

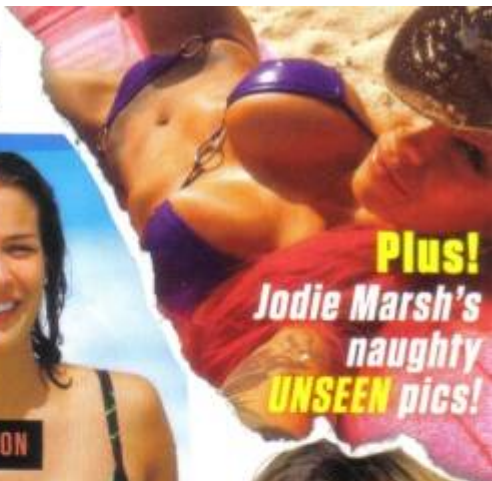
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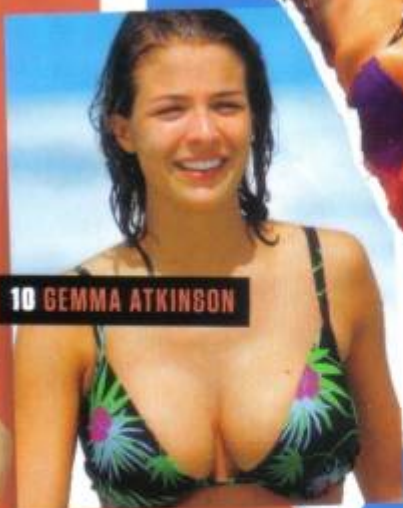
05 SAMMY BRADDY



21 SABINE

08 DAN FIALERO

16 CHANELLE HAYES



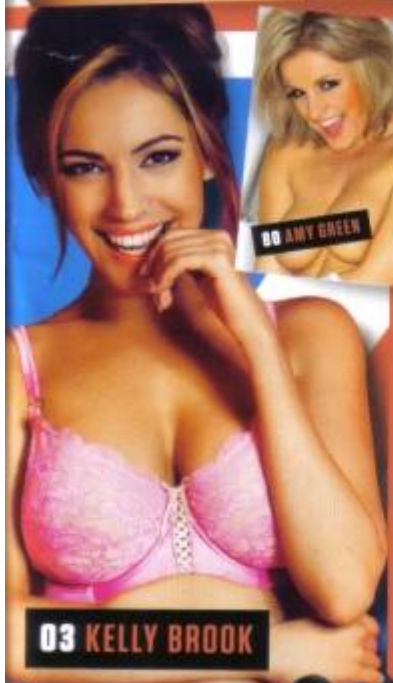
10 GEMMA ATKINSON



45 JESS KINGHAM

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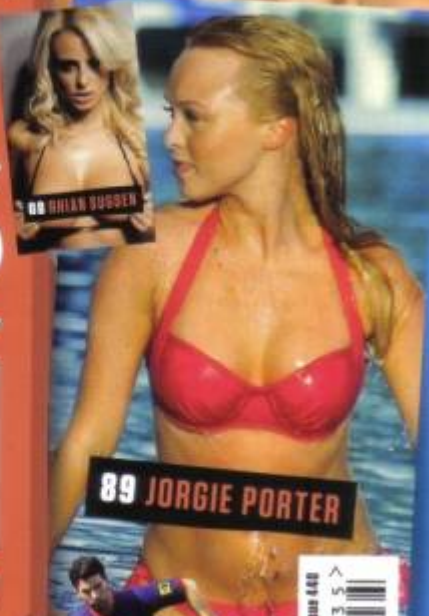
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FROM ROYAL MARINE TO TRIAD!

Working for Hong Kong's Triads is a long way from fighting the IRA in Belfast. But it seems there are more similarities than you might think...

I had been a Royal Marine in combat. I'd fought for my country and seen a guy next to me take three bullets. Now I was the only white guy working for the Chinese Triads in Hong Kong. I was fronting their nightclub and being treated as one of their own. And I loved being in the thick of things."

For most, seeing combat with the Army might be enough excitement for one

lifetime. Not Chris Thrall. Now 42, Plymouth boy Chris spent his early twenties taking on the IRA in Belfast, and then moved on to working for the most powerful organised crime outfit in Hong Kong, the Chinese Triads. Quite a career change...

Hong Kong madness

So how does a man who starts out by serving his country end up working for some big-time criminals? In Thrall's case, it was shockingly simple. After setting up a successful business in his spare time while in the Marines, Chris decided to go full-time with a new business partner in

Hong Kong. It quickly

went belly-up

and suddenly,

he was

desperate

for a job.

His

military

training

meant door

work was

always an

option –

“security

was our

business,

after all” – so

one day he

walked into a

club and was

offered a job on

the spot.

Chris soon

realised some of

the other staff

were following him

home at night. The

reason? The club he

was now working at was

in the Wan Chai district

of Hong Kong, an area

controlled by the Triads.

His employer was the 14K,

the second-largest Triad

group in the world, who

were heavily involved in

drug-trafficking,

prostitution and plenty of

other nasty businesses.

Getting chopped

Once he knew who he was working for, Chris learned the ropes pretty

quickly. “Face’ is a key concept for the Triads,” he tells us. “It’s

something us

Westerners

don’t really

understand

– an intense

pride that

means you

will not let

anyone

diss you.

And if they

do, you

will hold a

grudge

against

them for

the rest of your life.”

In short, the Triads are not people you want to mess with.

“If you commit a wrong against

them, you could be the victim

of a ‘chopping’, where 10 to 20

guys with meat cleavers

ambush you, chop you up and

leave you in a bloody mess. It’s

not intended to kill, it’s just to

send a message. Another

Western doorman I knew was

the victim of a chopping, which

was actually a case of mistaken

identity. He was cut up badly

and almost lost a thumb, but

he didn’t lose face. He was back

on the door three days later,

bandages and all!”

However, the true power of

the men he was with was kept

completely under wraps. Chris

just picked up on things that

were happening around him.

“I knew I was on the edge of

something that went an awful

lot deeper,” he explains. “There

was another doorman called

Dai Su, who was very tall for a

Chinese at 6ft 6in. One night he

wasn’t there. Someone told me

he was a Red Hand, which

meant he was an assassin – he

was off on a job. They would

smuggle him over the border

into mainland China,

he’d carry out

a hit and then

be smuggled

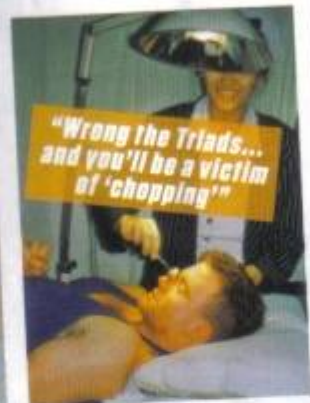
back into Hong

Kong, where he

would come

back and work

as normal.



“Wrong the Triads... and you'll be a victim of 'chopping'”



Wan Chai: Hong Kong's gangland

“Most of the time, these guys just communicate purely with their eyes, not with their mouths. They were never going to chat directly to a Westerner about these things, but I would hear things second- or third-hand. Someone would come into the club and stuff a piece of paper into your hand with the name of a racehorse on it, which was going to win a fixed race later that day. You were privy to it simply because you worked with the Triads. Those were the perks.”

Military life

So what is it that made this ancient Chinese criminal organisation trust a random Westerner? Chris thinks it’s all down to his former life as a Royal Marine.

“My military background meant I fitted in. I just stepped sideways from one criminal underground into another”

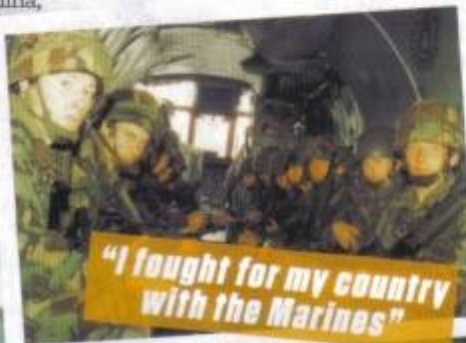
“My military background in Northern Ireland meant I fitted in. There was one night in the club where two young Triads had a big fight. My first instinct was just to mop up the blood in case the police turned up. Some people might have lost their heads, but that was my reality. I had just stepped sideways from one criminal underground into another.”

In Northern Ireland, Chris had seen his buddy take three bullets to the chest. So the fact he wasn’t fazed by the work of the Triads shouldn’t be all that surprising.

“The direct parallel was the surrealism of it all. Things happened in these two different places where I was thinking, ‘How am I going to explain this to people?’ Plus my training meant I was able to look at someone in Belfast and know if they were IRA or not, so in Hong Kong, I was always aware of who it was around me.”

Chris’ time with the Triads was over when he got hooked on crystal meth (“I knew I was addicted and it was going to end in tears”) and he came back to Plymouth to sort out his life, where he now works as a drugs councillor. He’s written a book called *Eating Smoke* and even helped make new game *Sleeping Dog* – set in the Triad underworld – as realistic as possible. “Once I saw a clip, it took me right back to the Wan Chai gangland. It was like déjà vu.” Clearly there is still a part of him that misses the buzz...

→ Chris Thrall was expert consultant on *Sleeping Dogs*, out now on PC, PS3 and Xbox 360



“I fought for my country with the Marines”