

Jamal was thinking that if time could be reversed now, this would be the time to do it. His right hand was gripped in a vice in his dad's old shed, with a lunatic screaming in his ear. He watched the South African reach for the lump hammer on the shed wall, leaving a white outline showing where it should always belong.

Like a golfer, Van Den Jong, or Jongy to his mates, took couple of dry swings to the tips of Jamal's fingers. On the fourth swing it connected. The middle finger was the first to snap, followed immediately by the ring then the forefinger and finally the little one.

Jongy stood back. "Fuckin' 'ell eh, look at that eh," he said to Errol. "The little bastard pinky finger Errol, only bashed the top of it, eh."

Errol shuffled on his feet. A small Zulu from Bulawayo peered at the hand trapped in the vice. Jamal was hanging from said vice, trying to support his trapped arm. Screaming, the pain searing through the limb like a hot needle. He daren't look at the vice, eyes fixed to the floor, sweat pouring down his face.

Errol reached for a pair of pliers that was marked out next to the lump hammer, felt the weight, like a plier connoisseur.

"What are you doing?" Jongy asked Errol, who looked at

him, showed him the pliers and then motioned to the little finger, still standing proudly next to the other smashed digits.

Jongy looked at Jamal. "Errol just wants to tidy up your hand, your little finger isn't as smashed up as he would like, eh."

Jamal looked up. "Fuck you! I'm connected you know, I know people."

"Oooooo," Jongy taunted, before tapping Errol who laughed as well.

Errol turned and Jamal screamed as the pliers came closer.

"Errol, the boy has been through enough eh, let's see if he cooperates."

Errol nodded and moved out of the way, Jongy crouched. He looked at the hand, which was turning dusky blue around the edges of the vice.

"Tut tut," he said, he grabbed Jamal's hair and pulled his head up with it.

"You only have to agree to our terms and I'll let you go," Jongy said.

He was well dressed, cropped hair, six foot three and made of what Jamal could only assume was human steel. There was a coldness to his attitude that was unnerving. Well turned out, he didn't fit the usual reprobate he dealt with. His South African accent was menacing and threatening. Jamal fought a hard corner. He knew he had a winner, he just needed to hang on a bit longer.

The week previous, Jamal had been hacking American government files and had come across a file marked, 'Gamma top secret.'

The details of the file were titled HYPNOS. After deep searches on the conventional web and the dark web, he finally made it to the locked vaults of the CIA in Langley. Within minutes, he had download the entire HYPNOS file including the software driver, still not knowing fully what he had. Files and software that had this much security often meant secrets that shouldn't be made public, or access to software drivers that could be used to aide further his criminal behavior.

When Jamal opened the file, it seemed unbelievable. A software program that could upload instructions to the receiver and the receiver could be made to do whatever the operator wanted. All the software needed was an app-based game, which used eye movement to control the game and soundtrack. This caused a triad of hypnosis to the user, opening the brain-waves for the software to be uploaded.

“Bollocks,” he said out loud.

He quickly found the game that fitted the parameters of the software on the app store, and invited his friends to play the game. Jamal had already hacked most of his friend’s phones, using their location signals to baffle the police for ongoing jobs he did for the criminal underworld. They agreed to play and when he knew they were playing the game, the software did everything else.

Rufus, Jamal’s longtime friend from school, was playing the game in the local pub. Watching him, he had access to the front camera, he could see the progress that he was making while playing it and uploaded the software. Jamal hacked into the security camera at the back of the bar.

With free text, Jamal typed, ‘Steal some beer from the beer tap, and drink it in front of the landlord.’ The software ran algorithms. A few seconds later, the information was being uploaded to the game.

Not more than five seconds later, Rufus put his phone down and walked off. He came into view of the CCTV camera and stopped. He turned almost robotically to the bar, took a step, picked up a half full pint of beer and tipped it on the floor.

The owner of the pint took a step back, demonstrating his anger at what Rufus had done, being quickly held back by the man’s friend.

Rufus didn’t even skip a beat. Leaned over the bar and pulled on the tap. The beer, clear in the footage, was filling up the glass. The beer drinker now incensed. Jamal stifled a laugh.

When the glass was almost full, Rufus took it and started to drink, leaving the tap on, spilling beer all over the floor. At this point, the landlord came into view and was remonstrating. Rufus stood back and drained the beer while sticking his two fingers up at the bar. It was at this point Rufus was wrestled to the ground and dragged out of the bar by the bouncers.

A more sinister exercise – Jamal’s cousin Salma. She worked in the bank as a cashier. He instructed her to steal one thousand pounds secretly, in a way no one would ever know. Deliver it to one of his dead drops by 9 pm that night. Jamal went to the dead drop, scoped the area, then reached into the bush by the phone box. His fingers found the bundle of notes, his heart quickened as he touched them. Pulling them out, he didn’t need to count it. He knew he was on to a winner.