

# Escape from Clown World



A short story by MekongMonkey

The two boys walked down the dusty road. It was a hot and cloudless day. The sun burned in the sky while they moved slowly through a flat landscape of dry rice paddies and occasional coconut trees.

“Let’s rest,” John, the youngest, suggested.

“No, we can’t,” answered George. “It’s too dangerous. We have to keep going. We want to avoid ending up like our parents.”

John looked like he was ready to cry. With his hand, George shaded his eyes from the sun and looked at the horizon.

“Look, we’re getting closer to the mountains. The river can’t be that far anymore.”

Just six months ago, John and George Woodstock were two regular London boys. Ten and eleven years old. Their father, William Woodstock, was a history professor. Their mother, Linda, took care of the household. Everything would have been alright (sort of, anyway) if William Woodstock knew how to stay silent. But the maddening evil incompetence of the world government (WG) was often too much for professor Woodstock, so he spoke his mind. And his circle of friends grew smaller and smaller. At the same time, the WG became more and more annoyed with the professor’s behavior.

One day, a manila envelope was left at the front door of the Woodstock family home. A shaky, handwritten label read “For professor Woodstock,” nothing else. The professor found it when leaving home for work, told his wife to put it in his office, and forgot about it until he came home in the evening. That night, after he read a bedtime story to his boys, the professor finally had time to open the envelope. He turned on the reading light on the desk and lit his pipe. He puffed a few times, leisurely blowing thick, white smoke in the direction of the reading light. Then he reached inside the envelope, retrieving a small bundle of ancient documents. The first page was titled: “Bitcoin: a peer-to-peer electronic cash system by Satoshi Nakamoto.” Professor Woodstock began to read.

The following day Linda came looking for him. The professor barely noticed her. He was vaguely aware of his sons saying goodbye before going to school. The professor didn’t go to work that day or the next. There were only nine pages of text, but he found the content astonishing. This knowledge could change the world. He took detailed notes while he admired the simple clarity of proof-of-work and the beauty of the difficulty adjustment. There was a final, 10th page, looking distinctively different from the rest. It was a hand-drawn map, in the same shaky style as the label on the envelope, with strange symbols and markers. Someone had written ‘Mae Nam Khong’ in English beside a river. Beyond it, there were mountains. Behind the mountains, a big X was scribbled.

After three days inside his office, sustained mostly on large cups of steaming hot coffee brought by his wife and no sleep whatsoever, he walked out of the office. He declared, to no one in particular, “Fix the money, fix the world!” before leaving the house.

Not much later, the professor lost his job. His last remaining friends ignored his calls. Government officials showed up repeatedly at the family home. They told the professor in unambiguous terms to refrain from speaking about this sound money nonsense. They even suggested he and his family could end up on the enemies of equality list, to be hunted down by bloodthirsty teenagers known as rainbow people. However, by that time, the professor was reasonably confident the ancient map referred to distant parts beyond the borders of Indochina. He had decided it was time to leave London.

The Woodstock family booked passage on a steamship to the free city-state of Krung Thep. The professor hoped to escape from the WG in Southeast Asia and start a new life far away from overreaching government control. Krung Thep would also be the perfect base to discover what lay at the X-marked spot behind the mountains.

The weeks at sea were relatively happy and quiet. The professor spent most of the time teaching his sons about what he had learned from the mysterious documents. He told them about hard money with a limited supply, a decentralized network, and a world wherein man could be free and responsible for his own choices. They also spent many hours comparing the ancient, hand-drawn map with current maps of Indochina.

Alas, the Woodstock family couldn't outrun the world government. Technically Krung Thep was the last remaining free city. However, the world government was constantly encroaching on its freedoms. It was well known WG operatives heavily infiltrated the city.

At the Krung Thep docks, the Woodstock family got off the ship and rented a couple of rickshaws to get to a city hotel. Professor Woodstock

and his wife shared a rickshaw, the two boys got in the next one, and the family luggage followed in a third rickshaw. It was dark by the time they all got going. The heat and humidity hung heavily over them, even in the thick of the night. They had only just left the docks when disaster struck. John and George watched in horror as the rickshaw in front of them exploded in a giant ball of flames. Even their rickshaw puller, right in front of them, disappeared in the raging fire while the sudden heat hit them in the face.

“Mommy!” cried little John.

Moments later, the rickshaw behind them exploded as well.

“Get out!” George screamed. He pulled his brother out of the rickshaw and into a khlong running beside the road. Only moments later, their rickshaw also exploded. The road was empty now, except for three burning rickshaw carcasses. They swam across the khlong and stared at the inferno from the other side of the water. Not much later, they saw two purple-haired women dressed in man clothes arrive at the scene.

“WG agents,” whispered George to his brother.

“Mission accomplished. No one survives this”, one woman said with a sardonic smile. John began to cry softly. George held him until the sun came up the following day.

And so the journey of the two boys in a strange and distant land began. Their parents were dead. They didn’t know anyone in this part of the world, and Krung Thep wasn’t safe. George decided their only way to survive was to reach the location of the mysterious X on the ancient map. They started walking northeast toward where they hoped to eventually find the Mae Nam Khong river.

To their surprise, and although they didn't speak a word of the language, the people they met on their long journey were almost always friendly and helpful. In their disheveled clothes, needing haircuts and pretty shaken up, the two white boys were offered a place to sleep, some rice, and water in every village they passed through. Local farmers often prepared a festive meal for the young guests, including meat or fish. Government propaganda hadn't broken down society at the far frontier of the known world. Humans still naturally cared about one another. However, word of their survival eventually trickled through to WG agents in Krung Thep.

The journey of the boys through the hot and dusty land progressed. On yet another hot and cloudless day, George shaded his eyes from the sun, looked at the horizon, and said: "Look, we're getting closer to the mountains. The river can't be that far anymore."

With renewed vigor, the boys continued down the road. By late afternoon they were finally approaching the Mae Nam Khong river.

The two boys had been walking in silence for a long time when John said: "Do you hear something?"

"What?" George asked. But then he heard it too. A mechanical sound in the distance slowly grew louder. Both boys looked in the direction of the sound. At first, there was nothing but a dot on the horizon. Then they saw it. Up in the sky, a zeppelin was approaching. To their horror, a giant rainbow flag flapped from the wicker car below the hydrogen-filled balloon.

"Oh no, the rainbow people are after us!" howled John.

All feared the rainbow people. They were a confused, angry, and nihilistic bunch. Teenagers from bureaucrat parents on a gap year between formal education and entering the government workforce. Between partying and hangovers, they were encouraged to hunt down enemies of equality. The rainbow people often traveled in colorful and heavily armed groups to find and deliver mob justice to enemies of the state.

So, a group of bloodthirsty youths was quickly approaching from the sky.

“Run, run towards the trees!” shouted George. Both boys sprinted to the treelined river bank with all the power they could muster. John peeked over his shoulder; the zeppelin was coming in low and fast. He could see the teenagers in the wicker car. He saw wild hair colors and young men in dresses and make-up. And guns. Countless guns. Then, the rainbow people opened fire.

John and George made it to the trees, but the cover was limited. Bullets were raining down all around. There was no way they could cross the river or leave the cover of the trees. John and George held each other tightly and were terrified. This was surely the end. The zeppelin passed overhead and turned back, preparing to land.

A thick white cloud with a distinctly skunky, strong odor washed over the boys. Moments later, a monkey appeared. It wore a dark suit, a black top hat, and dark sunglasses. John and George stared in silent surprise. Then, the monkey put a hairy finger over his lips, pressing them to remain silent. It looked up at the rainbow zeppelin and seemed to think the situation over.

Suddenly, the monkey jumped out from under the trees and performed a silly dance out in the open, right in front of the approaching zeppelin. The armed teenagers looked on in bewilderment. They were unsure about the correct viewpoint regarding dancing monkeys wearing top hats. An oppressed minority or an enemy of the state? It can be hard to keep track of these things. The monkey had counted on the confusion to make his move. He lowered his sunglasses to expose bright orange laser eyes. Two beams shot from his eyes and hit the zeppelin, causing a massive explosion. Burning debris rained from the sky. The airship came crashing down in a giant blaze.

The monkey avoided the burning debris and ran back towards the boys, grabbed them both by the hand, and dragged them away from the inferno. Together, they made their way to a small row boat moored at a pier some distance downriver.

Dazed and confused, the boys entered the boat. The monkey started to row. After a while, George finally managed to mutter: “How... what... who?”

The monkey grinned and spoke deeply: “It’s all good. You can relax. I’m Iteration 0420, Disciple of the Good Lord Satoshi, Protector of the Realm and First Servant of Our Beloved Princess.”

“... ???”

“No worries! You can call me Four-Twenty, boys. We’re on this trip together now.”

*To be continued...*