



# *Fools Gold*

a true story written by Darcy Gladwin

*Photographs by the author, showing places  
and people who feature in the story.*

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Ambling down the endless desolate beach under oppressive midday Asian sun I had two things rattling my mind ...

1. The feeling of new horizons and the feeling of freedom
2. Getting laid as quickly as possible

I was on the run from a traumatised girlfriend with violent tendencies – someone who had suffered badly in her childhood at the hands of males. I was that guy who fell in love and got dragged into the backwash, discovering that it turns out the same for men and women who split – it can help immensely to have a good no-strings shag to dust off the feelings of abandonment and love that may never return. Some people say romantic love is delusional.

But at least I was in the tropical seaside paradise of Goa, India where you'll find it very easy to feel blessed – by at the very least the lush environment ... palm trees meets ocean azure – kind of vibe.



So at some point along the drifting beach, immersed in my inner world I was approached by an Indian teenager. Not only did he not seem to have time to try and set up a conversation, he flat out came at me with a very solid intention of cleaning my ears. Dude wanted to clean my ears right here, right now !

With a deft sideways approach he went straight in to my personal space, a steel implement raised and aimed squarely at my ear canal.

“No, no thanks” I barped with enough force for it to be a warning, my hands instinctively raising for cover.

He persisted. I persisted more and reluctantly, he vanished to where he had come from.

I do have to admit to enjoying having my ears cleaned once in a while, but that's by a nurse with warm water, in a Doctor's room. Having my inner head probed on a remote beach in Asia was definitely not going to happen today.

The other ear episode I encountered in India was a month or so later while riding a motorbike through a central-continent sunset. Surely as the light faded it brought gazillions of insects united in a swarm, pelting my helmet visor as I battled the final 30 miles toward a city to find rest.

At some point it occurred to me that there was a regular clicking sound in my ear, much like the sound of a cicada or locust – it was the perfect sound of an insect, trapped in my left ear !

I tried massaging the area and pulling the lobe all ways to try releasing the little beast but it persisted along with my growing anxiety. Arriving at the unknown city I realised that I would need to entrust my ear canal to the first Indian that I saw and luckily a chemist came into view. Traumatized, I raced up to the counter and requested an immediate cavity search. The old man began peering inside with a torch and then took to probing with a cotton bud, producing nothing, the disturbance continuing. Another chap was consulted and some more probing and discussion – once again nothing emerged, they declared it a mystery.

What to do – a bottle of whiskey, and a warm shower. As the whiskey and warm cascade sent my body into relaxation, the disturbance lessened and then ceased, I was cured. 10 out of 10 – whiskey wins again !

The conclusion I came to was that it must have been the way that the air rushed past the helmet and visor and interacted with my ear, causing a weird vibrational reaction coming from somewhere inside the system, who would have thought ...

So I meandered down that Goa beach for hours, dragging with me the sadness of love lost and the excitement of freedom ahead. I knew that it would take all day to get to my destination – a random chosen village of which I knew nothing about – apart from that it was a small local fishing town. I love the smell of fish in the morning! Actually it's not the fish but the saltwater fragrance of which there is no shortage in this wild nature paradise. Money to burn, time to kill, everything was almost perfect ...

Here's a little advice for you : If ever you have a relationship which is destined for the rocks – Goa is THE BEST PLACE to enact the final tragedy, for three reasons...

1. You can just abandon ship – walk off down the beach drinking chai, smoke a reefer and begin strange vowel sounds with other beautiful fellow travellers.
2. Goa Trance is the spiritual mother of the outdoor EDM scene – what better way to get off your face and in harmony with others than on the dancefloor.
3. Your meagre disposable income in the West has catapulted you, brimming with cash into 'nouveau riche' status, which means that you are now rich and you will behave accordingly, that is, differently. Like, not your normal broken-ass self. More like on a once-in-a-year celebration night ... but every night ! Why not celebrate being alive and the opportunity to live like this.

Throw in some spiritual platitudes, a key one being that God is not something ‘out there’ but that YOU are in fact God. Why the fuck on Earth would you stick with a job, or for that matter a femme fatale, in a concrete room – fearing for your safety ?!

One very good reason is called “Stockholm Syndrome” – a condition that causes hostages to develop a psychological alliance with their captors as a survival strategy. So named in 1973 when four hostages were taken during a bank robbery in Stockholm, Sweden – the hostages defended their captors after being released and would not agree to testify in court against them. Despite the fact that many law enforcement officers’ doubt the legitimacy of the condition – I can assure you that it is a very real survival instinct, even if irrational.

So my girlfriend and I loved each other in that tragic way which exploded, but as I realised in time, so fittingly it would happen in India.

Ambulating toward the fishing village of Chapora I chanced to meet some local people who agreed for me to make photographs of them. The photos were taken without any words spoken leaving me with good feelings, not knowing of course that a darker side of India



was beyond, just waiting for this Western innocent. It would happen soon enough but in the meantime I had a mission. Party like it’s 2009, get laid, buy a motorbike and go off to remote regions to shoot wild Elephants. What the ... sorry, shooting wild Elephants ?

The reason I was hunting wild Elephants was to film them for use in a movie that I was making titled “Godplex” – a highly ambitious micro-budget feature film whose prima animale is the Elephant – who I needed to ‘shoot’ to ensure symbolic success. Actually this was the second attempt as the year prior I travelled through Vietnam, Laos and Thailand, failing miserably to find the Pachyderms in the wild... ironically the closest encounter was found in Thailand on Koh Chang Island which literally translates to : ‘Elephant Island’ – I found one, very sad, captured-

and-chained beautiful giant in the near jungle. Reportedly there are Elephants EVERYWHERE in Asia so I came to the conclusion that maybe I was jinxed for real. It was the sixth year of this particular film production and people were asking questions – there were serious doubts about whether the film would be completed at all.

In a quick attempt to bring you into the psyche of a zero-budget filmmaker, firstly I will tell you that it is an obsessional activity, and here's another couple traits that stand out :

1. They are bankrupt.
2. They are frustrated and / or deluded. They live in the knowledge that they may never create the perfect thing that achieves completion in their fantastical minds.

Put another way – they are 'chasing Dragons'.

Just to complicate things, as much as I am a filmmaker, I also function as a musician. I get paid to party – not enough to make a living but the fringe benefits are the typical things you'd expect. Sex, drugs and dancefloor is just a part of the lifestyle, whether I like it or not.

So anyway at dusk, arriving at *Chapora*, the fishing village of my destination – as imagined, the salty sea breeze is delicious. As the sky darkens, a palpable hum of excitement fills the air as people scurry, and motorbikes fly by beating their busy path to somewhere else. I've lost track of the date but I know that the Christian Christmas December 25 is near.

Food is in abundance with seafood, wicked-good omelettes and the massively popular fresh juice bar on the corner where everyone gets hydrated, and gets high. Hippys and travellers gather from around the globe in celebration of, and doing nothing in particular.

To see this 'one-road-town-with-a-fork' in daylight reveals its tiny and insignificant scale but by night it is an absolute mad party town. Indians, Europeans co-mingling – Russians on big motorbikes hellbent on the EDM scene, nouveau-gangster style. Here is a melting pot, getting loose in the many restaurants and shops lining the street. Young party people, old poets, lovers, loners and local fisherpeople all blazing the nights away, compressed with an intensity that can only be described as *joie de vivre* – an exultation of life !

I quickly settle on some cheap accomodation and have an early night – the next day is spent roaming in search of someone who might sell me a motorbike.

I meet a man named Raja who is a native of Rajastan, sophisticated in the ways of modern Western life from experiences in Mumbai. We quickly discover our mutual interests of partying, photography and . . . he is a passionate cook and one night on a shop rooftop he makes a banquet featuring a whole braised fish – a memorable dinner to kick start a long night of revelry.

Most days Raja would party till sunrise and beyond, crash to sleep and rise once the sun was receding, emerge and start again. Quite the man about town, he introduced me to some cheaper and not-quite-as-good accomodation and said he could help me find a motorbike for sale. He also introduced me to a German woman named Emma who is a market stall manager selling a Middle Eastern Artist's line of T-shirts. We hit it off and quickly became lovers, so I got laid and that was numero-uno off my checklist. And as expected I enjoyed it's distancing effect from my now ex-girlfriend.

Emma was a self-sustaining, worldly-wise woman with a motorbike, a house and some friends in the village of Vagator. Our mutual interests soon aligned and most of our time was spent at the beach, restaurants and dance parties.

One afternoon, walking alone atop a hill I discovered a groovy indoor / outdoor bar restaurant called the Monkey Bar, and met the owners. We negotiated and confirmed that I should come and perform a live set of my own music on New Years Eve, 10 days away. Surprised and excited that I would be able to indulge my music passion in this foreign land, I was amped and the date was set.

This is about when the drama started, late one night : Having concluded a dinner date with Emma, I'm walking down a beach and encounter a sophisticated looking Indian chap aged about 35 who is with a beautiful mid-20's European woman who it turns out to be Italian. Some friendly exchange occurs, he asks me what I'm doing in Goa and I reply that my current mission is to buy a motorbike in order to ride South in pursuit of Elephants. Raoul is his name



– his girlfriend, Sophia. He offers to help me find a motorbike so I am most appreciative. He tells me to meet him in a couple days time at a local pizza shop, noon.

Along with Raja, the Monkey Bar crew, and now Raoul, I seem to have unconsciously tapped into a vein of friendly local people because the next day at the beach I am befriended by an early twenties Indian with the name of Amit, who offers to take me for dinner and to visit his house. We never got around to doing either, but did go swimming together – we talked about girls, differences in Western and Indian life and he talked to me about the nature of greed.

At the pizza shop rendezvous, Raoul does not appear as promised, I call him with no response. Several hours later he makes contact, apologises and offers a time the following day at the same place, I agree.

The following morning I meet again my new friend Amit and he takes me to lunch at a place whose name fairly speaks for itself, because it is atop a prime clifftop overlooking the beatific Arabian Sea – the “Sea Paradise Bar”. I order my now favourite combo of Tandoori Chicken and Kingfisher Strong beer, we are joined by a couple of other young guys he knows and so we enjoy a lunch party, cracking on in broken English and slamming the beers in good cheer.

My head is fully in the clouds as I farewell the group to meet Raoul at the Pizza Shop. Again I wait for about 20 minutes with what looks like another no-show. When a motorbike comes rolling right up towards me and cruises to a stop right there, it is not Raoul but ‘Rishi’ – a young, slick-looking guy who offers to take me to meet Raoul. I’m thinking this guy Raoul is surely important to have a personal driver running errands for him. I jump on.

To my surprise, Rishi takes me straight back to the Sea Paradise Bar, where the Amit and his guys are still lounging about, sampling a shisha. Quite a co-incidence which doesn’t click in my mind as suspicious, I’d be more inclined to call it serendipity. I buy the biggest jug of Mojito available and stack it next to the shisha pipe.



And then half an hour later, Raoul finally shows. He greets me and all of the guys assembled and gets straight down to business – he has a proposition. As he begins his introduction, Amit becomes sullen and retreats from the table. Much later after the odyssey had concluded, I learned that Amit’s role in the ‘Con’ is titled the ‘Roper’ His (or her) mission is to attract a ‘mark’, gain their confidence and move them toward the next player who then delivers “the Tale”. Amit had missed his ‘mark’, I never saw him again.

Con-artists are known in India (Hindi) as “Thug” – henceforth I will refer to them as “the Gangsters” ...

First, Raoul ordered a big round of drinks and more food, he enjoys cocktails – very classy. He says that a motorbike is available to me but he has a more exciting idea and begins telling me his Con-artists’ “Tale”. He declares that his line of business is making and dealing high-end Jewellery, his family has a head office and workshops in Mumbai. His proposal is that as a Tourist, I purchase expensive uncut gemstones as *gifts* and take them out of India to Melbourne thus avoiding a prohibitive duty tax placed on local exporters such as himself. My fee for this service would be between five and \$10,000AUD. Of course I wouldn’t need to buy

the gems myself, the purchase would be financed by his Company. The gemstones would go through the mail and I would fly to Melbourne to personally hand them over to a receiving Client. It would take only three days to complete, the airfare would of course be paid for.

I was immediately intrigued and also interested. Not only would I become instantly 'rich' through this process I would be helping them do profitable business with other parties in Australia while concurrently stiffing Customs Department at the same time – definitely in alignment with my free-thinking attitude.

Raoul tells me this method of export is common for him and on my agreement would show photocopies of passports belonging to successful 'couriers'. One obvious thought which flashed through my mind at this time was that this could be a drug smuggling story, and in which case I would be a 'mule' ... but it couldn't be determined at this point, something to think about, if I accepted. Monkeys I can relate to and am happy to be associated with but I am not nor ever going to be, a mule.



In order to construct a feasible tourist export argument, Raoul weighs up appropriate value of the gemstones with ... and therefore asks for my financial position – how much cash I can access immediately. I offer that my net worth and possible cashflow totalled around \$5k AUD via debit card.

“That will be enough”, Raoul tells me, and goes on to explain that it's about fooling the India Customs Department that I was capable of a purchase of this magnitude.

“Totally makes sense.” I agree.

Raoul advises me to sleep on it, think it over and get back to him the next day if I want to proceed.

My mind raced with the possibilities of what I would be doing with the moolah : Firstly, I could complete the film with the Elephants and save my reputation ... back in Australia some

outstanding fines had accumulated into a warrant for my arrest – that could be settled pretty quickly !

I had some questions though ... My trip was only a few weeks into an intended 12 week stay and I had my new friends Emma and Raja, could I come back to India ?

“Yes, you can come back to India as you like”

“We pay your flight out of the country, your fee is paid immediately on arrival. What you do after that point is entirely up to you.” Raoul offered – the consummate professional.

I retreated to the solitude of my accomodation, ruminating on the possible outcomes. Best scenario is that I get to Melbourne quickly, hand over the gemstones and fly back loaded with cash – to reunite with Emma and blow her mind with my music on New Years Eve. Worst case scenario is well, um ... can't think of any !

I search the return airfare from Melbourne to India and although expensive at this high season, it is a do-able proposition and I'm excited. I have to admit that already keen to do the deal, I had lied to Raoul about how much money I could front, the reality being that I only had \$1000. I quickly send an email to my Mum :

EMAIL TO MOTHER :

“Hi Mum you will be very proud of me – I have opportunity to make good investment here in India and need \$4000 NZD ... if this is possible , I pay back within one week ...

Sounds dodgy . > > yes , no it's not ... i won't go into details but i understand if this money is not available ... it is a very good opportunity for me, might have to come back next year to complete the deal ...”

Bless my Mum because she is very good with communicating quickly when needed. And she does have an emergency fund for when the shit hits the fan or business opportunities arise, like this one. You can call me privileged like that.

“I'm in” I txt to Raoul.

In the meantime Raja had found a mechanic, a nice guy named Mohammad who would sort me out with a motorbike, ownership papers and everything legit. I visited him and it was agreed that a good motorbike could be found if we just waited for the right one.

And then I went to meet Raoul and his crew back in the Sea Paradise restaurant, ordered another Tandoori feast with Kingfisher Strong and we started talking turkey.

In order to cement the deal, I should need to be made to look more wealthy so that Customs won't be suspicious ... I would be given a five-star hotel with expense account and a personal chaperone. If Customs have any queries I would be contacted there.

It's nice to be offered the assurance that even though we would be diddling the Law, that they would be in consultation – a feeling that we were one step ahead. That makes even more sense to me, as did a lot of what they said in the days to follow. I never at all mind the idea of a paid-up luxury hotel with an expense account to boot, it had been too long !

“When do you propose to do the business ?” I ask Raoul

“We do it immediately. Tonight we post the gems, you go to hotel. It will take two or three days, we wait for Customs to clear and then you fly.”

I was somewhat taken aback by the urgency of the plan but also excited.

“What about the motorbike? ”

Raoul laughs

“No problem, we will help you when you return”

I tell him of my accommodation, paid up in advance, also my backpack of things.

“We will take you to get your bags but we need to move quickly now.”

“Do you want to do it?”

“Totally makes sense, let’s do it”



We toast in good spirits, the restaurant bill is settled on account.

One of the gang, Manu takes me on his motorbike and I check out of the accommodation.

We follow on from the Sea Paradise Bar to party on at a nearby outdoor circular-arranged nightclub slamming Goa trance in full effect. At some point in the night, Raoul’s girlfriend Sophia appears and we dance ! She brings me near to her and tells me in her cute Italian accent, part whispering in my ear two carefully selected words : ‘be careful’ .

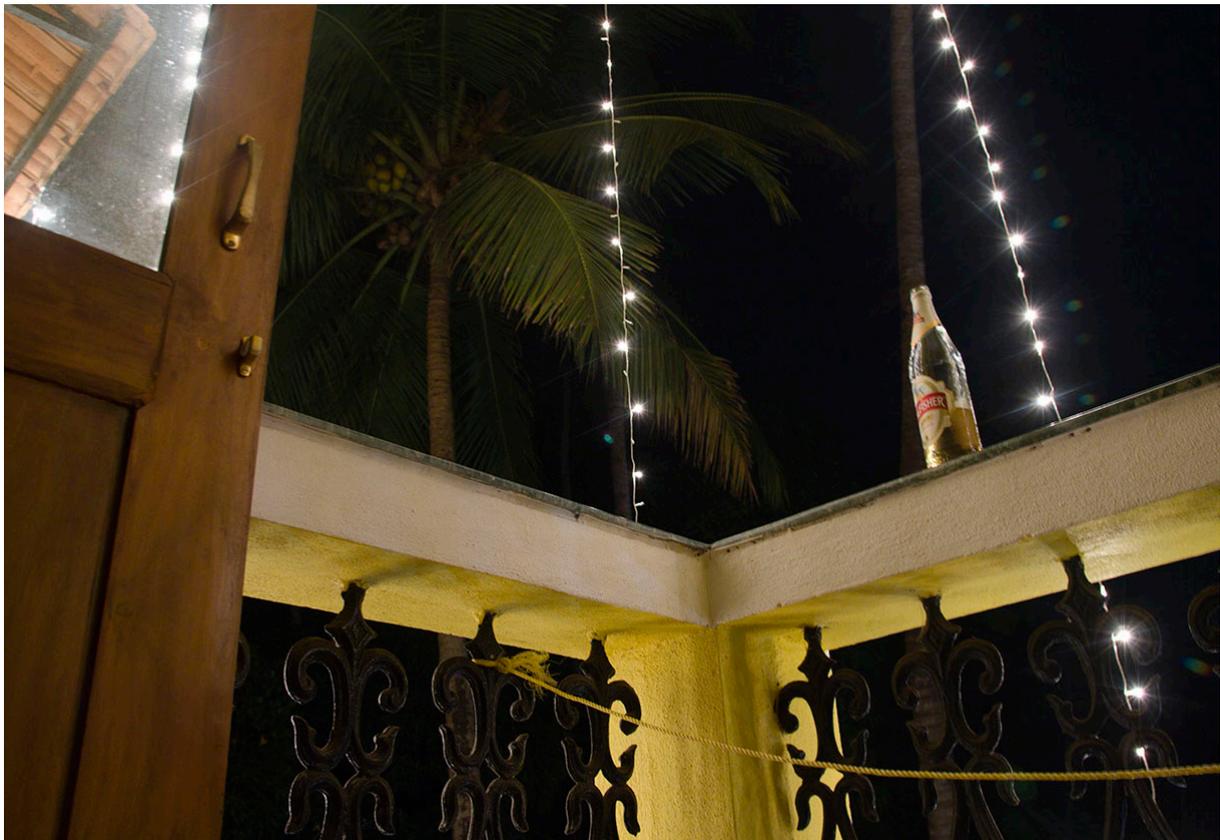
The caution is blown away in the heady haze of the dancefloor.

I txt a farewell to Raja and reluctantly phone Emma, saying that I am doing some urgent business, planning to be back in time for New Years Eve to perform at the Monkey Bar. By then I should be loaded with money, oh what a party it will be !

Safi, one of the youngest gangsters is appointed to be my chaperon, he is the hot-blooded type who likes to ride his motorbike as fast as possible ... an adrenaline euphoria floods my bones as we roar helmet-less through the damp, sweet night. We rip on to Baga Beach area which I've not visited before ... and straight into a modern ground floor apartment where Raoul awaits with a couple other Gangsters who are familiar. As promised, Raoul shows me the copies of passports of others who have done this business and I am foolish not to note and remember the name of at least one of them – for a later date.

On the large low table spread on white paper they show off the gemstones, which I cursorily glance at . . . Rubys, Emeralds, Tanzanite, Sapphire – they certainly look close enough to what I imagine precious gems look like... the way that they glint and shimmer in the chintzy led-strip room light, casting neon-crystal rays into my eyes . . . I think about my ex-girlfriend and at this moment the irony that in the month before coming to India she renamed herself from Gemma to Ruby is not lost on me.

The gems are carefully wrapped and stuffed in an envelope ready to mail then official Customs paperwork is offered, which on glance I can't really comprehend – but dutifully sign off on, and away we go ... this time on Raoul's motorbike, through an unexpected mist of the cool late night ... to a mail-sorting centre, seemingly in the middle of nowhere – an odd experience in these tropical climes. After some dealings inside, Raoul brings out the parcel we prepared, he shows it to me a final time and deposits it into the streetside red mailbox – all feels very professional and legit.



Safi then arrives to take me on his motorbike, we shake hands and Raoul departs.

After 15 minutes screaming along with Safi at the controls, he yells at me.

“The hotel is near !”

Coming around a corner, a glittering, pulsating vision appears ahead and on approaching is revealed to be a free-standing building about five stories high, decadently draped in fairy lights. We come nearer and I can't quite believe . . . that this five+ star hotel might be our destination – we pull up. Signing in at reception, Safi casually makes a phonecall while I am treated like royalty by the receptionist. In our room we make like children, checking out the facilities, playing with the electronics, downing some mini-spirit bottles. We order a lavish meal of crayfish and a whole crate of beer, eating and drinking, content until sleep.

In the morning, Safi is awake talking on the phone to Raoul – he finishes and passes on instructions : I should now prove that I have the means to make the expensive gemstones transaction ... I should extract all the money in my possession, from the cash machine ... we should go immediately, Raoul will meet us there...

And this is the point where I guess that I might well get robbed in broad daylight by Raoul, Safi, Manu, Rishi and a bigger guy who I assume is the muscle in the situation. I'm not a fighter but I'm not a coward so if this is the way that it ends, I would let them have the money – small change in reality ... on the other hand, it could get dangerous ... we meet Raoul at the ATM, and it looks like I'm being hustled right there.

“Max it out, get what ever you can” he commands. The limit of 50,000 rupees is spat out in a roll of 1000's . . . We roll on to another ATM, another 10k, and another, my account is rinsed and I'm stuffing the bills into my bag like some Roulette spinner who's just made black 23.

And this is the obvious time when they could just grab the money out of my hands and run like common thieves ... it's also this moment where i could get stabbed in the ribs and left to bleed, game over ...

But they don't ... stab me, or take my money. Raoul and Manu split and Safi takes me out to lunch, he's paying.

Just as I thought, this is pro-level business. My gut instinct has proved correct, I pat myself on the back for staying level under pressure and my trust grows for them – very civilised gangsters these guys !

In my desire to help these people scam the Customs Department and collect my fee, the delusion was so strong and profound – I would do anything to make it happen, to cement the deal. But had they known just how far down my own rabbit hole I would unwittingly take them then Raoul would have done best to take all the money I had at that moment and declare a miserable Mark for experience.

The next morning Safi relays a message from Raoul – his instructions are for us to simply do as we please for the day. So over breakfast Safi offers to take us sightseeing or go to the beach, anything I like.

I feel the need to get to the internet and so we ride around for a while and eventually find one tucked away in the town centre. My Mum has emailed back to me expressing concern, also with a link :

Hi Darcy

I am really suspicious about the integrity of the scheme that you are involved in.

I would like to make enquiries regarding your bank card. Would you please give me the details..... I saw a doco on TV with the same scenario. It all got really scary with huge pressure being brought to bear regarding the luxury accommodation etc.

[www.indiamike.com/india/scams-and-annoyances-in-india-f8/they-are-still-at-it-another-jewellery-scam-t35506/](http://www.indiamike.com/india/scams-and-annoyances-in-india-f8/they-are-still-at-it-another-jewellery-scam-t35506/)

And I guess that it's at this moment that you could say that the 'rupee has dropped' ... I read the link, and note the similarities to my current situation, registering in the back of my deluded mind that I might well be in the middle of a capital 'S' Scam.

But this is 2010 ! – maybe my Mum isn't on Facebook yet but all of my friends are. I'm thinking that if this is a proper bigtime Scam there'd be warnings all over the internet, surely ! That would totally make sense. The stories I find are burrowed away on travellers blogs, obviously penned by paranoid people with no sense of trust or good business sense !



Rightfully, I have a thousand questions : Why are they letting me use the internet? How would they get the money from me ? If I am being conned and am basically now in a hostage situation, how can I get away ? ... I have photographs of the Gangsters, probably video as well...

Safi takes me sightseeing – to an old Portuguese fort up on a hill where he bribes the guard-man with an unknown amount of rupees and we are allowed entrance to a forbidden area : Nothing special to write about but good to note that people can be bribed – Just in case.

We go back to the hotel, I still can't believe my eyes at the paradisaical world that I've stepped into. Feasting on the best of Indian and also top-shelf European dishes, the nights and days blur as Safi and I shoot stories and our friendship expands. Safi's tells me it dream is to go to New York. He dials in some hashish, offers cocaine, get a working girl in for the night?

“No Safi, don’t pay for sex, it’s too easy” I offer him my advice, followed by “You can get women to pay *you* for sex when you get to New York”

Slurring back to consciousness in the morning light, Safi appears and tells me that India Customs Department are on the line, my attention at reception is required immediately. Not great timing, but hey when is it ever a good time to deal with a Customs Department? I recollect from my furry mind that this is the call that could mean problems, I prepare for an inquiry.

At reception I am given the phone handset. The voice I hear is what I’d say is a middle-aged Indian woman who introduces herself from India Customs and asks for a Mr Thomas Mckenzie; Well, I think we might have a problem here – I ask her to hold the line and tell Safi that the woman is asking for a Thomas Mckenzie – what to do ? ... Safi instinctively quick-dial’s Raoul who responds with urgency to hang up the call. Safi repeats the order : hang up immediately ... I ring off and hand the receiver back to the Receptionist, perplexed ... as am I, – I’m not sure that Raoul was expecting this response ... if I am neck deep in a scam, this might be a little chink in the program, maybe this will throw it wide open. I shrug it off, say nothing and we continue like nothing actually happened.

And still I can’t work it out ... Who’s playing who ? I’m relatively free to use the internet, free to use my phone, I could phone my Lawyer, or the Police ... but I see no pressing evidence of a scam. Apart from the nagging feeling that I just can’t simply walk out and leave ... Ok, I’m delusional ... if the call from Customs asked for someone else, was I under inquiry or not? How many stories have you heard of victims calling the Police and getting no help ? In a foreign country? ... I could run for a copper in the street but I’m hip to the fact that Indian Police are as corrupt as they come ...

Everything is better in hindsight and when you’ve read enough victim accounts of this particular Con story, you realise how it all works and then you discover that it’s one of the oldest in the book. But we’re not there just yet ...

Raoul appears at the Hotel and explains to me that Customs have become suspicious. We need to make a transaction with my credit card to the tune of \$4000 immediately, which is the value of the Gems being exported. He says not to worry, he will refund the money, it’s just that it needs to appear on the ledger so Customs can be appeased – god damn bureaucrats !

“yeah I guess so” I concur.

“So who is this Thomas Mckenzie?”

“Not sure” says Raoul, “you can forget about that”

I’m not fully convinced by this response but not going to kick up a fuss, just yet ...

In order to get this large sum of money, we head for Baga bank, the biggest one we can find. Standing anxiously waiting, the teller punches her computer attempting the withdrawal. She disappears to consult a supervisor and returns to inform that the money is not available – something to do with my bank, the HSBC registered in Australia. I am annoyed and Raoul is disheartened but keeps his cool. I apologise as we leave the bank empty handed but then in a jump to action, I propose to call the HSBC immediately to sort it out. How dare they refuse my money!

I make the call and in Australia they are closed, out-of-hours, we will have to wait ... Raoul

vanishes to think about his next move.

When we're hanging out in our hotel suite, Safi spends most of his time on his semi-smart-phone surfing a new wave of connectivity and entertainment. Looking at him, I see that he's just a kid ... who feels just a little bit important escorting this wealthy businessman from the West as we jack around to flirt with girls at various restaurants and clubs, sunset down at the beach. I wonder just how much he knows ?

Or for that matter any of the other guys involved ... Rishi, Manu, Amit. In the following week of the ongoing saga, whenever one of them would turn up to attempt a transaction, I'm pretty sure that not one of them knew the full picture. Maybe only Raoul knew the whole truth. I may be a deadbeat film director but I am still a film director – I know a good actor when I see one ... these guys were so genuine in their friendliness and generosity they'd have to be A-class Method Actors to the core without fault ... I'm not sure they were acting. This shit was real.



The call to the HSBC is fucked-up frustrated. Apparently I cannot withdraw the cash, but can make a purchase. Phoning Raoul with the information, and a couple hours later he comes back with his next idea : “We take you to Panjim and you buy \$5000 of gold.”

And then right there I wasn't sure this wasn't professional theatre, stranger things *have* happened !

Our first visit to Panjim was exciting – a 25km motorbike ride feels more like 50 as it takes one full hour on disrepaired roads with excessive speed humps frustrating drivers as they brake, bump-on then accelerate toward the next. Like stampeding Rhino on the campaign trail, a goldrush with no beginning, no end – a dustball applause for the men in their toxic machines.

But now with a proper gem at the finish line – known properly as Paniji and also Nova Goa, Panjim sits like a jewel at the nexus of two famous rivers the Zuari and Mandovi as they break

for the Arabian Sea. Crossing the lush Mandovi River reveals flamboyant boats anchored below with names such as you might imagine : “Deltin Royale Casino”, “Casino Pride”. Available and ready to be in international waters at a moments notice.

We stream into town Raoul leading on his moto with Rishi and I following in tight pursuit. Our own mini-moto-cade, man yes, this is it !

We come to a stop just off the main street and Raoul presents his solution – which is to purchase refined gold – which of course I wouldn’t actually hold – but would receive a certificate of ownership. As a life experience, holding a bar of gold in my hand would be a good one considering that some of it might rub off onto my hand ... but I understood that a certificate was the logical outcome. Once again, I couldn’t fathom how they would steal from me.

The three of us enter a completely normal-looking city jewellery shop filled with extravagant and expensive work. Down into the basement to another level of even more excessive jewellery, we approach a man behind the counter to do business with. Raoul speaks with the man extensively as Safi stealthily makes selfies with the surrounding riches.

I offer my card, the machine blips, stalls, thinks for a seeming eternity . . . of 15 seconds . . . A receipt gurgles up out of the machine. DECLINED, the purchase is rejected.

Raoul is unsettled but remains calm. He enquires about what is happening but the man can’t offer much. We try again, and . . . DECLINED again.

I get the bank on speed-dial but once again it’s after hours in Sydney. Dismayed and confused, we leave the jewellery shop empty handed – we roll back over the bridge and back to the hotel.

Getting the HSBC bank on the line, the information is corresponded that the transaction should be accepted if passed through as credit card, I should try again.

“why can’t I just withdraw funds as usual ? indignance at bureaucracy spurts forth ...

The response is that I could not withdraw cash without the new pin number, which has been sent to my home address in Melbourne.

“You are f\*\*king joking !” I challenge, “I’m in f\*\*king India, I am not in Melbourne and I need the money NOW !”

“Sorry sir,, it is not possible.”

This is the 21st century, you mean to tell me that I need to be physically somewhere on this planet in order to access my moolah from this moolah Bank ? Wht f\*\*k ?! ”

I’ll tell you now that my home address in Melbourne is not your normal residence. It’s an industrial warehouse transformed into bohemian paradise – notorious for illegal living, huge dance parties and everything which you’d imagine comes with that. The resident crew are definitely not inclined to be checking mail which usually means undesired bills, like most people ...

So I would call my main man on the ground there and ask him to get the PIN number from the mail. A long-shot because problem being is that my guy is a notorious drug experimenter who’s baseline existence is 24/7 bong hits of the strongest variety and more. That and being

an incredible fine arts painter, I cast him in the second lead role of my film with the Elephants. He was my best hope.

And so I presented these two options to Raoul,

“What do you think?”

“Yes OK we must do whatever we can.” he replies gravely.

I access the internet cafe and make a renewed email to my Mum, divulging all :

“Yeah so i’m importing some precious gems into Australia as gifts ..  
this is to avoid the horrendous export taxes . . .  
for this service i make small fortune  
you can believe this or not but it is legitimate and legal way to import jewels of high  
value ..



anyway, the customs people are naturally suspicious. The company here puts me up in five star accom. to make look like i have money . . . to my name I have \$5000 credit, incl. \$3000 credit card...

to pacify the customs people i need to purchase a significant amount of gold to make it look like i am taking the gold back in order to fashion into custom jewellery . .

now i try to buy with credit card on the 28th, \$3000 AUD of gold ..

Unfortunately my card went into overdrive when we tried to make transaction and has frozen everything for one week ,, which is not acceptable for the deal .. !

Somehow the funds have become suspended in a holding account, the transaction is

declined. – the money is not available to me !

I do not have my pin no. which would have made it much easier in first place. Pin no. is now enroute Melbourne home address in mail ! i am calling them every day to get it.

Anyway, on request of my bank today I phone jeweller and ask them to fax letter on letterhead saying to cancel immediately.

They are certain that the gold purchase will appease the customs officials.

I said we can finish the transaction thurs or fri at latest and bang i will be flown to Melbourne to connect with the jewels which are already waiting for me at Melb. P.O.

So, i am totally in doubt whether my money comes back to me in time !

What i need is a WESTERN UNION money transfer to me ..

apparently you get a 10digit number, email to me and i go pick up the cash . .

i need \$3000 AUD

These people here are legit and professional with large offices and factory in Mumbai.

If you can help in this way it is of great value, as you know i am always short on money.

I shorten my India trip but is too bad i come back another time ..

now i am exquisite jewells dealer, you can call me this !

with love and abundance xx

I make the call to my man on the ground in Melbourne, his cellphone doesn't answer and that's no surprise because for whatever reason, he has about three numbers at any one time and is not likely to answer any of them. The warehouse phone is one of those leftover bits of technology from the days when your internet was bundled with the landline – it almost never rings and so when it does, the residents can appreciate the analogue annoyance as something of a novelty. Which should work in my favour, hopefully ... so I go for the landline and after a protracted wait, the call is picked up, ..

“Hello ?”

“Yo, Marko”

“Darcy, how are ya !, where are u ?”

“I'm in India, yeah good man, I might be coming back early”

“Oh right, what's going on ?”

The sound of bong getting ripped.

“Man, I need you to check the mail. It's really important.”

“Aha?”

“Listen : There's a letter coming from the HSBC, it should be there now. I need you to

open that letter and read me the code it says inside.”

“Mail, what are you fucking talking about !? ahah I don’t do mail man.”

“Ok bro yeah i get it ... just ... ”

“Man, get serious, you’re tripping !”

“Bro ! , , ,” ~hands in the air~



Safi and I are hanging out in a park, I reluctantly call Raoul – option number two is blown so we’re back with option numero uno with the bank – we had to try again in Panjim.

Then my cellphone rings and it’s a private, undisclosed number, I take the call.

“Hello Darcy speaking.”

“Hi Darcy ? It’s Simon Stewart here from the Indian Embassy, in Delhi.

Your mum has been in touch, she’s worried about you.”

“Oh hi, I’m ok, yeah I’m fine.”

“I’ve only been in this role about a month here so I’m just getting used to it but, you could be in danger, quite serious.” he intones

“Oh ok, well I didn’t really think about it like that.”

“You have to get out of there as quickly as you can ...”

“Yea, OK sure yep I think we’ll be done quite soon.”

“You don’t understand, this is India Darcy, they kill people in the streets over dead chickens !”

I look over at Safi, who's thumb-texting with one hand and picking his nose with the other.

“Oh that's a bit harsh. Well thanks for the call. Yes, yes. Thanks Simon.”

I never heard from that man again, nor any other type of legal service which might have been of help.

This time Raoul turns up in a hired taxicab, and we rollick out back to Panjim. I sit in the back with the cool air blowing my hair like a dog on holiday watching the meter click into three digits ... back across the beautiful river and park up nearby the jewellery store.

I'm not sure exactly why, but Raoul takes us to lunch at a very expensive restaurant, including the taxicab chauffeur. An upstairs, upmarket affair where we get a seat right near the window overlooking an intersection and on the far side, the jewellery store. It's like we're in a stake-out in an action movie, I'm expecting to see like a shootout at any time. The Crab entrée arrives to my delight, wine is abundant contemporary modern with generous flavour.

Something that perplexed me was why or what reason the Chauffeur was invited to lunch ... I guess could be familial goodwill ... also so on completion of business he can take us back to Baga or more hopefully to whisk me quickly to the airport Melbourne bound – which Raoul had promised all along.

The lunch was very nice...

We go down into the basement of the jewellery store once again, make out the order for \$4k of gold transfer and hold our breath as the EFT machine gurgles its international currency language in a desperate attempt to make the purchase. DECLINED.

I had to laugh in despair, Raoul started pacing.

Was the bank cosmically stepping in as my spiritual saviour right then, or was it just plain bad luck for Raoul and the Gangsters ? He looked tired.

On the way back I tell Raoul of the last ditch-stand and that is my Mum may be sending money soon. He tells me that my accomodation booking is running out and I need to be shifted elsewhere – problem being that it's now two days until New Years Eve and Goa is packing with hordes of holidaying Indians celebrating in style – hotel rates, anything with a roof, skyrocketing ! Not only was Raoul losing money fast, I felt that I might not make it to Melbourne in time to get back for my gig. I couldn't bear to call Emma that it was all a mess and there was no clear path of re-uniting. The Elephants were a fast-receding apparition into my idling mind.

Back at the hotel, Safi was hi\*, and pleased to see me. He didn't seem too put out by all of this, we gave it away to bad luck. It's funny being held hostage by people that you like. I didn't feel entirely restricted or captive but had an instinct that said I hadn't fulfilled my side of the bargain. If I attempted escape and became a fugitive on the run – from Gangsters on their turf – What if I failed? Things could very likely go for the worse . . .

It didn't matter that the gemstones that I 'bought' would never reach the destination written on the envelope and mailed as I witnessed – I owed these guys. And this was the trust thing in effect once again, these guys weren't exactly security minded ... for example if Safi wasn't trained in martial arts – and I suspected he wasn't – then I could no-doubt knock him out if

not with my hand then with a bottle of beer or a door to his head.

As a self-confessed freedom explorer, the thought of trying to escape and failing would be totally horrible. But Safi was definitely my best option if it was to go that way, hell I could just whack him while he was sleeping and walk out the door.

But paranoid thinking of this nature was not what I was interested in ...

Safi kept the high grade marijuana rolling in – Indian television while stonehigh on ganja is quite something I'll tell you.



More anxious now on the phone, Raoul barter with many Hotels, feeling desperation. Finally a dismal one-and-a-half star accommodation is secured which surprisingly sits on prime real estate near the mouth of the Baga River. The room itself was a shithole in comparison, and still cost a fortune, I would relocate there the following day. If there was ever a best time to escape then during this transit would be it ...

But instead I'm holding on to Safi for dear life as we speed toward the Last Resort, swerving hordes, revellers taken streets ... Goa the party meccessionism.

Quickly we set up in the new digs, I pass out and awake with a tremendous fever of the shaking, foetal position kind ... crazy sweat, vomiting, diarrhoea, the entire Vindaloo ... on into the next day ... midnight on New Years Eve when I should be fucking in Heaven with Fatboyslim on the dancefloor at my own gig, I struggle up some escaping energy, flop out the door ... on to the grass and manage to film skyrockets rocking the Baga sky.

Recovery begins after another full day of fever and when I emerge at 5am on the 2nd January, the only thought on my mind was escape, I was done with it.

I got up out of bed and simply walked quietly out the door leaving Safi sleeping peacefully.

I grab the most important bag (with the money, camera and computer) and swam across the river to freedom.

And what a freedom, Baga beach ! An incredibly beautiful, slowly-curved paradise of a beach, like you see on the internet. Imprinting one footprint after another up the virginal morning sand, my jewellery exporting career was submerging in the haze behind me.

I thought about how I may have been a fool. And that I wasn't in the clear just yet ... yes, it is possible that I may end up yet as a dead chicken on the street ! I rationalised that the trip to Melbourne wasn't going to happen, neither the 10k fee as promised ... All was lost.

Then again I hadn't actually lost anything – And still I couldn't work out how they would have taken the gold ownership off of me had the purchase gone through.

I secretly blessed my bank for their rigorous bureaucracy.

As I wandered my way to freedom, something told me that the story was not yet over. And there, looming on the horizon, just past low-water mark emerged a hulking blot ... slowly de-fringing, defining itself as I neared – a gigantic shipwreck of a tanker, a gargantuan symbol of my failure, stood stuck there just below low tide. I passed it in slow motion – a thought came to my mind: what would Safi do without me ?

After a moment of pause for decision ... I turned back.

Photographing the sea-wreck I about-face and walk back down the now populating beach, the empty footprints made enroute ahead, to mock the defeated dash for freedom. Stockholm Syndrome had taken hold, I must return and accept the fate.

Reaching the river, I swam back across and find Safi waking, stretching. He smiles and asks casually “where have you been?”



“Oh, for a walk” I say.

We had breakfast and passed the day. Raoul was MIA.

Magically the next day, just as Baga filled with the thronging masses, it emptied. The Indians had come to party, spent their money and split for somewhere else. Safi took a call from Raoul and the beleaguered Gangsters – we were to move again...

and so the final move was made, and I was quite comforted to realise that the new accommodation was near to where this story began, very nearby the Sea Paradise Restaurant – our final residence was a palatial five-star hotel with swimming pool, called the “Fernando Brothers Guest House”.

“Yes, this makes a lot of sense,” I opined, Safi agreed. Draping myself into a deck lounge with a cocktail and a splif by the pool.

Safi and I splash about all day in hedonistic glee and late in the afternoon a pleasantly unexpected call comes through – It’s Mohammad, the motorbike mechanic – apparently a good motorbike is there for me, I could come at any time.



A bluer than blue sky, the sun met the ocean and stars came out at night.

And in the morning, foof ! Safi had gone, vanished !

For breakfast I ordered ‘Perfect Blue Cheese Quiche With Whole Grain Crust’, had a swim, and waited. It seemed that Safi was good and proper gone without so much as a goodbye ? What did it mean ? Was I free to go ? Who was going to pay the,,, who was going to pay the f\*\*king bill ?

Better get another beer, think it through properly ...

On some oblique questioning it appeared that Hotel management didn’t know a lot and I decided not to say too much either – better to keep them happy and act ‘normal’ – it was lunch time already so I ordered lunch.

By sunset it truly seemed that the coast was clear, but when I looked out at the horizon I realised that I was still a captive ... but the only possible thing holding me back seemed to be

my own laggard mind. I could not possibly leave in such a fragile state, I'd wait it out. Time to kill ... oh wait ! I pick up the phone and dial out for the first time in 10 days...

“You won't believe this ... a five star hotel by the beach with a pool, get over here !”

And so my Emma came over, suitably very impressed – we ordered an extravagant meal and made sweet love all night while the expense account just kept climbing to the moon. Ha ha, life is sweet sometimes.

In the morning after croissants we packed our things and just walked away out of the compound, without questioning, without looking back.

Very soon I visited Mohammad and bought off him a very nice motorbike at a good price. He supplied complete with ownership papers and instructions on what to do when I encountered police and border controls on travels.

“Now I am going on another journey,” I explained to Emma. “This is the part where I need to go and chase Elephants in the wild. I will be back in a month,” I promised. She understood, and gave bestowed me the nickname of *Pink Panther*. Good song that I'd say.



The final memory I have of the Gangsters is as I'm riding the new motorbike heading out of Goa, the phone rings and it's Raoul – pulling over, I take the call.

“Where's the money?” Raoul demands.

“Dude, there never was any money !”

I hung that sucker up, revved up the bike and thought nothing more, speeding away as fast as possible, toward the mountains, the Goa haze receding as a memory.

Now that the story has concluded, here I provide for you the nine stages of the ‘big con’ as compiled and described by [Amy Reading](#), author of “The Mark Inside”. Not all of the stages are present, as the ‘con’ changes over time as do the best of stories. I’m sure that you’ll find that the format neatly encapsulates my experience, so simple !

### *1. Putting the mark up*

He (and it was always a he) would have to be an out-of-towner so that he wouldn’t be able to turn to his banker for advice during the swindle, or encounter the con men after his money vanished. He would be traveling alone for business or pleasure. He would be a prosperous, substantial citizen in his community. He would be a self-made man, accustomed to hard work and seizing the main chance. He would be able to raise as much as \$50,000 in a day or two, but he must not be so wealthy that he would refer a deal to his bankers or accountants. He wouldn’t be overly familiar with the financial industry. And he would be smart, so that he could instantly grasp the deal laid out before him.

### *2. Playing the con for him*

The steerer or roper who first approached the mark wouldn’t immediately proposition him with the scheme at the heart of the con. Instead, he would befriend him and gain his trust by a careful mix of business and pleasure. The roper would offer to take him around town and show him the sights, and he might also strike up a small business deal, which might then lead to another. These nested deals would never be consummated, but would serve to reframe the mark’s stay in the city, to carry him away from the ordinary world.

### *3. Roping the mark*

When the roper ascertained that the mark was ready, he contrived to steer him toward the insideman, who would take over control of the script. Sometimes this introduction would appear serendipitous, as with the wallet drop, also called the poke or ‘finding the leather’. The mark would discover a wallet filled with documents testifying to the owner’s success at gambling or stock-market investments, and the mark would be induced to return the wallet and make the owner’s acquaintance. Just as often, the roper would claim to know the insideman by reputation and would tell the mark fabulous tales of his money-making abilities, and then would be stunned when the very man happened to walk past them.

### *4. Telling him the tale*

After initially rebuffing the roper’s and the mark’s overtures of friendship, the insideman would eventually let the mark into his inner circle, and would reveal the secrets of his seemingly-magical success. Accounts differ on how overtly the swindler would reference the dishonesty at the heart of the scheme. Sometimes the conversation would proceed with a wink and a nod; other times, the con man would stop and ask the mark if he were willing to engage in underhanded activity. It is a truism of the swindling fraternity that no mark ever said no at this stage.

### *5. Giving him the convincer*

Before asking anything from the mark, the insideman man would provide tangible proof that his secret worked. He would make a small amount of money for the mark, usually without requiring the mark to risk his own money, and he would offer to let the mark keep the profits. Presumably, the mark could walk away at this moment having actually made money from a swindler. But of course none did. In the very next breath, the insideman would offer to rein-

vest the profit in the scheme, drawing the mark deep inside.

#### *6. Giving him the breakdown*

The moment in which the mark put in his own money typically came very late in the script, and it would be preceded by a conversation in which the con men discreetly probed his financial resources and ascertained exactly how much they could take him for. The ropers and steerers would often volunteer some of their own money as a way to push the mark toward the amount they had in mind for his contribution.

#### *7. Putting him on the send*

He would have to procure the cash without arousing the suspicions of his wife or banker. A small percentage of marks never returned to the scheme after this juncture. A larger percentage of marks returned even though their loved ones tried to talk them out of it.

#### *8. Taking off the touch*

This act is the heart of the con itself, the moment when the con men played the mark against the big store, prompting him to put his money into the scheme, with giant profits just on the horizon. Quite often the script called for the mark to succeed in the deal and to actually hold in his arms a big stack of cash—or a big stack of newspaper sandwiched between a few bills.

#### *9. Blowing him off*

The final act, also called cooling out the mark, is the endgame, designed so that the mark willingly returns to his regular life without complaint. It is a way for him to save face, to accept the ending and exit the frame of the con. The act might be violent, as when the swindlers fake a bloody shoot-out and convince the mark to flee before the police arrive. More commonly, though, this stage is peaceful, bureaucratic, and frustratingly elongated so that the mark never quite knows when the con has ended. Sometimes the mark is so thoroughly cooled out that he never realizes that he has been conned; he thinks he has simply been unlucky, and returns to put up more money. Swindlers call these men addicts.



*the Author, washed up in London*



