



The Sigma Code Chronicles

The Dao

JW BELL

THE DAO

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THE DAO

The Sigma Code Chronicles
BOOK TWO

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Chapter One

Colonel Noh San-jun tapped his swagger stick on his left hand as he strode down the trail of the Residence. He'd just gotten off the phone with his longtime friend Kim Jong-un, the Chairman of the Workers' Party and Supreme Leader, and headed to the tunnel works to visit the prisoner.

As he marched, his eyes took an inventory of weapons caches. Good. He grunted approval to himself. Kim and he had insisted upon all of them; they'd done it quickly. He reminded himself to try out the digital locks on them. The combinations were all set to Kim's birthday – easy to remember that way.

He approached a line of soldiers, and they snapped to, presenting arms. He raised his stick to return the salute and gave a curt nod. Chosen for their girth, his two aides marched behind him in matched step. They looked like trim Sumo wrestlers and much stronger than him, the pair were impressive. Noh chose them for their prowess, appreciated their obedience, but loved their sadism.

The building before him disappeared into the nearby hill. One aide broke formation, double-timed to the heavy door, and pulled on it. The door creaked. Colonel Noh acknowledged nothing and no one as he strutted through. A minute later, the big door boomed shut behind him.

The three marched down dingy hallways so bare they appeared just as they were – concrete tunnels. Clear bulbs hung from lone wires and illuminated the way just enough to display what a crude dung heap the prison was.

The access doors to the central tunnel system connected most buildings on the Residence: an underground defense passage. Noh had just passed one such entry, its appearance similar to a deep cell, the door of iron crosshatched bars.

Their footsteps clacked on the concrete and reverberated through the tunnel. Noh's nose wrinkled from the smell of rot from a cell as he walked by, and the itch of mildew in the air gave him

the urge to rub his nose. He stopped mid-reach and continued onwards. There were more important things to think of than relieving an itch.

He halted before a door indistinguishable from any other in the building – laced with bars of rusty iron. His hands caressed the stick behind his back, and he scowled through the metal crosshatching at Hahn. The aides remained a couple of meters behind him and stood at attention.

Hahn Kang-min's mind was still slow after waking in his cell, if he could call it waking. The rest he should have enjoyed during the night had never come, only fitful dread. His arms continued to tremble in the way they had when he'd crawled onto his mat to sleep.

The involuntary shaking wasn't from the cold, although the air was crisp. It was warm for early spring.

They will know soon. The thought woke Hahn often during the night, the reason for his restlessness.

The investigators are merciless.

Disgusted, he spat close to the hole in the floor designed for his bodily wastes. They won't stop until they find evidence of discrepancies. Once they begin, they find, always. No matter what you did, they knew.

He grimaced with an internal shrug. Even if they find it, they won't know what it is, or how they should use the information. He almost laughed and would have, except for the welling feeling of *eumyang* approaching: the changing of fortune. There was never an escape from that. The universe flowed like the tones of harmony, each moment relating to every other like the twists of a melody, and the overtone vibrations that resounded through everything, must, and will, eventually balance.

He'd been here a week, maybe two, and his feet had been numb since the first night. They would be useless soon, even if they let him out. The first meal had been pathetic, stale rice, no kimchi. All the food was bland and close to rancid. He hadn't eaten this poorly since he'd gone to science school. The difference was that here the fare never improved.

This prison cared nothing about vermin: neither that the

creatures ate part of every meal, nor that they left feces in it. By now, and because of the vermin, parasites infested Hahn, and if the investigators didn't kill him, the little beasts within would.

The only thing left for him now was to ensure he protected his family.

The clang of the main door echoed down the hallway and the hobnail boots stomping alerted him. Someone came. His trembling increased.

The approaching sounds grew, and his eyes automatically flicked about his small cell, an unconscious attempt at searching for a place to hide. He'd done it countless times since being locked up. Always the same results, too.

There's not even a blanket for cover. Why would I find something to hide behind now?

He knelt on the cold concrete, closed his eyes for another few seconds, and willed some kind of plan into existence. The universe flows with harmony—

The steps echoed louder. His eyes shot to the openings between the iron bars. Boots appeared first. Then Colonel Noh, glaring. Noh's appearance screamed the Supreme Leader's involvement.

This situation is a disaster.

In an instant, a second thought formed. Should I have the missile fly as designed? Was hindsight in this sharp and clear?

His bowels almost let loose. He concentrated hard and held them but not the urine, soaking his pants as he reminded himself of how unimportant he was.

Hahn's eyes refused to move from the terror before him. He tried blinking rapid fire to push his brain into high speed, and his teeth teased his upper lip. But no new plan developed.

Stick to it, Kang-min. The plan. The family depends on the plan.

Noh snorted. "You are so stupid, Hahn."

Simply Hahn? Not even basic politeness — Mister Hahn? Nothing. Hahn felt as if someone had stood on his chest. His head spun, and he struggled to pull in enough air to steady it.

"Did you think our intelligence wouldn't know?"

The twang in Noh's voice hurt Hahn's ears, and for the first time, he thought he detected the hint of a Chinese accent. He perked his ears.

The loathing filled Noh's eyes. "You would do this to our glorious missile program?"

He stuck his swagger stick through one of the openings between bars and ran the leather cap around the square opening. "You risked everything, your country, yourself, your family. There are only two things you can save now – one will be the country."

My family! Save the family. Hahn started a mantra, my family, my wife, the twins. My family, my wife, the twins...

"You will tell us what you did. You will also tell me how to undo those things."

Mustn't talk yet. My family, my wife, the twins...

"I did nothing, Colonel." Hahn bowed correctly to Noh, but as he did, his rectum opened. He blinked several times, swallowed, and squeezed his ass. Hard.

The chuckle bounced off the cell walls. "Shit yourself, did you? You fucking moron." Noh pulled the keys from his pocket, shook them, and jingled them against the bars.

Noh's brows touched above his nose, and he motioned with his head. It was not a nod and carried no respect. Instead, it was a direction for his aides.

The two soldiers took up positions behind him, mirror images of propaganda posters, mean as hell. They could smile after eating horse shit, maybe even the food here. No, Hahn shook his head, and his mouth formed a crooked smile — horse shit, perhaps pig puke, not this food.

"You are laughing now, Hahn?" Noh unlocked the door and stepped back as it screeched open.

The two soldiers watched Hahn as if he were a chicken and they were about to twist the head from its neck.

Their boots sounded in unison as they stepped forward.

Defiance formed on Hahn's face, but his eyes betrayed him, and more feces dribbled.

The two dragged him past Noh and down the tunnel, letting his bare feet scrape the concrete.

After only a meter away from his cage, Hahn's mouth watered after smelling kimchi, the fermented cabbage his captors had dined on last evening. The soldier grabbed his left arm, chuckled, and nodded at Hahn, "So terrified, smells like shit." The other laughed.

My family, my wife, the twins...

At the big entrance, they paused. “Open by order of the Supreme Leader.” The right one kicked a resounding frontal kick. The sound of it boomed like a dull gong in Hahn’s ears. “Open!”

Seconds later, the door creaked, and the dreary sunlight filled the air, too bright for Hahn. They dragged him down the road to the target range. All his senses peaked.

Hahn’s nose smelled everything – the almost frozen ground, hickory smoke from a fire not far away, even boiling ramen that a nearby soldier stirred for breakfast; the garlic and cabbage in it filled his nose. The tree leaves were only budding, but he detected their nutty aroma, heard the scrape of leaves against each other.

Noh pointed at a large wooden frame erected before a massive earthen berm that showed craters and rocks half blown apart. “Place the traitor there.” He turned, pulled on gloves, and placed both hands and the swagger stick, behind him. Positioned, he leaned forward and then back.

My family, my wife, the twins... He labored for breath. My family, my wife, the twins...

Unable to stop trembling and shivering, a cloud of steam came from Hahn’s mouth with each struggle for breath.

Chains reached from the frame to shackles at both wrists and ankles, they spread him like a bat, pinned wide like a trophy. The cold metal bit into his skin, and if the temperature dropped a few more degrees, the metal would freeze to his skin.

He watched Noh stand before him – the winter cap perched on his head, the baton held by gloved hands, and wearing the quilted jacket that bespoke winter. Noh turned to face him, his eyes aglare, with hate and entertainment.

My family, my wife, the twins... My family, my wife, the twins...

The guards marched closer to Noh, who stood by a bench. With cruel insight, Hahn knew the seat was a weapons drawer of the kind that dotted the Residence.

Hahn’s heart almost pounded a hole through his chest. This time his bowels emptied all together. A gun range. This place is a gun range! All the rumors flooded through his memory, the stories of executions.

My family, my wife, the twins... The mantra came back stronger, faster. My family, my wife, the twins...

With a swagger, Noh closed the distance to him. “Hahn. Do you see that small building there, on the side of the little mountain?”

Hahn blinked in the direction Noh pointed. The shack wasn’t hard to see, although it was at a great distance. It had no vegetation around it; the land was bare. Everything had died.

“I will take your family to that building.”

“My family?” He blinked rapid fire. My wife, the twins...

The deadly set to Noh’s eyes branded Hahn’s innards, and the burning chilled him even more.

“What did you do?”

“I—”

“That shack over there is our chemical building, where we test weapons. Tell me what you did, or your family goes in. The current test is anthrax, a new strain that produces symptoms in minutes, yet makes death agonizing.”

“No! I will tell—”

“Yes, you will.” Noh waved toward the small mountain, and Hahn saw movement around the building. “They are your wife and children. As my guests, they will watch your execution. If not, they will test anthrax next.”

The two aides pulled a camouflage net down, unveiling an enormous anti-aircraft gun. They tilted the aircraft killer skyward and fired three times.

The sound pounded his ears, the shockwave convulsing in his chest, and he shat himself again.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

J.W. Bell's life reads like an adventure story. He was a Field Artillery Officer in the Army for ten years, is well-versed in long-range and large-caliber weapons, and is an expert with small arms — handguns, rifles, machine guns, and, oh yes, he trained in explosives and is excellent with hand grenades. His military thrillers use actual terminology, weapons, and military courtesy. He traveled extensively throughout Europe, Asia, and the U.S., living in Hawaii for several years. He coached gymnastics for a time and worked for years as a roughneck in the oilfields of Oklahoma. He became a teacher and holds a lifetime teaching license to teach music and drama. He composed his first symphony and now has a good start on his second. Currently, he lives in Arkansas by himself in a small house on a small acreage where his estranged wife and their ten children live: three boys ages seven to fourteen and five girls ages seven years to seventeen live close by. He has two nineteen-year-old boys living on their own and two older daughters who live in Little Rock with their own families. On his acreage there are four dogs and cats, one pony, and two pet pigs.

If you want to know more, [Click here](#).

Books by J.W. Bell

J.W. Bell primarily writes fiction, thrillers. They have to do with the military or at least several characters having a military background. He has also been known to dabble in other genres.

Fiction

Recall

The Great Zero-Sum

NonFiction

I Am, Therefore I Think

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