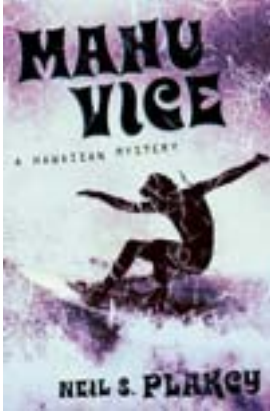


## Excerpt from *Mahu Vice*



*Mahu Vice* begins with the death of a young Chinese boy in an arson at a shopping center once owned by Kimo’s father—a place readers might recognize from the first books in the series. Kimo discovers, as he works once more with fire investigator Mike Riccardi, that there is unfinished business between them. In this excerpt, Kimo spends some time with Mike and realizes that the case may be tied to his past in more ways than just the location of the fire.

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On my way home, Mike called my cell. “I’ve got a lead,” he said. “You going to be home tonight?”

“I’m on my way there now,” I said, then regretted it. I was having enough trouble dealing with Mike on neutral ground, with others present. What was I doing inviting him over? And what was he doing asking?

It was just after five, the height of rush hour, and the sun was setting. The streets were alive with neon and with car stereos blasting hip hop, as the tropical night descended rapidly. The air was hot and humid, without a hint of a trade wind. The slow traffic and intermittent showers made me edgy, combined with the sense that our case wasn’t moving forward either. Or maybe it was just knowing that I was going to see Mike.

When I pulled into my parking space, he was sitting in his truck on the street, the same one with the flames painted on the side that he’d been driving when we dated. “I had an idea,” he said, getting out of the truck and walking toward me. “I cross-referenced a bunch of unsolved arsons, and I think I found a pattern.”

He showed me a list of ten arsons over the past two years, but the sun was

setting and it was too dark to see clearly, so I led him upstairs to my apartment. Fortunately, I'd cleaned up on Sunday so most of the clothes and sports equipment were put away, and there were no crusty dishes in the sink or dirty underwear on the floor to embarrass me.

He sat down at my kitchen table, and I got us a pair of Longboard lagers from the fridge—only realizing as I popped the caps that if Mike was an alcoholic, based on that vodka in his water bottle, it was a bad idea to give him a beer.

He accepted the bottle gratefully, and took a deep swig. "Long day," he said.

I sat across from him and looked at the list. The other fires had been at a massage parlor in Waikele, a quick mart in Kaneohe, a coffee shop near the airport, a Christian religious shop downtown, and a lingerie shop in Chinatown. "They were all places where the business closed down before the fire," Mike said. "I want to see if there's anything else that connects them. Business licenses, phone numbers, that kind of thing. You have any ideas?"

There was something familiar about that lingerie shop, and I struggled to make the connection. Then it hit me. "I know this shop."

Mike looked at me, his eyebrows raised. "My old partner from Waikīkī, Akoni, and I went there when we were investigating Tommy Pang's murder. Tommy owned the place. I wonder if any of these others were owned by tong guys."

"Can you run them by your Organized Crime unit tomorrow?"

"I will." Something was tickling around the edge of my brain. "The pharmacist's wife told me that she thought the old Chinese woman at the clinic was named Norma. And at this lingerie shop, there was another old Chinese woman named Norma." I reached over to the sofa, picked up my laptop and brought it to the table, where I turned it on. "If I can pull up the report online, maybe I can find her last name, and we'll see if we can connect her to both places."

Mike scooted his chair around next to me and looked on as I logged on to the

department's intranet and searched for the right files. Being so close to Mike unleashed a wave of pure longing, followed by sadness. I had loved him, and I'd been devastated to find out that he'd cheated on me, thinking at the time that it meant he hadn't loved me the way I'd loved him. I'd over-reacted—but if we hadn't broken up over that incident, something else would have happened to tear us apart.

Mike still wore the same lemon-scented cologne, and I wondered if he'd reapplied it in his truck while waiting for me to pull up. What did he want from me? Why couldn't this meeting have waited until the next morning, and included Ray?

I multi-tasked-- talking to Mike, searching the files, and at the same time considering Mike's motives. I'm no computer geek; I leave that to Harry Ho. It took me a lot of searching, because I wasn't giving it my full attention, to pull up the reports from Tommy Pang's murder.

It wasn't an investigation I was happy to recall, since it was the one that had dragged me out of the closet two years before. But I found Norma Ching's name in one of our reports. "You think this might be the same old woman?" Mike asked.

"Worth checking," I said. A few minutes later, I'd run out of options. There was no listing for Norma in the phone book, or in Yahoo's people search, and she had no criminal record.

Tommy Pang, who had owned the lingerie shop, was my Uncle Chin's illegitimate son. Would his widow, my Aunt Mei-Mei, have known Norma? I looked at my watch. It was dinner time, and I knew if I showed up at her house she'd ply me with delicious food. Mike, too, if he was along for the ride.

"Want to take a trip up to St. Louis Heights with me?" I asked.