

BYRON BALES



SEOUL  
ON FIRE

# Seoul on Fire

By Byron Bales

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## Prologue

### Seoul, South Korea

The Englishman didn't have a chance. Not really. He fought like a demon once he realized what was happening. He wasn't just getting rolled. Hell, he had enough sense to give over his wallet to a couple of ugly goons. No, robbery was just a blind for what these guys had in mind. He wasn't sure how he knew this. He just knew. Something had been nagging at him these past few days. The way his friend had been acting.

Friend? Yeah, right!

Rainwater ran down a brick wall from the street above, and freezing wind whistled through the vacant underground shopping arcade as the big thug went through his victim's wallet. The little guy propped the Englishman against the wall, putting in shots to his face and gut for nothing more than fun. Didn't matter; those final whacks with the sap had taken the fight out of him. The Englishman slid down the wall, plopped to the cold, wet pavement like a puppet whose strings had been cut, taking whatever this little slope head dished out.

The giant, the one called Moon, stuffed the passport and wallet into his pocket, didn't even bother counting the money. He rolled the Englishman over on the concrete, tore out the custom-tailored labels from his suit, checked his shirt for initialed cufflinks, and took his monogrammed handkerchief. But the point was really driven home when the giant pulled garden shears and pliers out of a canvas bag. He sat on the Englishman's

back, threw out his arms, grunted for the little guy to begin the manicure—right up to the knuckles.

The last thing the Englishman felt was his third finger being snipped off, and the last thing he saw was the little pug scooping it up, dropping the bloody stub into his pocket. Incongruously, his last thought was one of wonderment: why these guys didn't want his own mother to recognize him. Mercifully, he wouldn't feel his teeth being ripped out of his skull.

With the last of the fingers and teeth in his pocket, the little guy sat back, rubbed his chin in thought, leaving the Englishman's blood streaked across his face. He pulled a tile cutter from his pocket, tapped it in the palm of his hand. Any point in taking out the eyeballs?

They sat on the body, mulling this over with the combined intellect of a ten-year-old, passing a pint of whiskey between them. Moon belched an obnoxious odor of garlic and booze, expelled with a thick plume of his warm breath that permeated the dark passageway like poison gas. To add to this concoction, he farted, shrugged, said why not; the Englishman wouldn't need to see anything where he was going, anyhow.

The squirt guffawed and slapped his knee. Damn, Moon sure was a funny guy!

Their job finished, Squirt started to squeeze through the partition that divided this area from where the construction workers would be in the morning. Moon grabbed him by the collar, spun him around and pushed him over to where water had pooled into an empty wheelbarrow. He made certain that his associate washed the blood off of him before going up to the street. Somebody had to do the thinking in this crew.

Squirt turned in circles for Moon to inspect his clothes, face, and hair. Satisfied, Moon pushed him towards the stairwell and emerging from the concourse, they tracked blood from their shoe soles for two city blocks.