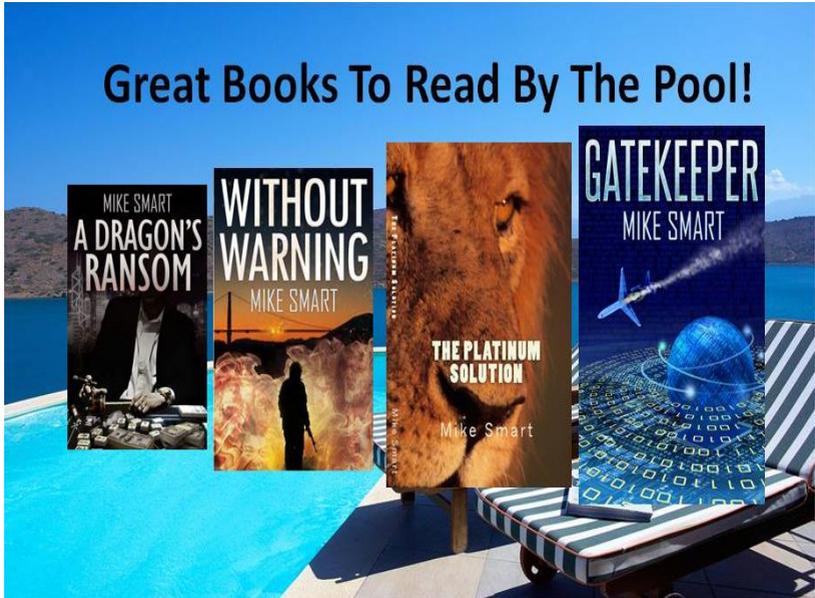


The Max Thatcher Series

By Mike Smart



The Max Thatcher Book Series written for you to enjoy on a flight, by the pool or to break up the monotony of the daily commute. Not suitable for under 18's nor those wanting an early night as readers complain they can't put them down!

Available at Amazon

Paperback or Kindle

The Max Thatcher Series Reviews & Prologues

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About the Author

www.mikesmartauthor.co.uk



A BBC Radio and press featured author Mike Smart, born in Surrey, writes very well received fast moving thrillers which are packed with action and are short on flowery prose. The series all feature a lead character called Max Thatcher, a former Special Forces operative who takes no prisoners.

Written for you to enjoy on a flight, by the pool or to break up the monotony of the daily commute. Not suitable for under 18's nor those wanting an early night as readers complain they can't put them down!

Volume 1

GATEKEEPER



Planes inexplicably colliding, economies in disarray. A psychotic businessman has brought the world to its knees.

Can a former Special Forces operative with the help of a damaged Cambridge Professor save a bride to be and avoid worldwide anarchy?

They've got 24hrs to try!

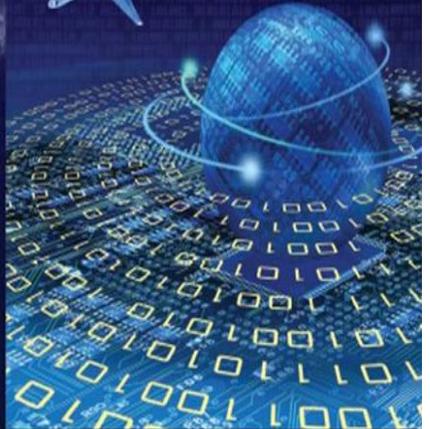


GATEKEEPER

GATEKEEPER
MIKE SMART



MIKE SMART



5.0 out of 5 stars **High-Octane Thriller**, April 4, 2014

This review is from: Gatekeeper (Kindle Edition)

"Gatekeeper" by Mike Smart is a fast-paced, high-octane thriller filled with action and intrigue. It begins with the mid-air collision of a Boeing 777 and an Air France 290, quickly spreading to frozen bank accounts, payroll and power grid malfunctions, and a downturn in the trading market.

When the head of Falcon Services and former Special Boat Services Operative Max Thatcher begins investigating the disappearance of his sister, he doesn't anticipate being drawn into the mystery of a worldwide catastrophe. Nor does he know that a megalomaniac, the head of a mammoth corporation that deals in computer information retrieval has brought the world to its knees and that he's holding his sister hostage.

The plot is well-written, its underlining theme directed at mankind's addiction and complete trust in computer technology, and the evolving use and inherent problems in using Artificial Intelligence (AI) in core applications. Mike Smart weaves a story that blends cybercrime, mystery and murder into a psychological thriller that has Max Thatcher chasing a highly intelligent psychotic businessman with no morals and a murderous nature from London to the Caribbean.

The characters are well-developed and complex, each with strengths and weaknesses that add intensity, power and dimension to the plot; especially the high-powered owner of Mega Corporation. Obsessed by sex, money and power Jack Hunter thrives on using his intelligent mind and problem

solving skills to outmanoeuvre his enemies and competition. He's arrogant, blunt, impatient and hot-tempered, a warped man who likes killing. His adversary, Max Thatcher is a clever realist with honed fighting skills who's quick-thinking and perceptive. Serena Thatcher, Max's sister, a junior reporter is independent, capable and feisty, but her ambitious nature may be her undoing. John Carter, Serena's fiancé is a staid senior accountant at City Bank whose mental agility and devotion may help save her. Clare Pryce is a smart, no-nonsense professor whose speciality in Artificial Intelligence may bring triumph out of disaster.

With skilful dexterity Mike Smart develops fascinating characters and weaves a plot that's spellbinding from beginning to end. I thoroughly enjoyed "Gatekeeper" and plan to read more about Max Thatcher's exploits.

5.0 out of 5 stars **A timely story and introduces us to a new adventure hero - Max**, March 18, 2014

This review is from: Gatekeeper (Kindle Edition)

A great tale of intrigue, deceit, and a desire to access, store, and manipulate all information about everything and everybody as a tool to control us all. The story shows the consequences of too much information in the hands a just a few and the total reliance on computers to manage our way of life - and if something goes wrong. Very relevant considering the recent events surrounding the NSA, Facebook and Google knowing all we do on the web, and how much of ourselves we post for all to see.

A great first book from Mike Smart. The series of books sit right next to my collection by Cussler, Du Brul and the like.

5.0 out of 5 stars Gatekeeper revealed, 18 Oct 2013

This review is from: Gatekeeper (Max Thatcher Series)
(Paperback)

A very well crafted story. The topic is right in the moment and anyone who worries about data will worry even more now. Great pace with good characters with personalities that are consistent throughout the journey - overall a brilliant first book!

5.0 out of 5 stars Exciting thriller, 19 Oct 2013

This review is from: Gatekeeper (Max Thatcher Series)
(Paperback)

Just finished this great book, couldn't put it down. Obviously written by a professional in the computer field with considerable travel knowledge. The chapter layout and good sized print was a bonus.

Really enjoyed the whole scene from this new author. Look forward to his next one ~

5.0 out of 5 stars A great gripping thriller, 13 Oct 2013

This review is from: Gatekeeper (Max Thatcher Series)
(Paperback)

This book just keeps you turning the pages. It has vigorous drama and action and also raises questions of computer espionage, artificial intelligence and international high-level skulduggery. Action heroes, evil megalomaniacs, ruthless villains, cheating politicians, high scale computer hacking, even a damsel in distress - Gatekeeper has it all. Read it now - it'll be a film soon! ~

5.0 out of 5 stars Gatekeeper, 21 Nov 2013

This review is from: Gatekeeper (Max Thatcher Series)
(Paperback)

For a first book this is a quantum leap. It bursts into life from the very beginning and continues apace without let up. It is in a way reminiscent of the Mikey Spillane novels but also very much in the style of the very early James B. Gatekeeper novels. There is however a difference and that is that the former were somewhat far fetched, Gatekeeper is quite believable and could easily happen. The style of writing is punchy and it is a page turner. Expect to see this book suddenly catch the public's attention and become a best seller and don't be too surprised if it appears as a film.

5.0 out of 5 stars A great read!, 20 Nov 2013

This review is from: Gatekeeper (Max Thatcher Series)
(Paperback)

Couldn't put Gatekeeper down! Loved the inclusion of short chapters, just to be able to keep in the story whilst stirring

Bolognese and get a cliff hanger moment at the same time!! Very current IT theme, yet not too techie for the uninitiated, mixed with a huge variety of characters, great locations, a superb insight into politics, and the ever popular goodies and baddies. With lots of twists and turns along the way, Gatekeeper is well worth a read and will appeal to a wide audience. Something in it for everyone, so spread the word and pop it in a stocking...!

5.0 out of 5 stars Gatekeeper Review, 9 Nov 2013

This review is from: Gatekeeper (Max Thatcher Series) (Paperback)

What a great debut novel from Mike Smart. The characterisation and pacing are first rate and the book really is a page turner. A cross between Ian Fleming and Christopher Reich. I look forward to seeing his next book.

5.0 out of 5 stars Real page turner, 7 Nov 2013

This review is from: Gatekeeper (Kindle Edition)

This is an excellent first novel from a new author.

Fast paced and refreshingly free of padding, especially the endless descriptions of all that happens when you pull the trigger, so overused now by many Clancy wannabees.

From the first page you are hooked and just have to keep going to see what happens next.

The author clearly has an in depth understanding of the IT and software industry and this only serves to provide a level of authenticity that makes you think long after you finish the last page.

Looking forward to the next one!

5.0 out of 5 stars An excellent read, 4 Nov 2013

This review is from: Gatekeeper (Max Thatcher Series)
(Paperback)

I was hooked on page 1 and it lasted until the end. A well thought through story with plenty of drama and action. The only disappointment is that I have now finished it! Can't wait for the next book.

5.0 out of 5 stars Gatekeeper, 1 Nov 2013

This review is from: Gatekeeper (Max Thatcher Series)
(Paperback)

An excellent and topical story of open access, data protection (or lack of it) and current day concerns. No wonder that China have openly been restricting web access and twitter! Any person that is paranoid about data or the power of an individual, will now be very concerned about the future. A great read and difficult to put down. So it kept me awake on a flight to Asia. I look forward to the authors future books.

~

5.0 out of 5 stars Fast moving, fabulous read, 13 Oct 2013

Really loved the pace of this book. Fast moving, relevant, thought provoking and action on every page. A cross between Ian Fleming and Dan Brown! Intense time frame, great characters and brilliant plot. It could be true

4.0 out of 5 stars Gatekeeper rocks, 26 Nov 2013

This review is from: Gatekeeper (Kindle Edition)

Great subject, what with the Snowden revelations and general fear of government snooping, and it really rocks along, with lots of action and plenty of thrills. Good stuff.

4.0 out of 5 stars There out there!, 17 Nov 2013

This review is from: Gatekeeper (Kindle Edition)

A very apt subject matter which affects us all in this 'big brother' society where we don't know who is watching us or listening in on our conversations. A great first novel.

Gatekeeper

Prologue

French Airspace - Wednesday Night

Flight BA487 had left Heathrow on time, bound for Dubai. The flight was busy; it always was, Dubai being a very popular holiday attraction in its own right and one which had also, over the last ten years, established itself as a major hub for the near and far East, providing frequent connecting routes into every major business city and favoured tourist location.

Susan sat in the economy section of the Boeing 777 looking forward to getting to Dubai for a bit of shopping. She'd never been there, but her friends had been told stories of wondrous shops with knock-down prices. A supersized Harrods in a series of fabulously clean, perfectly air-conditioned

terminal buildings – a great way to spend a couple of hours waiting for her connecting Emirates flight on to Sydney.

She was so looking forward to a month of travelling; she'd spent hours doing research on the internet. On the advice of more seasoned travellers, Susan had written a long list of 'must dos'. As this was her first major long-haul trip on her own, she was hoping to meet up with some like-minded fun people to share all her new and exciting experiences.

She had broken up with Marty, her boyfriend of three years, a couple of weeks earlier. He had wanted a serious commitment – two-point-four kids and a nice house in suburbia. Susan felt this was all a little bit too premature. They'd argued, she'd walked out and now she was on her way towards a bit of adventure. In her own mind she was pretty certain that the two of them would work things out when she got back; but in the interim this was her life, to be lived to the full, and at 23 the petite brunette felt she was entitled to some fun before settling

down to a life of matrimonial and domestic bliss.

Susan played with the entertainment controls and settled back to watch a movie. *Love, Lost and Found* had just come out featuring her favourite actress, Sally Stevens, with the bonus of having the gorgeous and oh-so-sexy George Hadley playing opposite her. Her last rom-com had been great fun and according to the reviews that she had read in the Evening Standard on her daily commute back from the smog of Central London, this movie was a good laugh. It had everything by all accounts; a great storyline, lots of intrigue, with some twists and turns in the plot thrown in for good measure. Headphones on, movie starting and looking forward to a couple of drinkies – life was good.

She never got past the opening scene, as the BA487 ploughed straight into the Air France 290 coming out of Paris bound for Atlanta. At 20,000 feet, over the killing fields of Flanders, the planes collided and erupted in a single massive ball of flame; there would

be metal debris spread over a 100-mile radius below to be picked over and collected by the air investigators. For the friends and families of the 700-odd passengers and crew on both flights there would be no remains to bury, only the hollow consolation that the ashes of their loved ones would be scattered amongst the poppies, along with so many that had sacrificed their lives in the Great War

Volume 2



The De Heerden brothers have some big plans for South Africa which they intend to see through to fruition, whatever the cost. South Africa's fledgling democracy is not working in their opinion and they have a platinum edged solution.

Max Thatcher is drawn in to preventing the conspiracy spiralling South Africa's constitution back to the dark days of Apartheid.

In this, a fast moving story, there can ultimately only one winner. With none of the protagonists prepared to take a backward step the cost to secure victory is measured in terms of life and death.

THE PLATINUM SOLUTION

THE PLATINUM SOLUTION

Mike Smart

Mike Smart

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5.0 out of 5 stars **Enjoyable read**, March 23, 2014

This review is from: The Platinum Solution (Max Thatcher Series) (Paperback)

Enjoyable read. Mike Smart's books seem to hit on current topics even though they are fiction. Look forward to reading the newest book. Recommend this to anyone who likes action series books as I do.

4.0 out of 5 stars **A captivating story from cover to cover**, March 18, 2014

This review is from: [The Platinum Solution \(Kindle Edition\)](#)

This second book in the series is a fun read and I found it hard to put down. A few surprises for those that have read the first book Gatekeeper. Stock market manipulation, racial tension, lies, deceit, murder, greed for total power over a country, and of course Mike Smart's "Dirk Pitt" Max to set things right. What else do you need for a great story?

I read a great number of books from Cussler and Du Brul and find this series from Mike Smart as enjoyable. Looking forward to the next in the series.

5.0 out of 5 stars **A Riveting Thriller!**, February 18, 2014

This review is from: The Platinum Solution (Max Thatcher Series) (Paperback)

In South Africa Mandela is dying, and a formidable organization of white Afrikaans with a platinum solution is bent on returning the political structure to the dark days of isolation and Apartheid. "The Platinum Solution" is a fast-paced, heart-stopping thriller that encompasses cities from South Africa to England, and even Madeira, a small island off the North African coastline. It begins when insurers hire Falcon Services to solve the disappearance of the lead analyst from London's BDS Bank which has been negotiating a deal with PG Mining. With Max Thatcher on assignment overseeing protection of a British contingency at a conference in Madeira, his associates Greg and Patrick take on the mission. What they don't expect is to find a connection between both undertakings that will not only lead them into danger, but could mean the disruption of political systems at home and abroad.

The plot is a well-written roller-coaster ride filled with murder, mystery and intrigue. The action never stops from beginning to end as clues are unravelled and the danger escalates. Even in victory the ending holds a shocking surprise and paves the way for another Max Thatcher novel.

The core characters are memorable with all their weaknesses and strengths. Max Thatcher the head of Falcon Services is a sharp-edged, tough investigator with keen instincts who reveals a tender and considerate side in his relationship with Clare Pryce, a smart, humorous, sexy professor. Like Max's colleagues Greg and Patrick, Sara Brown the M16 agent is

fearless, determined and astute; all three face danger without hesitation.

But in this story the antagonists are both chilling and heartless as they murder and destroy to get what they want. The Der Heerden brothers are a study in contrasts; one an intelligent womanizer with political aspirations, the other a hot-tempered madman with evil intentions that go far beyond the mandate of their Fraternity. Their henchmen Henk Gerber and Joost are killers without any scruples. All these characters add excitement and energy to a novel that is riveting from beginning to end.

I thoroughly enjoyed "The Platinum Solution" and look forward to reading Mike Smart's novel "Gatekeeper" which I'm sure will be just as entertaining.

5.0 out of 5 stars The Platinum Solution is a book you can't put down!, 5 Jan 2014

This review is from: The Platinum Solution (Max Thatcher Series) (Paperback)

From the very beginning, I found this story completely compelling. Mike Smart seems to have the knack of keeping you needing to know what happens next. Global business, corruption, violence and sex are woven into this chilling version of reality. I admire the way he writes completely

contemporaneously with actual world events. His story line seems to anticipate real events, then they happen, and then they become pivotal to the action in the later stages of the plot. It is uncanny.

I can't wait for the next in the series.

When will someone make a film of these great adventures?

5.0 out of 5 stars A Platinum read....seriously!, 17 Feb 2014

This review is from: The Platinum Solution (Max Thatcher Series) (Paperback)

Great second book in the Max Thatcher series...only takes a couple of days to read because you can't put it down! Totally unpredictable plot, an abundance of characters, very fast-moving and set in extremely well-researched current political circumstances. All but the dull and ignorant, will have an opinion on its content!

Mr Smart weaves in some very clever and considered development of the main character, Max, making you feel a sense of familiarity and connection with the first book, Gatekeeper, coupled with a degree of empathy with the variety of personal and professional situations in which he finds himself.

And I sense a hint of darkness brewing in Max, that may or may not be significant in 'Without Warning'....the third book, out in March I believe, and on the wish list.

The Platinum Solution is a page-turner and if you want to generate some juicy debate and banter about issues like South Africa, terrorism, the Secret Services, Government cover-ups/cock-ups etc etc.... get it on your Book Club list!

5.0 out of 5 stars Another Excellent Thriller, 12 Feb 2014

This review is from: The Platinum Solution (Max Thatcher Series) (Paperback)

Having thoroughly enjoyed Gatekeeper, I was pleased to receive for my birthday The Platinum Solution , the second in the Max Thatcher series. It's superb, well written and keeps you waiting (not for long) for the next exciting chapter.

I heard the interview on BBC radio yesterday with the author. It was good to hear his background and enthusiasm and can see why the book is so enthralling. Written in the style of Jeffrey Archer but more factual and thrilling.

Well done, Mike Smart, bring on the third as soon as possible.

Robin

5.0 out of 5 stars Worth its weight in..well platinum!, 6 Feb 2014

This review is from: The Platinum Solution (Kindle Edition)

This is Mike Smarts second novel featuring his protagonist Max Thatcher.

Once again he delivers a "smart" fast paced thriller which is also just about as contemporary as you can get.

Short on frills, long on thrills with unexpected twists and turns all the way. Buy it in the evening and you will be turning pages long into the night.

Waiting for the next one sir!

5.0 out of 5 stars A great book, action packed, tense and interesting., 28 Jan 2014

This review is from: The Platinum Solution (Kindle Edition)

Loved this book, it grabs your attention and keeps you guessing the whole way through. You start to think you know where the story is leading and it changes direction abruptly.

The Platinum Solution

Prologue

Gans Baai, Western Cape South Africa – Monday, Early Morning

Gordon, a landlubber at heart, was feeling sick to the core. It wasn't simply the motion of the boat lolling around in the 3ft swell, which didn't help, but the knowledge that he was in a lot of trouble. Why hadn't he kept his mouth shut and just gone along with the whole crazy scheme? He cursed himself for the thousandth time. *Shit, I should have known better*, he thought.

Henk turned to look at the man dressed in a badly sweat stained business shirt and slacks, hands tied, lying helpless in the well of the boat; he was rather looking forward to this morning's entertainment. A mile away he could see the small harbour at Gans Baai which would be a hive of activity later in the day when the tourists came to get scared by the local attractions. Turning to face the front of the 30ft former commercial fishing boat constructed out of wood and fiberglass, he could see their destination about fifteen minutes ahead. Small waves were breaking between Dyer Island and Geyser Rock, the smaller of the two islands. These rocky outcrops provided a permanent home to over 60,000 resident cape fur seals. The smell of guano filled the nostrils of those on board; later in the day, under the full glare of the summer sun, the smell would become almost overpowering.

The weather was pretty unremarkable that morning, the sky was overcast, early teens showing on the boats thermometer; the mid-summer sun had not yet done its work and burnt off the grey mantle of cloud that hung over the bay.

“Let’s head for the gap in the channel,” he called up to the skipper – a member of the Fraternity who could be trusted to keep schtum about the morning’s proposed proceedings. He was a good man in Henk’s eyes, and another committed believer in the ‘great cause.’

“Sure, no problem.”

“Henk, for Pete’s sake, we can work this out. It’s really not a problem; I can get back onto London and sort this misunderstanding out.”

“Too late for that, Gordon. You knew the rules, your bank balance confirms that we kept our side of the bargain; you’re a very foolish man thinking that you could blackmail us. See what happens if you get too greedy? The Fraternity looks after its friends and punishes its enemies.”

The steady hum of the engine changed its beat as the boat slowed down to a walking pace from the steady 12 knots that it had been making across the open water.

“Look, I’ll give you all the money back, you’ll never hear from me again – I’ll take my family and disappear.” A slight grin appeared across Henk’s heavy-built facial features; at 6ft 2in he was a big man. He was dressed in his preferred attire of camouflage trousers, army boots and cut-off green T shirt. Weighing in at over 18 stone, he’d played a lot of rugby as a boy in the privileged private all-white schooling system that he had enjoyed. Growing up in a wealthy Afrikaans family, he had been used to the better things in life. Staff to look after the gardens and the inherited farm, a career mapped out in the family business – all good.

But over time life had changed; with the departure of Apartheid, all of a sudden he was supposed to become acclimatised to treating the blacks as equals. Positive discrimination had led to having to employ non-whites in positions of influence within the business, and what had once been a private ‘by invitation only’ club was now becoming, at a frightening pace, open to all and frankly that didn’t sit very well with him or many of his peers.

No, in his mind things had gone too far, something had to be done. "Gordon, save your breath. You're past redemption, if I were you I would concentrate on making your peace with God." With that, he gave the defenceless man a solid kick in the midriff on the basis that would stop any further pointless discussion.

The boat's skipper, Pieter, pointed the *Cape Fisher* into the swell and cut the engine. There was no tide running to speak of and in the light chop he knew an anchor wasn't required as the boat wouldn't move far off its current position. Coming out of the cabin he looked across at Henk; "What's the plan? Shall we put a bit of hors d'oeuvres out there and see what's around?" In his early 50s, he'd leapt at the chance of joining the elite club called the Fraternity. He was not from wealthy stock but was very proud to be Afrikaans by birthright.

"What have you got in mind?" asked Henk. "I rather thought we might have a bit of a troll and see what we catch?" A keen fisherman, he was referring to the process of trailing bait in the water to attract the target fish of the day.

“Sure, whatever, but we can’t be out here too long without attracting a bit of attention.”

Pieter looked to the shore line; he estimated that unless someone had binoculars trained on them they would be fine and pass unnoticed.

The pair decided on a combination of both fish-attracting approaches – lifting the hapless Gordon up between them, Henk got a bait knife and cut deeply into the struggling man’s legs. Gordon screamed with pain and begged them to reconsider their chosen course of action. The pair tied a thick rope around the man’s already tightly secured wrists. By this time the prisoner was thrashing violently in desperation, knowing full well his likely fate; but all to no avail as he was easily outmuscled and outweighed.

In almost a single movement Gordon, the lead analyst from BDS Bank based on Broad Street in the City of London, was unceremoniously deposited over the side of the boat.

The coldness of the water took his breath away and he had to kick violently to keep from sinking under the weight of his quickly sodden clothes. The wet clothes and weakened legs due to blood loss combined with the inability to use his hands made staying afloat for any length of time only a remote possibility. Henk looked down at the drowning man and pulled playfully on the rope. "How's the water?"

Pieter turned to his left and picked up a small dustbin full of blood and offal that he had secured for the day's fishing from a slaughterhouse some 33 clicks up the road in Hermanus. Situated to the north west, on the main road back towards Cape Town, Hermanus is world renowned as a great place to go and watch migrating whales.

Lifting the lid, he waved the contents under Henk's nose. "Ummm, lovely – fancy some for breakfast?"

"Ag man, get that out of my face, smells awful!"

"Ag, don't be so fussy." Taking the loaded bucket to the gunwale Pieter promptly deposited the contents over the side, much of it covering Gordon who was frantically trying to find some respite by holding onto the boat.

Returning to the cabin, the skipper pushed the fishing boat's throttle forward a single notch and headed towards shark alley, as the gap between the two islands was more commonly known. Henk played out about 20 yards of rope and watched as it tightened up to the 'bait' and then began to drag the City man along in the wake of the boat. A couple of the local cape fur seals popped their heads up off the starboard bow to have a look at what was going on; they weren't going to have to wait for long.

Gordon was fighting for breath, being dragged by the boat. His mouth was continually filling up with salt water and he knew if this went on much longer, he was going to drown. His onetime business associates - but now recent captors - would have been disappointed if a simple matter of drowning was the only fate befalling the man who had come close to scuppering the whole project.

The *Carcharodon carcharias* that picked up the scent of the blood in the water was a big female; she was in short term residence in one of the most prolific mating areas for her breed in the world. The Great White made so famous by Peter Benchley's 'Jaws' can grow to over 20ft and has no known predators, it's a prehistoric eating machine. This female was at 14ft an awesome specimen. Now in the chum trail comprising the slaughterhouse delicacies mixed with Gordon's blood and urine, she was moving at pace from underneath the trawled 'bait'.

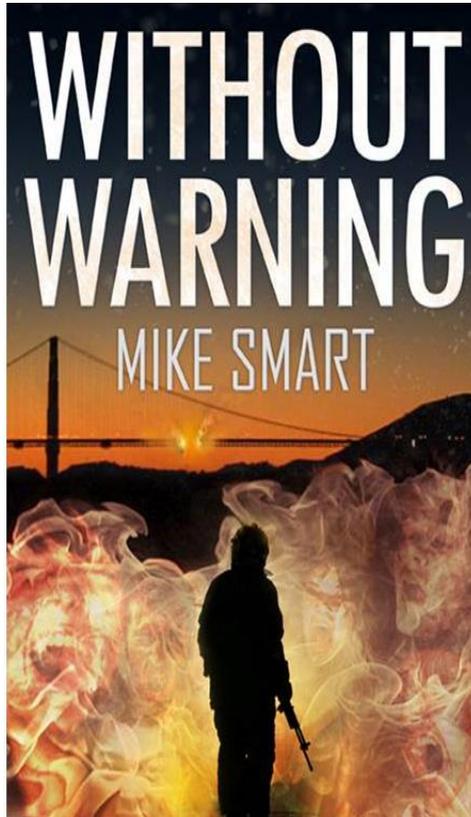
Gordon probably knew nothing of his untimely demise; he had known that when he'd been bundled into the car the night before and deposited in the dawn on the fishing boat that things were not going to end well. He knew well enough what Gans Baai was famous for, and once he had hit the water he had simply prayed for a swift onset of the anticipated terrible bloody conclusion. He had half expected to see his whole life pass before his eyes and to think about the wife and children that he would be leaving behind. None of that took up his thoughts for the last few moments of his life; his whole consciousness was filled with terror of not knowing what it was like to be eaten alive.

The most feared predator of the high seas, one that had almost singlehandedly put millions of people off going for a quick swim, hit the doomed man at some 18 knots. Black soulless eyes rolled back to avoid being damaged; with her cavernous mouth open, lined with razor sharp teeth, she had come in on a slightly tilted attack path. The 2,400lb Great White ripped through Gordon's rib cage and lifted him entirely out of the water as though he were a rag doll. The two men watching from the boat were suitably impressed and delighted in equal measure to have witnessed the attack so up close - one to share with boys at the bar and maybe tell the kids about one day.

Though possibly, with hindsight, they would change the story with regard to what bait had been used, at least for the child friendly version.

Volume 3

In this story of violent revenge Max must find and stop a radical of the worst sort. No home, no family, just a lifelong desire to inflict as much pain and suffering as possible on those that had destroyed all that had mattered to him.



5.0 out of 5 stars **Max goes from strength to strength!**, 21

Mar 2014

This review is from: Without Warning (Max Thatcher Series) (Kindle Edition)

This is the third Max Thatcher novel from Mike Smart and in my view is the best so far.

Mr Smart has slowed the pace slightly this time around and the result is spectacular. As terrorists plan and carry out their increasingly desperate and vicious acts of violence, Max and his trusted team race against time to try and stop them.

As the pressure builds you are totally drawn into this shadowy world of terrorism and counter terrorism, turning each page with trepidation at what might be about to happen next.

Well crafted and with his usual penchant for sticking to what's important whilst resisting the need to pad out with the overly high levels of detail like many of his peers, Mike Smart continues to carve his own path with increasing skill and certainly delivers the goods.

Make sure you have read the previous novels first, and then

make sure you are comfortable before you start. The hours will fly by!

10/10

Prologue

Disputed lands - Fifteen Years Earlier

The young boy looked into the lifeless eyes of his father; he would never forget that sight nor the putrid smell of his beloved parents' now-emptied bowels. He had held his father's hand as the final signs of life had ebbed away unable to stem the bleeding caused by the shrapnel which had ripped through his body. It didn't seem right that the man who had brought him to life, had fed him and cared for their family should have spent his last few minutes on earth wracked in pain and laying in the dirt stained with his own urine and faeces.

He looked across at where his older sister and mother lay. The whole family had been working in their small field trying to scrape some sort of a life from the hard unforgiving land. There had been no

warning, no indication that the lives of his immediate family would so suddenly and violently be cut short.

On that fateful day, their incessant toiling had been made that much harder by the hot morning sun beating down. They had been working together for a couple of hours before his father had instructed him to go to the village well and bring back two goat skin pouches full of cold refreshing water. As he had walked back up the small path, up the steep incline back to the plot of land they called their own, he had seen wisps of vapour trail in the azure sky. He had stopped, shielding his eyes to get a better look at these miracles in the air. It was always a great source of amazement to him, a poorly educated boy, how these planes ever managed to stay in the sky. He often wondered what it might be like to fly. Where were they from and where were they going? This was one of his favourite guessing games to play silently in his head.

The noise had been deafening as the high explosive bombs had gone off a quarter of a mile away from where he stood. The earth had shook and he had immediately thrown himself to the ground in a

mixture of fright and pure shock. As he had hit the hard-baked dried earth he knew at once that the bomb, or bombs, would have landed close to where his family had been working.

Picking himself up off the floor, he had left the now-forgotten water sacks behind him as he had raced up the slope towards where his family should have been waiting for him.

At 20,000 ft no one in the American B52 bomber had felt the shock waves from the explosions from far below and the crew had carried on happily chatting away. They had been given their coordinates and done their job little knowing that they had inadvertently dropped their payload in the wrong place. Not only had they killed several, totally innocent noncombatants, but they had also spawned a radical of the worst sort. No home, no family, no great cause; this young man had nothing left to lose and had just inherited a lifelong desire to inflict as much pain and suffering as possible on those that had destroyed all that had mattered to him.

He had made a vow at the very moment of his father's passing that his own life was forfeit and

that all he should focus on henceforth was to bring death and destruction to the people that had come unwanted into his land. The uninvited foreigners hadn't come to grant the indigenous tribes freedom but to help keep them oppressed. Well, he would make sure that the three 'superpowers' which made up the bulk of the coalition forces would never forget this day.

Volume 4

A DRAGON'S RANSOM

A BBC Radio and press featured author Mike writes very well received fast moving thrillers which are packed with action and are short on flowery prose. The series all feature a lead character called Max Thatcher, an ex Special Forces operative who takes no prisoners.

The stakes in this deadly game of chance couldn't be higher for Max and his team. Who can you trust in this fast moving story of betrayal and greed? Brutal drug lords, kidnappings and lethal violence are all cleverly interwoven within this page turning thriller.



A DRAGON'S RANSOM

MIKE SMART

MIKE SMART

A DRAGON'S RANSOM



Prologue

The container ship *Happy Valley* was making a steady twelve knots running north parallel to the South Carolina coast line which was some eight miles of the port bow. In the half light between night and day, three of a skeletal crew of fifteen were hurriedly preparing the highly illicit packages to be loaded into the awaited delivery boats. The three men were busily working in a false hold set deep within the bowels of the huge container ship. At almost 400 metres long and with a displacement weight over 150,000 tonnes it had been a pretty easy job to hide a thirty-metre by twenty-five-metre area from prying eyes.

Other than the handful of the men and women who had designed, built or worked in the area, no one knew of its existence and the owners went to great lengths to keep it a very well

protected secret. So much so that several of the original architects, even had they wished to crow about their engineering achievements, were no longer physically able to share the details with the living.

The *Happy Valley* was the largest and most modern ship in the Chang family's extensive modern container fleet and had cost almost \$170m to build and outfit. She was named after the famous area on Hong Kong Island where the locals went happily off to the race track and gamble hundreds of millions of Hong Kong dollars away in an afternoon.

The change in the tone of the massive diesel engines combined with the noticeable shift in how the vessel rode through the Atlantic Ocean was the signal that Liang had been waiting for. He took a quick look at his watch, a good imitation of a Cartier that he had picked up in a street market a few months earlier in the Central District on his

native Hong Kong Island: bang on schedule. Good, he thought; he knew that his boss would be very unhappy if the operation was not carried out as punctually as had been meticulously planned. It was time. "Niu, open the doors," Liang instructed in Cantonese. Niu moved his heavy frame across to the complex looking control panel and started going through the process of pressurising the hidden space. The slight popping in his ears confirmed to him and the other occupants of the room that the door seals had done their job. He pushed a couple of buttons on the touch screen computer screen, and in response the polished steel hull in the centre of the floor began to slide away, revealing the churning dark blue Atlantic waters beneath the now almost stationary vessel.

The three men hadn't been waiting long before the dark outline of a submersed object could be seen rising slowly up towards the surface; it

looked like a large oversized cigar. Its form became clearer and, as the sleek conning tower pushed its way through the now still water surface, one recognised it to be a small black submarine some forty feet long. The water-tight hatch atop the conning tower was pushed open and two men exited the sub in quick succession. Within sixty seconds the first submarine was joined by its twin, both vessels now laying alongside one another in the small submarine pen concealed in the hull of the *Happy Valley*.

“Liang, how’s it hanging man?” The leader of the submarine squad had climbed off his boat and was making his way to the athletically-built Chinese man standing by the pile of product that was to be loaded onto the subs. Liang reached out his calloused hands, hardened by thousands of hours of martial arts practice. He didn’t like the man standing in front of him, but choose to keep his personal distaste of this particular individual -

and westerners in general - to himself. To his mind they were an ugly form, normally overweight, clumsy and rarely to be trusted in his experience.

“I am well, Chuck, thank you.” He didn’t bother with asking how the American was doing on that particular morning and instead looked across at Niu and Feng. “We don’t have much time, begin the loading of the packages.” The instructions snapped off in Chinese.

If Chuck had noticed the intended insult he didn’t show it and pulled out a cigarette. “You guys,” he directed the curt instructions at his three men, “help the Chinks with the dope.” The three heavy built thugs made their way towards the neatly stacked packets of cocaine and effectively formed a chain between the piles of drugs and the submarines. In quick order the foil-wrapped packets were moved along the line of five men and deposited into open storage holds, set fore and aft of both submarines.

The subs were purpose built by a small company in Korea that normally specialised in 'toys' for the rich and mighty. The owner of these particular subs was certainly rich but that's where his personal profile with the manufacturer's typical customer match abruptly ended; no one was under any illusion that these were in any way toys. Powered by a bank of large batteries, they were big enough to carry two members of crew along with a decent sized stash of cargo. Their range was about a hundred and fifty miles before they would have to recharge and so were ideal for the short runs between the southern states' coastline and the frequently returning *Happy Valley*.

Liang and Chuck watched on in silence as first and then the second submarine were filled with their illegal cargo of pure cocaine. By the time the process was completed, each vessel was carrying about thirty five million dollars' worth of drugs.

Chuck dropped his third cigarette stub onto the steel floor and kicked it casually towards the gap in the hull where the submarines were tied up. He'd been cooped up in the sub for over 90 minutes and smoking simply wasn't practical in such a small confined space, so he was determined to get as many smokes in as possible before making the enforced smoke-free return trip. "Liang, there is something I want to discuss with you."

Liang looked at the big American and nodded.

"Don't say much, do you," muttered Chuck under his breath. "It looks like we have a breach in our security; the Feds almost caught us last time we came ashore."

"What is this to do with our part of the operation?" enquired Liang in an even tone; landside operational security was not his concern. He picked up the drugs offshore down in the southern Caribbean Sea and transported the goods

to the agreed drop off point. His operation was watertight; of that he was entirely sure. The two men that were now working for him packing the drugs aboard the 'drug mule' submarines had been with him for a long time and they knew the consequences of betrayal or of making a silly mistake.

Chuck nodded discreetly in the direction of one of his men who was now busying himself locking down the last of the loading hatches on the submarine furthest from them. "I reckon Tony there has been shooting his mouth off a bit and I think that we need cut him out of the business. I was kinda hoping that I could leave him here and you'd make sure that we'd never hear from him again; if you get my drift."

The request was clear enough, the hint of a vicious smile appeared across the Chinaman's lips. "And why, Chuck, are you not capable of taking care of your own house-keeping?"

“He’s my sister’s brother Liang, and, well, it just don’t seem right that I kill him,” said Chuck awkwardly.

Liang looked at Chuck, making no effort to hide his pure contempt for the man’s weakness. “No problem, call him over.”

The American was taken aback by Liang’s apparent willingness to take on a task of this nature without further questioning, and found it very disconcerting that Liang had not taken any length of time to consider the request in the first place. Chuck had only met Liang on a few occasions but the Chinaman’s reputation for clinical, cold efficiency preceded him. The American recognised that he had set the ball in motion and that he couldn’t very well now lose even more face in front of Liang by backing down and retracting the request. Chuck rather wished that he’d said nothing and had found another way of resolving the problem. This was, he acknowledged, one his

great failings; he never really thought things through and had a recurrent habit of firing too often from the hip.

As he bucked up the courage to do what had to be done, he felt a cold chill run through his body as some stress-induced sweat began dripping down his back. Committed to his chosen path, Chuck shouted across the open area, "Hey, Tony. Can you come over here pal? Something I need to discuss with you."

The brother in law looked up from his task and replied, "Sure, no problem," and started making his way back along the submarine that he was working on. Tony crossed over the one laying alongside and walked up to where Chuck and Liang were standing.

"Hi, guys what's up?" He had no inkling that he was in any trouble. The conversation that he had had with Chuck the night before about him having too much to drink and bragging in one of

his favourite bars about the amount of money he was making was long forgotten. They were family, he knew that he'd been a bit stupid and had promised not to let it happen again, so as far as he was concerned that was the end of the matter. In any event he wasn't entirely sure what Chuck's problem was, as in truth nothing had actually happened with the Feds

Chuck's concerns had stemmed from what had happened on their last run. They had been in the process of unloading the drugs shipment, in one of the inlets they used, from the second of the two submarines when they had been overflown by what looked like a police spotter plane. Despite its low altitude, Tony and the rest of the crew were pretty sure that the occupants of the aircraft wouldn't have seen that much. The submarines were almost invisible up close let alone from a comparatively fast moving light aircraft at a hundred or so feet up. The group from the

submarines and the waiting delivery drivers had separated hurriedly into small groups. Chuck had stayed behind and gone through the auto sinking routine. Some fifteen minutes later, as he was making his way down one of the narrow dirt tracks away from where the subs were hidden, a couple of black sedans with a state trooper patrol car hot on its tail had screamed past, going in the opposite direction.

It had been a close call in Chuck's opinion, too close by far. He had done a complete review of all of the security procedures that he had in place and could find no fault. Then, one evening, he had been drinking in a bar downtown when one of his former girlfriends had approached uninvited and sat herself next to him at the bar.

"So Chuck, long time no see. What happened to that promised phone call?" she said with a smile accompanied with a playful squeeze of the top of his muscled thigh.

Chuck's taste in women was more accurately described as an unhealthy appetite in young college girls; Debbie, the woman encroaching on his personal space, was legally allowed to drink which made her definitely old in his opinion.

"Yeah, I'm fine thanks Debs. Been very busy, you know how it is."

"If you say so hun, I guess you just don't find me sexy no more. Though I did hear your business was doing good," said the platinum blonde as she took a very unladylike swig out of her beer bottle. She'd obviously had been drinking most of the night and Chuck was about to leave her to it, but her last throwaway comment had caught his attention.

"Let me buy you a beer for old times' sake, Debbie." She'd been a good plaything for a while but he preferred fresh meat.

"Sure thing Chuck but make it a double on the rocks, cause I'm certainly worth that." She was

at least going to get a proper drink out of the shite. He'd fucked her a couple of times, promised to keep in touch and then suddenly disappeared.

"Cheers, tell me what have you heard about my business?"

So that's why he bought me a drink, thought Debbie. Subtle as a brick, as ever; no matter, she would tell him what he wanted to know, but it was going to cost him more than a couple of drinks. *Never know, she mused, I might fuck him later as part of the deal.* Despite the way he had treated her she still fancied him immensely.

"Tony, this is Liang." Chuck indicated at the man standing next to him.

"Hi, I'm..." Chuck's brother in law never got the opportunity to introduce himself fully as Liang took a half a step forward and slammed the fingers from his right hand deep into the unsuspecting man's windpipe. The martial arts expert's hands were as hard and as rigid as steel and this speed,

combined with the accuracy of the strike, left Tony reeling on the floor gasping for breath. Chuck was stunned by the man's speed; Liang's arm had moved as a blur. He reckoned that even if he had been prepared for such an onslaught that he would most likely not have been able to stop the impact.

Tony was lying at their feet trying to formulate words, the look of shock and fright in his eyes almost pitiful. There was no remorse to be seen in Liang's cold dark eyes. He snapped his fingers. "Niu, Feng throw this rubbish into the sea."

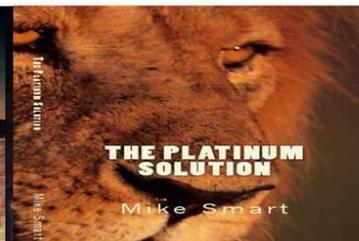
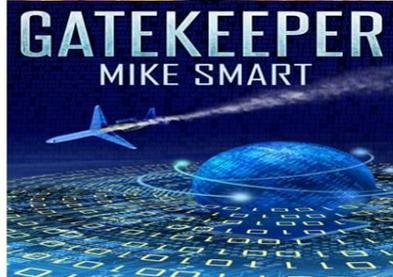
Chuck had no idea what Liang had said, but all became clear when the two men picked up the still struggling man and took him to the edge of the loading bay where they unceremoniously dumped the man into the water.

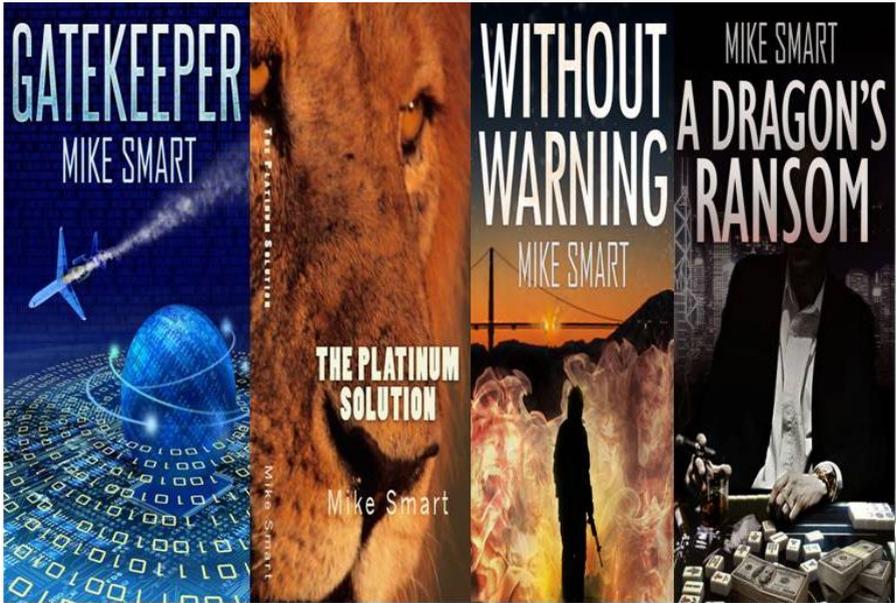
"Problem solved, Chuck?" queried Liang. He felt no remorse for what he had done. Tony may or may not have been responsible for a breach in security, it was not his concern. The man had lived

and operated as a drug dealer; he certainly was no saint, and if one played in a dangerous game then one knew the rules.

Chuck's last sight of his brother-in-law was watching him sink slowly down beneath the calm water in the loading bay and drift, submerged, towards the stern of the ship in keeping with the general - albeit slow - forward motion of the great vessel.

Eliciting no response, if indeed any was necessary, Liang moved towards the control panel. You have a scheduled to keep; I suggest you be on your way."





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