

# ***'THE ANGELS OF VENGEANCE'***



## ***Episode One***

by Kevin Ahearn

# 1.

The blackest night on earth fell on the Sea of Japan off North Korea where foreign ships and planes were forbidden for fifty nautical miles out.

Ruled by an iron-fisted tyrant, the country could barely feed and house its 22 million citizens by conventional farming and industry. To keep his Communist regime afloat, Kim Jong Il and his Party henchmen ran the world's largest criminal empire.

Employing thousands, from lowly farmhands to high-ranking diplomats, "Bureau 39" generated billions through illegal weapons sales, counterfeiting, and smuggling. The biggest moneymakers were homegrown heroin and methamphetamines shipped by the ton to Japan, Russia, Taiwan and South Korea. Backed by a one-million man army and a nuclear arms program, North Korea's '*Commie nostra*' flourished beyond the reach of international law enforcement.

Not so 'The Angels of Vengeance'.

The MH-60G helicopter crossed into North Korean air space barely clearing the waves. Running on full, the long-range fuel tanks had been jettisoned twenty miles back.

Two years before, the Saudis had reported the chopper “severely damaged” in a training exercise, setting up a salvage scam. The damage was far less than officially reported. Money spread around sealed the deal. The advanced avionics were then removed and the “wreckage” turned over to a private contractor in-country for repairs. The plan was to sell it back to the Pentagon, supposedly saving American taxpayers millions, but an anonymous bidder stepped in with \$11 million in cash. Crated up, the MH-60G was shipped to an island in the South Pacific where it was upgraded with components far superior to the original. The creation of a secret air force had begun.

High above the rehabbed helicopter, two fully loaded F-15 fighter-bombers flew escort. Six of the \$50-million aircraft had been purchased off the factory floor. Money and connections got them to that long abandoned island.

The strike team represented no nation or political front or religious organization. Completely independent, they answered to no one. Alone against the most corrupt, most heavily armed dictatorship in the world, the seven grew more confident as they neared the drop zone.

“ETA with Bureau Thirty-Nine in twenty minutes,” said Wong, Chinese in his late twenties. “Weather’s perfect to party with the Party.”

Unlike his teammates, the former Taiwanese Air Force commander had been 'grandfathered in'—since birth, an 'Angel' burned inside him. Until the spirit *blazed* in their blood, the rest were wannabes.

"Five thousand feet to the dance floor," said Darius, his voice flavored with African roots. More than two meters tall and weighing 120 kilos, the continent's first wrestling champ had earned his wings as a flying game warden over Kenya's vast wildlife preserves. "Over, around and through political niceties."

"With bold wings and sharp talons," added Ahmed, because they *had* to have an Arab. All the eldest sons of sheiks had private jets; Ahmed, 'the Hawk Prince,' had an F-15, but it was useless against the suicide bomber who killed his sisters. "Think their lawyers are any better than their security?"

"The '*Commie nostra*' won't know what hit them," said Camilo with a Latin beat. Once a captain in the Columbian Air Force hunting drug kingpins, the cartels had put a price on *El Halcon Negro*.

"And when they find out?" asked the team leader.

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Pacing back and forth on the porch of his modest woodland home in the Tatra Mountains of southern Poland, the eighty-eight year old man didn't look like much in a heavy flannel shirt and blue jeans. And those *sneakers!*

Still straight and spry, he'd aged well despite a history of death-defying derring-do and countless battles against dozens of deadly enemies, but that was a lifetime ago.

"Oh, Bart, will you stop it!" said his wife Zinda, only a couple of years younger. Her once-golden hair turned to silver, in country garb, she appeared so ordinary. "You've turned into a worrywart."

"I was dead set against this mission from the start," said Bart, continuing to pace as if he were waiting to be a father for the first time. "Invading North Korea--they'll be outnumbered a hundred to one on the ground and twenty to one in the air."

The elderly couple never had any children. Almost forty years later they were discovering what parenthood might have been like.

"What's new about that?" said Zinda. "You broke into and out of dozens of impregnable fortresses and inescapable prisons. As if Thomas were going to listen to your learned advice. The team is his, bought and paid for."

"Not about the damn money!"

"They're the best," she said. "You saw to that."

"So did you. Harder on their wives than I ever was on them."

"Then what?" she asked.

"You know...better than any woman in the world, you *know!*"

“Oh, the love and hero of my life,” Zinda spoke the hard truth softly. “It’s not about you any more.”

“But it is!” the old man insisted. “It has to be.”

“Will you stop!” she scolded him. “We’re not who we used to be, who they’re trying to be. And we never had anyone worrying about us.”

“You...you never...?” he asked. “Not even once?”

Zinda came out of nowhere in 1959. Blond and beautiful, flying her own jet and wearing classic blues, she was bent on joining the team. Their initial meeting was a disaster. Eight months later she came back and saved them all.

Those angelic blue eyes, her devilish figure! Bart fell for her at supersonic speed, but they didn’t marry until his career was over. And it didn’t end well.

“Not for a single second!” she said. “You had me and the rest of the world convinced that you and the team were invincible.”

“The Angels of Vengeance! We took on all comers and beat them all...except Father Time.”

“Tell me about it. Now, please. Sit down and relax,” she ordered. “You’ve earned it.”

“Smash and dash,” said Bart, again reaching for his cell phone and wishing it would beep. “The Kid’ll call when he needs me.”

“Don't get your hopes up,” she said. “Thomas is as arrogant and as headstrong as you ever were. He *has* to be!”

“But does he have that ‘Angel’ flying hot in his blood?”

Zinda could have gotten angry, but she understood what her husband was trying to do; he'd tried so hard all his life.

“Let me hear you say it,” she said.

The old man clenched his fist and gave her a playful knuckle under her chin. Then, as if he were pounding on Heaven's Door, pumped his fist high.

“C'mon, Kid,” he commanded. “Show me Blackhawk!”

*Blackhawk?*

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The heavily armored limousine wove its way through the port city of Najin, district headquarters of the Zokwang Trading Company, a Bureau 39 dummy corporation controlling the cultivation, preparation and distribution of North Korea's booming poppy crop.

The arrival was not unlike a third-rate Hollywood premiere. Twin sets of motorcyclists escorted the big car through the front gate adorned with patriotic banners to the main entrance, freshly decorated with a bright red carpet and matching

Communist flags. The two foreign “stars” were greeted by Army officers in full dress uniforms and given stiff salutes as they entered the building and then a secure elevator.

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Not far away and closing...

A crescent moon revealed a once-renowned emblem on the fuselage of the helicopter barely visible in the night sky. All lights were off. By the glimmer of the cockpit instruments...

“Going to altitude. Wind's from the east at two kays,” said Wong from the pilot’s chair. “I've jerked their Russian radar with an ECM 'ping.' Locally it'll look like an echo malfunction for about ten minutes.”

“Home intel is five-by-five,” said Camilo, checking the infrared screen displaying dozens of yellow shapes on a red background. “Fish in a barrel...piranhas!”

“Hover here for those ten minutes, Wong,” ordered the leader, performing a last check on his gear. “Then come down and get us!”

A final radio call. “Jacob, Kin-Yon, six minutes till half-time fireworks!”

Two replies crackled back from higher up and miles away. The first voice was Israeli; the second, full-blood Lakota.

A Jewish grandfather and an indigenous brave—the pair was worlds and generations apart, yet matched perfectly in the air.

Dubbed the 'Hebrew Hawk' by half a dozen Arab air forces, the Israeli ace had ruled the Middle East sky for thirty years. It was his own country who finally shot him down, grounding him due to age.

His wingman had been chosen for the US Air Force *Thunderbirds* flying team; the Pentagon was set to make the young Lakota a god, but *Sapa Ceta* aimed even higher.

"Been through so many dry runs, I may do this with my eyes closed," said Darius, sliding open the helicopter door. For eighteen grueling months, they had trained under the brutal, unforgiving command of a long-forgotten legend. All they had to do now was outdo him.

"If things don't work out, we can always hook up with Zokwang Incorporated," added Ahmed. Once the ruler of his own private kingdom, joining the team had been a step up from his throne. "We know Bureau Thirty-Nine better than the North Koreans do."

"A distinct possibility," said Wong, his inheritance at hand. "I foresee imminent mass vacancies... opening up many employment opportunities."

"Hopefully not in a slave labor camp," said Camilo who'd put dozens of drug dealers away only to see them quickly replaced. Not this time. Not with this team.

Ready to jump...five thousand feet below, the lights of Najin twinkled like tracer bullets.

A moment's pause...the five gave each other that spirited stare that cut to the blood.

The leader pumped his fist and shouted for all the world to hear, "Show me Blackhawk!"

*Who?*

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Established in 1974, Bureau 39's Najin headquarters was a six-story, rectangular concrete building ringed by barbed wire fences and barracks for the 89th Special Battalion, the special troops of the North Korean Army. The penthouse featured a large picture window with a breathtaking view of the harbor.

"The People's Democratic Republic of North Korea welcomes Madam Nakajima, exotic emissary of the honorable yakuza," said Colonel Chul, his custom tailored uniform bedecked with medals, rewards for economic achievements. With this deal struck, a new decoration would have to be minted. "This overdue expansion of our organizations will create a global marketing and distribution enterprise without rival."

"The yakuza is honored by Colonel Chul, always the aggressive entrepreneur," said the stunning Asian woman, the prime overseas contractor for the Japanese underworld. Her beauty masked the beast inside her; addicted only to power, she was strung out for a billion-dollar 'fix.' "We look forward to an even better understanding."

“The honor is mine, madam,” bowed Chul with practiced sincerity. The woman’s place in the yakuza delighted him. With every week’s receipts he could buy a thousand just like her. “Our product is unmatched, our supply inexhaustible.”

Bureau 39 had pumped up North Korean methamphetamine production in the late '90s, partly to make up for a drought-induced slump in the opium crop, but also to satisfy demand from Japan. In the New Millennium, meth street value had hit \$3 billion. In the last decade, Japan had seized almost 1,500 kilos of methamphetamines originating in North Korea, a pittance of the total and a bitter pill to swallow.

“Would you care to celebrate our partnership?” asked Chul, offering Nakajima a sample tablet on a silver platter. “Our quality is superb, our packaging impeccable, the effects sublime.”

Indeed. For nearly twenty years North Korean meth had been the scourge of Asia. Production required ephedrine, a chemical also used in allergy drugs. In 1998, Thai police stopped an Indian shipment of 2.5 tons of ephedrine, suspicious that North Korea would need so much cough medicine. After six months of negotiations peppered with bribes, the shipment was allowed to proceed, alleviating a “hay fever crisis” and assuring meth production for a generation.

Despite repeated busts of diplomatic “mules” and regular seizures of heroin and methamphetamines, the North Korean drug empire had continued to expand. No nation would risk interfering. Unlike the Latin American cartels and the Russian mafia, Bureau 39 was backed with H-bombs.

Nakajima knew that sampling the meth would be folly. To test it chemically would be disrespectful. Yakuza retribution was swift and final for all those who crossed it. If need be, she'd enjoy educating this pompous Korean storekeeper personally.

"Shall we begin with ten thousand hits per week?" suggested Chul. "Delivery is guaranteed. May I suggest that you concentrate on recruiting long-term habitual customers."

"You mean children, don't you?" said Nakajima. "Our reports of your sales' acumen do not do you justice."

"I invest in youth. Hook a pretty girl barely in her teens and her body is ours forever," he said. "I expect payment promptly and in full. Overhead is no problem."

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On the contrary...

Four silhouettes guided their blackened chutes expertly. Each had a pre-designated target. The night was new and all planned on getting older.

"Power diving on the roof," said Darius. "The guards are winging it."

"We've got the luck," replied the leader. "The legend flies with us."

Were 'The Angels of Vengeance' retaking wing or had these impostors run out all their luck just getting this far?

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Less than 500 feet below...

“Your operation is impressive, Colonel Chul,” said Madam Nakajima. “But the yakuza has learned that wealth and power are meaningless without security.

“Saburo is mine.”

“Madam Nakajima humbles me with her trust,” bowed a giant sumo wrestler in a Hong Kong suit. Effortlessly he placed a large attaché case on the table. Two quick snaps opened it.

“Ah!” said Chul, pulling out a stack of hundred dollar bills. Instinctively he held one up to the light. “Benjamin Franklin has a negotiable smile.”

“Unlike your American money,” chided Nakajima. “Ours is genuine.”

Counterfeiting was yet another of Bureau 39's enterprises. Using presses from Eastern Europe, they printed out crisp \$100 bills, then shipped them out through courier or passed them to pay part of their import bills. Like its meth, the quality was excellent.

“Electronic transactions may be more efficient, but nothing beats the real deal,” said Chul with a crafty smile. “North Korea rules the trade. Kim Jong, our esteemed leader, has intimidated all Asia, all the world. For Bureau Thirty-Nine, the sky is no longer the limit!”

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Closing on their prey, the four parachutists made final adjustments

“We go with the blitz,” the leader ordered the others. “You take out the offensive line.”

“*Hermano Halcon*,” said Camilo. “You won't even lose your cap.”

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“I like to think of myself as the president of a public service foundation,” said Colonel Chul, lighting a cigar. “I work so hard to supply what so many desperately crave.”

“The engine of addiction cannot run without your precious fuel,” agreed Nakajima.

“Exactly, Madam!” said Chul. “I am the engineer who turns all the wheels. Do not forget that!”

“The yakuza forgets nothing!” bristled Nakajima. “We are perfectionists with a profound intolerance for disloyalty! We pride ourselves on caution...not to enter a stranger's house blindly, lest the roof fall in.”

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None of the roof guards looked up until it was too late.

Darius, Camilo, and Ahmed struck quickly. Surprise, strength and skill made for swift, silent results.

“Interference down and out, amigo,” reported Camilo, standing over an unconscious North Korean. “All clear for the sack.”

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“Neither of us have anything or anyone to fear, Madam,” said Chul with a subtle smile. “I am a wanted man on four continents, convicted in absentia on two, yet here I am completely safe. No drug enforcement agency can touch me. No law can reach me.”

“How politically convenient,” replied Nakajima. “The laws your country holds in contempt are the very same that protect you.”

“The weakness of a frightened world,” declared Chul. “Not to take full advantage would be...”

**“Hawk-A-A-A!”** yelled the lead parachutist as he crashed through the large window and landed before them.

There was a moment when all that was heard was the crinkling of the window glass bouncing on the floor.

“Who dares...?” said an astounded Chul, drawing a pistol as his uninvited guest released his parachute harness. “No! It cannot be!”

“That uniform, that insignia!” gasped Nakajima. “By the Shinto gods, it's  
BLACKHAWK, ‘The Archangel of Vengeance’!”

“I damn sure hope so,” said...

*Who?*

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