

## ***Bambi and The Chopper: Episode 4***

### **What happened to Bambi.**

by Martin Flett

Bambi wakes up to the sound of ocean, the sun on his face and a gentle breeze. Attempting to stand, he's knocked off balance again by the rocking of the floor he finds himself on, which he now realises is attached to a yacht. A yacht which, judging by the distinct lack of visible land nearby, has been sailing for some time.

Looking out over the waves, Bambi can see a speedboat disappearing into the distance. *So I guess that's how I got here*, he thinks.

'Hey dude, looks like you're awake!' calls a man, leaning against the railings of the deck. 'Sorry about all this. It's for your own good, I promise.'

Bambi has adopted his stock look of bewilderment, 'Who are you?'

'A friend. At least, I hope I am.'

Bambi scans the deck; no sign of Chopper.

'Sorry man, we didn't have time to bring your ... partner,' The Friend says. 'Barely even made it away with you! But don't worry, we've made arrangements for his safety. Radio-ed in right before you woke up.'

Bambi manages to find his balance; this is good news. 'Safety?' he asks. 'What's all this about?'

The Friend motions with his hands for Bambi to relax. 'Don't sweat it, man, it's all cool. We'll explain soon enough, just enjoy the ride. There's beers in the cooler downstairs if you fancy another pint...' and he gives a knowing smile.

Deciding a cold drink wouldn't go a-miss in this heat, Bambi heads to the staircase and into the bowels of the yacht.

It's bigger than he imagined; a bar covers the side of the room opposite Bambi, and a couple of sofas are against the adjacent wall. Across from them is a door and the rest of the room is taken up by a dance floor with bar stools skirting the edges like nervous disco-goers, unsure whether to plunge into the middle. There's a large mirror ball above and the floor is made of lit panels, changing colour to the music on the sound system.

There is only one other person here, besides Bambi and a barman, and it's this man who breaks the silence.

'Come on in, dude! Our friend up top told us you were on your way.' He waves a walkie-talkie in the air. 'What you want to drink?'

Bambi's head is spinning from all this.

'Never mind,' the man says, 'you look like you need a beer. Have a seat and I'll get Troy to bring you one over.' He signals to the barman who obliges, retrieving a bottle from the fridge behind him.

Bambi sits next to the man and 'Troy' brings him his drink. Finally he has a minute to catch his breath.

'Just chill, dude,' the man says. 'I can't tell you anything, but the boss'll fill you in,' he adds, with a nod to the staircase where The Friend from the deck has appeared.

He signals to Troy for his usual then calls Bambi over to the sofas. 'Come on, man. I'll explain everything.'

Bambi looks at the man next to him for approval and then heads over.

The speedboat pulls up at a jetty. Its driver disembarks and hurriedly moors the boat before sprinting to the DAF 600 car parked on the promenade. He almost loses his aviator sunglasses from the top of his head as he jumps in the car, catching them on the roof, but they fall onto his nose, perfectly in place on his eyes, as he starts the engine and speeds off in the direction of the golf course. He knows he needs to check the right people have picked up The Chopper, but he could do without the added journey. Time is critical if they're going to gain the upper hand here.

Bambi's new friend has been talking for a couple of minutes. He's explained how he and his 'team' got a tip-off that Bambi and The Chopper had skipped town and headed north. Bambi doesn't really recall this but figures it's not impossible; he knows his memory isn't really reliable after a few pints. And crazy things did seem to keep happening lately.

'So you see,' the Friend continues, 'once we knew you were out in the open, we had to do something. If the Puppet-Master got to you guys first, God knows what might have happened.'

'The Puppet-Master?' Bambi is suddenly on alert. 'What's he got to do with this?'

'He's got more to do with everything than you realise. He's not just a bar-owning, money-laundering dog; he's way bigger than that. This is war, man. And we're leading the resistance.'

Bambi swallows, 'War? What the hell are you talking about?'

'The war. The one going on right now.'

Bambi stares back blankly.

'Don't tell me you don't know about it? The way your two names keep popping up with the Puppet's, we thought you were undercover from the Cheltenham gang or something. We even got the meat from Cruz! He said you guys had been in talking about it with him!'

But Bambi's clueless expression forces The Friend to start at the beginning. He spends the next twenty minutes talking solidly, barely pausing for breath, while Bambi slowly drinks, each sentence needing further Dutch-courage to deal with

Turns out there *is* a war on; a war between the spa towns of England. Rival gangs from Leamington, Cheltenham, Bath, and even the tiny towns of Boston Spa and Woodhall are involved, battling it out beneath the surface of middle-class serenity, each town wanting to stake its claim for spring water supremacy. It's how the Juice Prohibition had started, forcing people to drink more water, and it's why the Puppet was so powerful – he was leading the fight from Leamington and he'd stop at nothing to ensure victory for his town.

But then there were others: those who believed a coalition between the Spas was a better way, that too many people had been hurt, or simply disappeared, and that someone had to put a stop to the Puppet-Master and his ilk. The Friend and his team were from the Boston Spa branch. Bambi and The Chopper's fame, unbeknown to them, had been spreading: they were now a symbol of hope to the rebellion.

And all because of one drunken mistake of a brawl outside The Starsky.

Bambi can't believe it. He needs time to take it in. He needs to talk to The Chopper. *Damn it – The Chopper – What the hell had happened to him?*

'What happened to The Chopper?' Bambi asks.

'Don't worry,' The Friend says, 'he's okay. Our man from The Starsky – he's the one who tipped us off – drove up here to make sure everything was cool. He was gonna meet Chopper and tell him where to go.' At this point, The Friend smiles, like he knows a secret making everything else irrelevant. 'I haven't told you about our secret-weapon. It was quite a coup to get her onboard. She'll be meeting Chopper...' he looks at his watch, '...round about now, I should think.'

"*Secret weapon.*" Bambi mulls it over. 'Is *she* someone I might know?' he asks. His concern for his partner isn't lessened any by the revelation that yet another stranger is breaking into their lives.

'Shouldn't think so,' the Friend says. 'She's been keeping a pretty low profile since defecting to us. You guys are new on the scene, wouldn't expect you to have seen her.'

Bambi asks the obvious question, 'So, who is she?'

'It's probably for the best you don't know.'

And with that, Bambi knows the conversation is over.

He'd checked the golf course, and the Bed and Breakfast. All had gone to plan until then it seemed, but after that The Chopper had gone missing and the driver of the DAF 600 doesn't know where to look.

Because his mind was on other things, because he was driving through a cloud of dust, and because he was still wearing his sunglasses, he didn't see the woman step out into the road, not until it was too late. And now he has no idea what to do. His body flooded with adrenalin from the urgency of his mission, he floors the accelerator and carries on.

He knows it was the wrong thing to do; he glances in the rear view mirror, thinking about going back. But then he sees him, standing helplessly by the side of the road: The Chopper.

He can't believe his eyes. Now he definitely can't stop, how would he explain? And there's nothing to be done. If he stops, it'll look strange, like he changed his mind about hitting-and-running, and that'd be weird. What if she's dead? He'd be locked up. What if she's not? Then there's no need to stop.

All these thoughts rush through the driver's mind and, by the time he's sifted through them, there's a good mile and a half between him and the accident scene. Too late now.

In any case, he's done what he had to do. He found The Chopper and, if that was *her*, then he definitely needs to get back to the yacht ASAP and figure this whole damn mess out with the team.

He leaves the car by the roadside and heads back to the speedboat.

Bambi is managing to relax a little. A couple more people came into the bar-disco room through the other door, presumably from the cabins, and they'd turned out to be pretty cool.

The group of four are talking, wondering whether it'd be too strange to make use of the dance floor with so few of them, when a yell from the deck above reaches them.

The Friend steams down the staircase, shouting as he comes, 'Guys! We've got to go – now!'

The drinkers stop talking, but don't move.

'Come on! This ain't a drill. There's ... a chopper, heading our way!'

Bambi's eyes widen, 'Chopper's here?'

'No, not *The* Chopper, a chopper! A Lynx, I think!'

This gets their attention and the group leaps to their feet.

'What do we do? Got any weapons? Lifeboats?!' says the girl with them.

'The Prof just got back. That Lynx'll have missiles, for sure, and I reckon a speedboat's gotta be a harder target than this. I say we abandon this thing and make a break for it.'

'Hang on, did you say The Prof is back?' asks Bambi.

'Yeah, he'd gone to check on your pal. Now come on, move!'

'How ... when ...?' Bambi asks, but it's no good, his questions fall on deaf ears as the group disappears up the stairs. He decides he'd better follow.

On deck the four crew members are causing enough commotion for a packed cruise liner. The Lynx helicopter is in the distance and approaching, fast. Bambi panics and makes a dash for the boat's side. He sees the speedboat at the other end as the others get it together enough to start making their way down to it by ladder.

'Hey Bambi! Come on! Whether you meant it or not, you're part of this now and we ain't leaving you behind!' calls The Friend.

Bambi sprints the length of the deck and reaches the ladder as The Prof starts up the speedboat engine. Everyone else is on board; the chopper is within range now.

Bambi makes his shaky way down the steps when, in the distance, a roar fills the air. He looks up to see a rocket leaving its berth at the side of the helicopter and loses control of his legs, slipping and falling from the ladder.

He hits the ocean, missing the boat below by inches, and someone – he can't tell who – grabs his arms and pulls him aboard.

The Professor nails the throttle just as the rocket careers into the bridge of the yacht. Wood splinters, glass shatters an explosion rages, but the six escapees emerge from the smoke unscathed, their speedboat skimming the waves, hitting top speed as the chopper above circles around to give chase.

'I hope you've got some moves, man!' one of the other companions shouts at The Prof.

'We can't out run a chopper!' cries another.

Adrenalin courses through the Prof's veins. After the day he's had, nothing will stop him. 'Just watch me!' he yells back.

The speedboat veers right and the passengers lurch left, nearly tumbling into the sea.

'Sorry,' The Prof shouts, 'better hang on back there.'

The helicopter is close now. A man leans out wearing dark glasses, a suit, and aiming a machine gun. He opens fire.

The Prof's skill at the wheel is evident as he steers left ... then right ... dodging the spray of bullets in his wake.

Bambi chances a look: the North Cliff is looming straight ahead, the helicopter behind, very low, its rotors stirring up the ocean below. Bullets rain down on all sides like one of those movies where the bad guys are all hopeless shots and the good guys escape.

At least Bambi hopes that's what it's like.

At the last moment, before the speedboat hits the cliff face, the Prof veers right. The boat power slides across the sea and Bambi can almost touch the cliff itself, they're so close.

The chopper behind turns too, backing out of this particular game of chicken, and comes around in front of them for a head on attack.

The Prof throws the throttle forward once more. He seems to know what he's doing and no one dares to question him. The Lynx helicopter starts to bear down on them.

The Prof calls out, 'Best hold on tight!' and spins the wheel left. 'A little trick I picked up in the DAF 600 earlier!'

With the wheel hard left and the throttle wide open, the speedboat starts turning in circles, gaining speed. The Prof is 'doing do-nuts' in the speedboat, faster and faster, churning the water.

The passengers feel sick, but it's working: the speedboat is whipping up spray, creating a mist that pilot of the Lynx was not expecting.

'Flying through a cloud can be hazardous to the health!' The Prof cries. 'Trust me, I know!'

Like those movie-bad guys, these ones seem to lack common sense. They know all about the cliff face ahead, they should know they need to avoid it again. Maybe it's the unexpected nature of The Prof's actions, or maybe they're just that stupid.

The machine gun fire stops. Bambi assumes the shooter's vision is impaired. And as the chopper passes overhead, The Prof spins the wheel the other way, straightening the boat out before speeding away towards the open sea.

Behind them, the pilot of the Lynx is powerless, pulling on the stick too late, and Bambi, The Professor and their team are powering away from their second explosion of the day.

'Whoa man!' The Friend cries. 'Good thing you can drive!'

'Where the hell did you learn that, dude?' Bambi asks.

'Never mind that,' The Prof says, slowing the speedboat. His hands are trembling at the wheel as the adrenaline leaves his system, the day's events catching up with him.

'I killed her,' he says.

Confusion floods the faces of his passengers.

'Killed who?' The Friend asks. 'Not the crew of that chopper! Man – they were gonna kill *us!*'

'No ... no. Not them,' The Prof says, 'her.' He can barely get the words out, 'The girl. The Puppet-Master's sister.'

The Boston Spa team gave Bambi word on who to contact back in Leamington, and then he drove himself and the Professor – still inconsolable – back to their home town.

As the red DAF 600 pulls up at The Prof's house, everything feels different. All Bambi knows is he needs to find The Chopper and he heads to The Starsky.

No one had ever mentioned the tree house out the back of the pub before...