

Snakes in the Jungle, Special Operations in War & Business, Jim Truscott, Zeus Publications, Gold Coast, 2015

Review by Neil Gledhill

Jim Truscott's autobiography 'Snakes in the Jungle' provides an insight into the motivation and achievements of one of Western Australian rock climbing's biggest and most passionate contributors.

"Whilst the title 'Snakes in the Jungle' can sometimes be associated with evil, in the eyes of the Chinese someone called a Taipan in business is one highly regarded as a top-class operator or entrepreneur and this is a description that fits Jim perfectly. Often considered unconventional, Jim possesses a typical Special Forces style of thinking with a very considered and positive attitude and the ability to think laterally, weighing up all the options in any circumstances." Bruce Parker, CEO, HMG, Nason Group

Jim has done 100's of first ascents in Western Australian climbing; from the most southern tip, to the Pilbara and beyond in the north. Some are barely boulder problems and some are 100's of metres long. The routes span urban backyards, rotting quarries, parrot bush infested boulder hills and majestic southern granite monoliths. The routes are in every style; delicate, slabby, easy, desperate, over-graded, under-graded, three star classics and utter abominations. The one thing they all shove in your face is Jim's passion for climbing new routes. This has been Jim's greatest contribution to Western Australian climbing. In a community often jaded with the state's lack of rock opportunities, Jim's skill and hard work in finding, doing and promoting new routes is unmatched.

Jim's autobiography reveals that rock climbing is just one facet of this highly motivated and thinking man. 'Snakes in the Jungle' shows how Jim's interest in the risk taking side of outdoor fun was instigated and developed. Perhaps it is not surprising that Jim pursued a military career, no doubt a considered choice to provide ample opportunities for fun in the sun and to keep his mind working with engineering and leadership challenges. As Jim's military career develops, so does his "instinct for dissent". The text is no Andy McNabb or Tom Clancy machine gun narrative. In fact Jim probably undersells the risk, tension and achievement of some of his military adventures. More time is spent dwelling on his contributions to military doctrine during his time with various military units including the SAS.

Importantly, many of Jim's roles show him strongly assimilating with the natives. Whether they be indigenous Australians, Indonesian commandos, East Timorese Falantil guerrillas or tribesman from Borneo, Jim's affinity and interest for their culture is often evident. He learns their language, their skills and their history. These local communities very frequently respect Jim's involvement and he is held in high regard. Often the conduit for these relationships is Jim's exploration of Australian military history. He re-enacts significant voyages from Operation Rimau, travels through Borneo and visits Australian battle fields in Vietnam and Europe.

“It is strange that the 7 ‘D’ delights of mountaineering – death, danger, disease, deprivation, disharmony, disunity and despair do not include the preceding paperwork” Jim Truscott

Jim’s military career has him dodging paperwork intensive roles whilst receiving his fair share of bollockings attracted by his ‘instinct for dissent’. Clearly the threat of yet more paperwork did not dissuade Jim from pursuing an admirable mountaineering career, each adventure often flush with the 7 ‘D’ delights. Highlights would be four seasons in New Zealand and trips to Balls Pyramid, Carstensz Pyramid, Broad Peak, Aconcagua, Nandi Devi East and Australia’s 1988 Everest expedition.

“It was just our luck Ganesh had a human body, but at times the head of an angry elephant as we were soon to learn” Jim Truscott

Having achieved considerable success in the hills, cliffs and jungle’s, the later part of the book deals with Jim’s boardroom and corporate adventures. His Special Forces mind still longing for stimulation and challenge, Jim embarks on a journey into the business world.

“I recall the utmost desire to punch a senior manager from a large public company in the face” Jim Truscott

Unsurprisingly, Jim faces some slightly different challenges. He attacks these with typical vigour and he has the scars to prove it. This section of the book perhaps reflects Jim’s character even better than the stories of climbing and soldiering. His mind is tested, his will is tested and he doesn’t always succeed. Yet again, the passion for what he believes comes through and ultimately leads to success.

It’s satisfying to see how Jim has managed to harness the lessons from his soldiering skills and countless outdoor adventures into developing a post military career.

For those of us who spend too much time in front of our computers, ‘Snakes in the Jungle’ might just help focus your outdoor climbing or Special Forces skills on business success; or not. Worst case, it will motivate you to get out there, have an adventure and do something with passion!