and let the others fight to answer him.

"I'm Seema the..." started the Indian girl before Gracie interrupted her, "straight and left" as Jones hurried down the corridor

"Still ain't answered me," he teased Gracie.

"Coffee's in there," snapped back Gracie.

"As I was saying, I'm Seema, Human Resources and we have..." began the girl but Jones halted her with a swift raise of his hand; he had just spotted his office and the sign on the door. He picked it up and read it carefully, "Dullass Jones, Construction Manager", handed it to Seema and added "get rid of this, get me one with 'D Jones, Gaffer', got that?"

"Yes of course, but what's a 'gaffer'?" Seema asked puzzled.

"You'll find out," quipped Jones over his shoulder as he entered his office. Flowers and a large fruit basket decorated the side table along the right wall, and various cakes, Indian sweets and drinks stood awaiting consumers on the table under the glass window. Behind his desk were pictures of Mahatma Gandhi, revered by all as father of the Indian nation, and a smiling Moti Lal, cursed by many as the idiot of the nation.

"Alright, get the tables cleared, get this crap out of here and get rid of the pictures," ordered Jones slapping his saddle bags on the desk.

"But that's Gandhiji," protested Seema.

"What did he ever build?" queried Jones.

"He... he built a nation," said Seema in exasperation.

"Alright he stays, but the rest goes and..." before Jones could finish a large figure blocked his doorway.

"Jones you old coot, you still barking orders at young girls" said the big man in the door way. In all manner of size he was bigger than Jones; a ten-gallon hat, double chins, a fat pot-belly gut threatening to tear his denim shirt, a huge belt buckle of the Texas State flag and long elaborate boots.

"Brad you old fart, I thought you were in prison; sweet bitch of some Mexican gang lord," teased Jones as he crossed the floor to shake hands with the big man.

"No, not me; your Mexican boyfriend is staying loyal to you," laughed Brad.

"What have we got?" asked Jones.

"The usual clusterfuck, with a funny accent," replied Brad.

"Team meeting in 10," said Gracie as she flew past the open door.

Jones turned to the Indian girl and said sharply, "Why didn't you tell me that Seema? That's your job."

She was stunned into a momentary silence; he'd remembered her name and then she burst into life, "That's not my job. I'm not your PA, I'm the Human Resource manager and I've been trying to tell you the architect is missing?"

"Give it time, it's only nine; so where is my PA?" demanded Jones.

"Well," began Seema with a little coquettish smile, "give it time, it's only nine."

Brad started to laugh as Seema turned on her immaculate high heels and marched out of the office.

"Why can't people turn up on time so I can fire them," said Jones as he turned to pour himself a cup of coffee.

"See you at the meeting," said Brad as he left the office.

"Six Flags over Mumbai Trading Company" read aloud Avinash as he gazed up at the skewed banner and a huge grin smeared itself across his face; he was working for a real global company, his time had come. The driver had demanded an extra hundred rupees for driving fast, Avinash had protested strongly, threatening the chap with a traffic citation for reckless rickshaw driving, before they had settled for thirty rupees; a sum that dissatisfied both men.

He would have to curtail his rickshaw rides if the local drivers were so thoughtless in their driving and so hard-nosed in their bargaining. It was just under 3 kilometers from his small room at the Parijat Co-operative Housing Society complex on Eksar Road to the offices here. He could manage that walk in 45 minutes if he walked fast with no distractions. It would be impossible to find accommodation as cheap nearer the office; after all it had taken some diligent nurturing of distant relatives and their wider network of acquaintances to secure the stuffy little room at a tolerable price. Further planning was curtailed as a pair of IT workers barged passed him into the office and he realized he was late, "Shit!" he said running.

He hurried to the reception desk to pick up his identity badge but he had to wait impatiently, behind a visitor who insisted on spelling his name to the surly receptionist, until at last it was his turn.

"Avinash Preet, new starter today," he announced.

The surly receptionist started to flick through the stack of new identity cards, "what was it again? Avinaat Phoot?"

"No, Avinash Preet," he corrected her.

"You're late," said a sharp voice behind him.

Avinash jumped at the sound and turned around to gaze upon the beauty that was Seema; her dark brown hair, with subtle red highlights, curled and flowed around her shoulders framing her moon-shaped face; her gorgeous almond shaped hazelnut eyes blinked, and her luscious engorged lips parted and below her full breasts pressed taut against her peach blouse and lower still, the small belt pinched tight against her

impossibly flat stomach and her long jeans stretched away for miles like a second skin.

"Hey *luluji* [dopey]; wakey, wakey" said Seema snapping her fingers before his face.

"Sorry," apologized Avinash.

"You're late, follow me," she commanded striding away down the corridor.

"But my pass, I..." he began but Seema wasn't listening, she was already near the end of the corridor and about to disappear around the corner.

"*Jaldi karo* [quickly]," he demanded slapping the receptionist's counter but the woman continued to flick through the pile at her own leisure.

Avinash looked up to see his worst nightmare, an empty corridor. She had gone and left him behind; his job had walked away.

An intense growing frustration shook his body and he exploded into action, leaping across the counter, fanning and scattering all the cards until he spotted a familiar face smiling at him. He seized his badge and ran flailing down the corridor after the ghost of Seema. He skidded around the corner to see a shorter corridor which was equally empty. He carried on running past rooms, peering through the glass and rounded another corner to find an even longer corridor; he started to panic, unsure whether to go forward or retrace his steps and try another corridor. He twisted and turned trying desperately to work out where he should go.

The sound of two finger clicks echoed down the corridor and he spun around to see the lovely Seema, standing in the doorway of a room he'd already ran past, beckoning him back with her forefinger.

He ran gasping down the corridor, his satchel flying behind him, and nearly knocked over Seema in his eagerness to get into the room. He stopped short as a dozen important people turned to look at him.

"Your PA," announced Seema and left the room.

Jones approached the sweating, gasping young man, looked him over, smiled and said "You're fired."

