

## The Silent Watchman

### Part 7. Escalation

#### Sunday Sentinel Book Reviews

WASHINGTON, DC – Tomorrow, at the weekly luncheon of Washington’s Chapter of the National Press Club, Marcello Barcqe, award-winning author based in Mexico City, returns to discuss his latest book, co-authored with one of Europe’s top investigative reporters, Arianna Lentz, Point-Counterpoint: The Militarization of the War on Drugs. The book explores the growing employment of military-style combat forces by both the drug cartels and local/federal law-enforcement organizations in the escalating battle for control of the illicit drug trade in North America, and the growing threat in Europe as Latin American drug lords seek to expand their markets. Every bit as scintillating as his previous best-seller, Nexus: Cartel Cash, Terrorist Tactics, and Social Angst, Barcqe’s newest assessment, augmented by the long-time expertise of one of Europe’s most experienced observers of international terrorism and its methods, adds detailed insight into the increasingly well-orchestrated violence on both sides of the law in one of the most important societal conflicts of our time. The Sentinel also contains a feature article with the same title.

#### Previously

Simon Stoddard sat quietly, staring into the depths of his exquisite *Deus Ex Machina*, searching for a message that would guide his thoughts as he wrestled with the decision he must make by the end of the day: Should he or should he not abandon his usual role as counselor and advisor with all the protections of an attorney serving a client perceived to be in violation of a law, or setting-up an intricate organization to shield a client from scrutiny by any one of a number of international agencies, to take a more active position as part of an international owner/management team conducting the business activities that, in the role of attorney, he would be hiding so well and professionally?

In representing his clients, Simon did not depend upon loopholes in the statutes; as a matter of fact, he did not believe that loopholes existed. He believed that laws were written and published in black on white, saying what they said with syntax and vocabulary that simply meant what it said. He would accede to interpretation and precedence in case law, but he considered such to be merely an extension of the law-making process. Whatever lay within those parameters was *the law*, and was legal and proper under *the law*, and was not to be thought of as the pejorative “loophole.”

So, his hesitation was not based upon the law; it was, rather, based upon management of the not inconsiderable risks attendant to responsibility for decisions by himself, his associates, or his agents, as an owner/manager. His behavior as an officer of the court was questioned occasionally but not openly challenged legally or ethically, and his shield was the confidentiality of the attorney-client relationship, and his power was that of mastery of the law, and, of course, the insider who knew much about many in high places of public and legal exposure. Simon Stoddard was not a beloved man, but he was trusted and respected, and more than just occasionally, feared.

The decision he faced was monumental and could lead to dangerous outcomes. As Devon Xander had said, he could be drawn inextricably through a black hole into the mire of the “dark side,” defined diffidently by Simon himself as no more than another universe where business remained simply business. But, he was not so naïve as to believe that the business of the dark side did not differ from that of the side of law and order. And, he was not certain (beyond a shadow of a doubt) that he would be as safe and his position as secure as in his present circumstances.

So, Simon Stoddard sat quietly staring into the depths of his exquisite *Deus Ex Machina*, waiting for the message to emerge before the end of the day.

Previously

“It’s done, Devon. I’ve crossed the Rubicon, cut the cord. No more Bernard Sampson for me. After this project, I’m finished with this bureaucratic horse scat. I’m going back to being a cop, or loose on the mean streets, or anything besides dealing every day with myopic viewpoints and narrow-minded politicians.”

Malcolm Garfield was briefing Devon Zander on his current project and Devon’s role in it. He knew that involving Zander was the tip of the iceberg; that Zander brought with him assets that he did not know but thoroughly appreciated in the working environment the two of them were always immersed in. And, he had another, more personal, reason for telling Zander that he was retiring at the end of this particular project.

“I’m telling you this for two reasons: First, you will be working with someone else on your next assignment with this office. My retirement has not been announced yet, but my successor has been selected and will accompany us on our trip south of the border. You’ve worked with him before, but I won’t tell you officially who it is until I am 100 percent sure of his

appointment. He understands that my effectiveness may be compromised if our Latino counterparts know that this is my last hurrah, so he, the rhetorical all-of-mankind 'he', will play out the role, take in as much as he can, and deal with us privately as peers. Make no mistake, I am his superior officer on this caper, and we'll use his mind like the steel trap it is; but, I want this to be a smooth operation. Second, at the end of the day I want to ride off into the sunset with your crew. My connections will continue, and I think they will be a lot more useful because I won't be handcuffed by agency policies and procedures. If this transition plays out the way I think, we will be the cutting edge for my replacement, and any number of others I've met over the years.

"I haven't mentioned this to Simon yet; I wanted to know what you think, and, if it suits you, for you to bring it up with him.

"That's it. It's a big deal, so I want you to take some time to mull it over. Please, though, if you talk with others, make sure you can trust them to keep it just between us until I make the move and the change is officially announced.

"Now, get out of here. The director is coming in with one of his Senate staff wonks to tell me to be a 'good boy' in this Central America situation. I'll be in touch."

Zander left through Garfield's private back door as the arrival of his next visitors was announced. He was only slightly surprised at Garfield's coming retirement; he was far more intrigued by the fervor of Garfield's interests in the future. Zander wanted to continue the association with Garfield, and he knew, or expected, Simon Stoddard to share his enthusiasm for maintaining the ties. Amos Sanson, Jack Kavanaugh, and especially the openly skeptical Lillian de Vizcaya, would recognize the potential assets, but they would insist upon thoroughly examining all the potential liabilities before they agreed among themselves to a "conditional" partnership. After all, they had operated in the fog from the dark side to the light for much longer than he had known them, and they would think long and hard about exposing themselves to anyone with Garfield's law enforcement credentials and contacts. Malcolm Garfield probably imagined that he would be vetted before being accepted into Zander's "crew," but Zander doubted that Garfield realized the full extent of Amos Sanson's apprenticeship program. Zander himself had not realized the full extent of Amos's process until Rosada Angel Jesus had described her observations during Zander's journey "from recruit to master craftsman" under Sanson's exacting scrutiny. "Another facet of the mysterious Rosada," mused Zander to himself.

He felt a tingle of excitement at the prospect of discussing Malcolm Garfield's proposal with her across the coffee table in the front window of her shop. Sanson, Kavanaugh, and de Vizcaya: that day would come soon enough.

Pausing at the opening to the long, narrow cobblestone street, the elderly gentleman peered into the momentarily sunlit distance. Sun-light brightened the walkway only briefly each day when the sun aligned directly with the street bounded on both sides by three and four-story walk-up buildings, small shops at street level and a mix of apartments and offices above. The day was cool enough that the soft cloth glove on his right hand did not seem out of place.

He was on a quest, first to find the bookshop of Donald Quixote Alvaria-Iverson, then to examine a rare illuminated manuscript of the *Don Quixote de La Mancha*. The manuscript had been, or so it was said, copied by hand by the scholarly priest-confessor to an aristocratic Castilian officer who had provided the artistic illumination and illustrations for the manuscript. The two, priest and soldier, had spent every free moment during their service to the Spanish conquerors of Mexico working on the manuscript. One-of-a-kind, if authentic, the manuscript could be of considerable value. It had been brought to his attention by Rosada Angel Jesus, who had learned of it first-hand during her government service in Latin America when she had sought the expertise of the professor from the Universidad de Guanajuato and the aging Alvaria-Iverson had recognized her ken for Spanish and Latin American writers. She visited Alvaria-Iverson's shop frequently, becoming known on the street as "La Aprendiz de Don Quixote." For the moment content in "retirement," Amos Sanson was looking forward to meeting the rare-book dealer.

The delicate ring of a bell announced his entrance into the shadowy interior of the bookshop. Immediately a gentleman who looked remarkably like Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra appeared by his side.

"Senor Sanson?" The words came softly and clearly, and with a degree of expectation that the inquiring inflection would be answered. "I have been awaiting your arrival with great interest."

“Yes, Senor Alvaria-Iverson, as have I. You have been the object of my professional curiosity since our mutual friend suggested that I visit your shop. The Castilian manuscript has interested me for some time; her suggestion was most welcome.”

“Yes, the Castilian manuscript. She told me of your interest during my visit to your country for her tribute to Borges. The conference was stimulating and very well organized; it reminded me of my best days as a teacher. And, if it is not offensive to you, please address me simply as ‘Don Quixote’; my friends often think I have slipped into that identity as the years have advanced.”

“Very well, Don Quixote, I am honored by your friendship.”

“Please, then, step into my work room.” With that, “Don Quixote” led Sanson through an armored door into a climate-controlled warehouse, and directly to a glass-encased “clean room” of enviable proportions. “This is my domain, my castle, and very, very few have been admitted. You come with La Apprendiza’s imprimator and are welcome. My assistant has laid out the Castilian Manuscript for your examination. We will leave you to your work. If you have need of us, press the green button by the clean-room door. You will need one of us to open the doors.”

“Gracias, mi Amigo. I have long anticipated this moment.”

“No hay de que, Senor.” Senor Alvaria-Iverson and his assistant left Sanson to visit the Castilian Manuscript.

Two hours later, Sanson pressed the green button and the assistant ushered him through the waning afternoon light to Senor Alvaria-Iverson’s desk near the street entrance to the bookshop. “I have concluded my examination, Don Quixote, and in due course, I think I will present you with an impressive offer. Buenas tardes, Senor.” And, with a jingle of the bell, he left.

Arianna Lentz looked up from her computer screen and spoke to Marcello Barcque as he entered her study in the bungalow under the trees lining the sun-drenched beach bordering their Caribbean hideaway.

“Check this, Marcello. Belgian counterterrorism operatives just took down a Jihadist who, according to verified reports, was planning to assassinate or kidnap for ransom a very influential, highly-placed financial executive suspected by authorities of involvement with drug

cartel money laundering on the Continent. The authorities had been tipped by someone inside a ring of narcotics importers, and were able to grab the guy off the street without any collateral damage to passers-by or patrons of the sidewalk cafes that lined the street. A smooth operation to say the least. The Jihadist was a former French Foreign Legion paratrooper who was linked with the mercenary trade and known to have access to some pretty heavy weaponry, so they snatched him quickly before he could draw or run. My contact believes that the police were probably tipped because the guy was about to take out an important link in the drug-terrorism money chain, someone the authorities were unobtrusively observing, and sever a pretty tight association between terrorists who need money and know how to spend it and drug lords who have money to buy whatever they want. The police always seem to be just nibbling at the cheese, either because they don't know the whole story or can't substantiate their cases; and, they don't like poachers on their turf. A different view of the "protection racket": the cynics among my colleagues believe that the observed are well aware of the observers, and pay handsomely to protect their liaisons and maintain the illusions. She has information from a reliable source that the drug side of the deal is linked to a Latin American consortium operated out of the free-trade zone in Colon, but she can't corroborate it. She wonders whether I can help with the Caribbean end."

"That fits pretty well with our investigation," replied Marcello Barcqe, "and correlates with our information from this side of the Atlantic. The Jihadist's link with the Foreign Legion plays well into our theme of militarization of drug operations on both sides of the law. Did you receive a photograph of the guy? I think Malcolm Garfield got a lot of face-recognition imagery when he sent Devon Xander to check the PM camp in Central America and the pharm plant in Spain. We already have verifiable links with law enforcement and private security services. If we can put this former paratrooper into the camp, we can strengthen our inferences and strongly suggest a link between the camp and terrorism. Such a link would be valuable when combined with the growing concern for militarizing the wars on drugs and terror. Some in the United States are speculating about military weaponry and tactics on police forces, the changing concept of posse comitatis, and threats to civil discourse; hyperbole probably, but politicians and the Fourth Estate in Los Estados Unidos are easily spooked, and the interested parties have a lot of incentives to feed their appetite for 'balanced' speculation.

“We do need to discuss whether your ‘contact’ is a source or a collaborator. I am always open to a reliable source, subject to validation of course, but taking on a partner is another matter. Can you keep her at arm’s length?”

“I believe I can. At no time in the past has she been more than a cultivated source. So I think we can deal fairly with her on mutually beneficial terms. I have some trade goods that should satisfy our relationship without opening any questions about collaboration on Point-Counterpoint. In addition to the expansion of Latin American drug cartel interests in EU markets, increasing radical Islamic recruitment of well-educated but grossly underemployed young Muslims in Europe provides quite capable human resources for both terrorism and drug peddling in the dancing landscape of the Arab world and the Continent.

“Once again, modernization unsheathes its double-edged sword. This is the second time I’ve gone through a wave of terrorism linking east and west in Europe, and the war against drugs has provided the same nurturing environment for illicit narcotics that the US 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment provided for the Mafia during prohibition. Perhaps the *Young Turks* on all sides in the wars against drugs and terrorism can see opportunities when they assess the risks and rewards of going to war. We know that some in the top echelons are perfectly willing to send the cannon fodder into battle, and rake in the spoils that litter the landscape. And the PMFs, drones and arms dealers are waiting in the wings for their fifteen minutes on stage.

“It may seem a bit gauche of me, Marcello, but I think the powers that be on both sides of the law and order fence are serving up a cornucopia of food for thought, and jet-black ink for our pens.”

“Arianna, my love, your mix of metaphors is delightful, and unerring. In dealing with your colleague, I’ll follow your lead. By the way, I have some intriguing information concerning Malcolm Garfield.”

And so their conversation continued down this new, and as yet unrevealed, path.

Devon Zander, once again in the comfortable familiarity of Rosada Angel Jesus’ coffee shop, continued relating to her his conclusions from his last meeting with Malcolm Garfield.

“Malcolm is still a cop, Rosada. I think he’ll have a tougher time adapting to our world than I had. I was a border cop, up to my neck in the hot water of drug dealing, the daily grind of the low life of cross-border affairs; and, I had a pretty deep involvement in one stage of The

Troubles. Up from the streets is not the same as in from the Georgetown brownstones. I saw stuff in Kosovo that chilled me to the bone. Excepting a few short-term investigations that were pretty well limited by local authorities to formal roles for American investigators on foreign soil, Garfield hasn't lived in that side of the game, or at my level on the street.

“Recently, when he and I talked with Marcello and Arianna in Washington, Arianna showed us a picture of a bomb and asked whether I had seen anything like it in Kosovo. I told her the only thing I knew about hand-made bombs in Kosovo was the call number for EOD. Malcolm was not familiar with the device. I was, but I recognized it as a Provisional IRA product from an earlier time. She is fishing for something, but she isn't telling us what. Malcolm will have to accept that we are always trading and cutting deals with perps, informants, and others on pretty much the same level, not from the moral or legal high ground.

“And, I am not sure all of the people we deal with will appreciate the association with a former federal cop. I get an occasional cold shoulder because I'm a cop, even though I've passed through Amos' apprentice program and have been anointed by Simon.

“In a couple of days, Amos, Simon, and I are getting together to talk about Malcolm. I intend to ask Simon about rumors that someone who looks a lot like him is getting pretty directly involved in the programs we investigated last time out. Part of that is whether having two cops on the payroll is in Simon's best interests, particularly given that Malcolm and I still have more than a little bit of “cop” in us. Amos and Simon have been operating in the fog for so long that right and wrong don't always come into the picture. Malcolm and I may not be there yet.”

“And,” replied Rosada, “Amos has been going through his own personal reassessments. Not too long ago, he seemed to be on his way out but he came back in. The times are changing, Devon. Don't forget to check your own 360 in three dimensions.”

“The term used recently to describe the inter-regional conflagration among cartels is 'Balkanization.' Our consortium is disintegrating, consumed in the flames spreading throughout Mexico.” So began the current Sinaloan as he opened an emergency meeting of the three-cartel drug Consortium in its warehouse in the Colon free-trade zone in Panama.

“The experiment is over. It has been unsuccessful in the plazas and on the streets, and threatens our organizations in the regions. Our ability to cooperate in this room cannot be sustained in our regional organizations because we are unable to prevent the insidious



undermining from below. We have experienced defection within our own immediate family: remember the experience with our operations chief surrounding the partial success at Nogales. Our own policies aimed at strengthening the paramilitary capabilities of our street soldiers have contributed substantially to the disintegration: they are better, and we are the poorer for it.

“Finally, the political environment is more tumultuous. The United States has increased its efforts to interdict, both directly and indirectly, through cooperation with national authorities in Latin America. The drones that threaten terrorist leaders in Asia and Africa are as close to us as to them. We must look after our own interests, individually. Certainly graft and corruption remain in our arsenal, but they appear unable to control the American executive authority in its war with us.

“I intend to terminate my relationship with the Consortium, withdraw my financial support for the projects in Spain and the four countries, and reestablish my position along the border with los Estados Unidos. I say this to you as a mark of my respect, the good faith we have maintained among us, and our civility during the period of our cooperation. The experiment has run its course, and current conditions suggest that the results are not favorable. Another time, perhaps, but not now.

“Therefore, I recommend that we accept the offer for the projects, allow our agent to dispose of the returns on our investments as previously provided in our contingency plans, and ... and I say this with a mind tortured by memories and lost hopes ... return to the past.”

Choosing not to look the Sinaloan in the eyes, the other two gentlemen curtly nodded assent.

With that, the only man to speak during the brief conference was instantly surrounded by his bodyguards, and walked briskly out of the room.

Simon Stoddard was pleased.

His plan for taking control of the Consortium’s investments in Central America and Spain was proceeding just as he had designed. The group of PMF CEOs he had formed was not just interested but had fully subscribed the acquisition price. He was chief counsel, the role he coveted most. In it, he could guide development of the enterprise while retaining the lawyer-client relationship. He had the power, provided he could hold their trust. Some of them were additions to his stable of clients, but they were linked organizationally, and especially

financially, to his more established clientele. Stoddard was confident that the principal investors would keep tight reins on the new members.

To establish the reality of control, he had cultivated his position with that inner circle of principals, and had structured the organization to make them the Executive Board with powers to make decisions binding upon the whole; not unusual in itself but, rather, in the nature of the decisions. The Executive Board was his client, and the associations among its members were characterized by their passage through attorneys who could protect themselves and their clients through attorney-client privilege; links that could be severed selectively should the need arise. The outer ring of Board members and investors was more exposed, but they were no less distanced from the inner Board and themselves than were the inner Board from each other.

Financial arrangements were arcane. Stoddard knew that old rules of international finance were changing, and that a number of countries could (and likely would) meander covertly through the dark side of cyber space and the dancing landscape as readily as overtly in the light of day. So he established the organization and investments within defensible bounds. The finance and organization could be discerned; but, after brutally difficult and expensive investigations, authorities (or anyone else with the power and reach) would discover that everything met the letter of the law. Simon Stoddard was master of his domain and confident in his belief in no such thing as loopholes.

Professionally and ethically, he was satisfied that the facilities in Central America and Spain could be owned and operated legitimately, and their legitimacy could be defended legally. Financially, they were expected to operate at a profit sufficient to retain the interest of the outer circle of investors (perhaps requiring an occasional bit of convincing to remain content with their ROI) but not at a rate of return generally sought by the inner circle, the Executive Board. The members of the Executive Board expected to profit along with the other investors, and to promote various interests in various ways within their own risk-management strategies. Stoddard's design was such that an occasional rotten limb could be pruned without damage to the tree.

Simon Stoddard was pleased.

“A new dimension has been added to the discussion of American imperialism,” began Marcello Barcqe as he opened his daily phone conference with Arianna Lentz. “Don Quixote Alvaria-

Iverson, an aging scholar from the university in Guanajuato, has emerged as the ‘intellectual’ quoted most often by opponents of greater US involvement in internal anti-drug and terrorism activities in Latin America in general and Mexico and Central America in particular. An expert in the history of Spanish and US presence in Latin America, he describes Spanish colonialism as ‘imperialism,’ and US exploitation as ‘hegemony,’ though ‘Yankee imperialism’ is usually the way it comes out in arguments from coffee houses in the plazas to capitols throughout the region. I have found no record of his direct involvement in anti-American activities and he refuses to comment on his influence. I’m certain, however, that we can use this together with the thoughts of other ‘intellectuals’ to add depth and substance to Point-Counterpoint.”

From her hotel in London, Arianna replied, “That’s great news, Marcello. European and Middle Eastern thinkers have written a lot of philosophical stuff to justify their actions and spread their ideas. Adding respected commentaries by Latin Americans punctuates the worldwide nature of drug trafficking, terrorism, and security contractors. We can do a chapter that will go a long way toward making our book more than just a passing fancy on the New York Times best-seller list.

“My contacts here are all abuzz over rumors of the collapse of the Colon drug consortium. Have you picked up any information about that in DC or Mexico City? A related topic they couple with news of the disintegration of ‘the great experiment’ is how it might affect a pending deal for acquisition of the PMF training camp and the pharmaceutical plant in Bilbao. Josalyn is pushing pretty hard for current information and a feature article. I can put her off a bit for a feature, but she wants to scoop the competition and is offering full byline recognition in addition to EPS cash for up-to-date reporting as the drama unfolds. This is a great opportunity to penetrate EU news markets, Marcello. Can we put something in her hands soon?”

“I’ve got a piece in the word processor now. By tomorrow morning, early, you should have a solid draft. It will include news and a brief commentary concerning the upcoming conference that, and this is confidential for the moment, will be Malcolm Garfield’s last. His retirement will not be announced until the delegation returns to Washington after the conference. Off-the-record, though, ‘unidentified sources,’ are not confused about it. They just don’t want to undermine his authority at the negotiation table.

“I’m going to Nogales for a day or so on my way home. Something significant is going down, Arianna. Our patience will be rewarded handsomely.”

Amos Sanson had been on station for some time, becoming intimately familiar with, and no less importantly, becoming an intimate part of the landscape. In addition to checking the meeting locations, hotels, and routes, he was watching for the pre-op reconnaissance that would be performed by folks who might be planning an attack on Malcolm Garfield's team during the four-country discussions centering on the potential downsides of the private military and security training camp. Garfield was focused on the increasing militarization of drug cartel and law enforcement operations; others in the US delegation would be looking into whether trainees were part of terrorist or counter-terrorism organizations in Latin America, and into the growing importance of Central America as a transshipment point for drugs moving into North America and Europe.

He had already reported the presence of other counter-surveillance teams who he thought were probably detected by cartel and terrorist pre-op scouts, and had provided surveys of routes in and around the places he was instructed to check. Guanajuato is a beautiful mix of old and new that tourists and residents love but security teams can find daunting. And security teams seemed to be everywhere.

Among the personas Sanson presented to the residents of the city was one he affected with a disguise that was not difficult to maintain, that of "dealer in rare books, maps, and manuscripts." One of his interests in this operation was Don Quixote Alvaria-Iverson, newly emerged luminary in arguments regarding American hegemony over Mexico and Central America, and possessor of the Castilian Manuscript. Sanson's visits to the bookshop hidden away among the narrow streets were conducted in such a way as to appear to be poorly disguised attempts by a secretive book dealer to communicate with the caballero perfecto who dealt in rare books. In this way he accomplished two tasks: negotiations to purchase the manuscript, and back-checking to detect any surveillance that might suggest someone had penetrated his disguise and detected his mission to protect the US delegation to the PMF talks.

Time-outs were rare in the Great Game.

"Buenos dias, Don Quixote."

"Senor Santana, welcome. It is good to see you again. No matter the outcome of our negotiations, I do enjoy our visits."

“Have you reached a decision, mi Amigo?”

“Direct, as usual. I have, and I am afraid that it will disappoint you and perhaps interfere with our friendship.”

“Then you have decided against the exchange.”

“Rather, I have decided in favor of a different exchange.”

“And...”

“I have decided to present the Castilian Manuscript to the National Museum in Mexico City, to become a permanent part of the heritage of our great republic.”

“I am authorized to increase the offer substantially.”

“I suppose I have my price, as do most of us, but I think I am content with my decision. Por favor, let us close the matter and take up other issues over lunch and a bit of wine”

“As you wish, mi Amigo.”

The two gentlemen walked slowly, the older man speaking quietly but animatedly, the younger man occasionally nodding or shaking his head, to a small cantina a few doors away, where they occupied a table outside, eating polla a la parrilla and queso and sipping a light red wine of local vintage. Late in the afternoon, they rose, shook hands and parted, Don Quixote to his shop, Senor Santana to post a report through Rosada Angel Jesus to Xander, who would if he thought it appropriate inform Malcolm Garfield of its contents.

It had been an enjoyable afternoon, and a successful foray into the dancing landscape.

Devon Zander read Sanson’s message for the third time. Without a doubt, Alvaria-Iverson was a force to be dealt with. Don Quixote was a true scholar; his writings were steeped in detail and scrupulously documented, and certain to be used authoritatively to question the motives of Los Estados Unidos in any dealings with Latin America. Their veracity was unassailable. They could be used by both US negotiators and their opponents to fashion strategies and contingency plans. Zander sanitized the message and forwarded it to Garfield.

Then he sent word to Sanson, informing him of the US delegation’s travel plans and meeting agendas. He included his assessment of Alvaria-Iverson’s growing importance, as both a voice for the opposition and a candidate for martyrdom. The aging scholar’s extant writings already were part of the growing opposition to cooperation with the United States, and he refused

to enter into a more active role. In Zander's estimation, Don Quixote was totally unaware that he might be more valuable to the opposition dead than alive.

When she transmitted Xander's message to Sanson, Rosada could not restrain her impulse to ask Amos to look out for her mentor and dear friend. Sanson had come to that conclusion himself when he noticed that the old academic was being watched by people who might harm him in such a way that local and national authorities would be led to Washington. And he knew that assassination would not be necessary to turn the investigation toward the north, a well-executed assault would be sufficient. The watchers he saw were efficient and cruel, and their handlers were coldly rational. The labored breathing of a semi-conscious old man in a hospital bed could be a graphic feature in the daily news for a long time.

In this game, not only were there few time outs, there were no rules to protect the players.

Barcqe began with a resume of his time in Washington, Nogales, and Mexico City. Summarizing his broad array of information under general headings, he listed several particulars: US Border Patrol shootings across the international border; violence in local elections in Mexico attributed to struggles for political control between the Cartels and political reformers; prescription drug overdoses among Americans, especially upwardly mobile women; and, the employment of UAVs for surveillance in America and to terminate terrorist leaders living in civilian neighborhoods abroad. He was toying with the notion that a lot of people north of the border were beginning to think that US leaders were stretching their authority at home and pushing the bounds of sovereignty overseas.

"That the US might employ drones and cruise missiles against the cartels in Mexico is discussed behind closed doors and on the cocktail circuits in Washington and state capitols from California to Texas. And ports along the Pacific, Gulf, and Atlantic coasts are on everyone's list of critical concerns. Some have thought it fortunate that the economic downturn has slowed growth in the number of cargo ships entering our ports, perhaps buying a bit of time to prepare for the future. But, no one wants to talk about 'The New Panamax,' new free-trade zones and all that goes along with the expected increase in shipping across the isthmus.

"Of particular interest to me was an item in The Southern Poverty Law Center's Spring 2013 Intelligence Report indicating resurgence of 'conspiracy-minded patriot groups' and hate groups during the last dozen or so years. These folks just might be persons of interest for my

final note that several people alluded to Simon Stoddard's increasing role in the Four-Countries PMF training facility and the pharmaceutical plant in the north of Spain, but no one would say more than, 'It is rumored that, ...' Both of those projects may represent attempts to walk on both sides of the fence between legitimate business and illegal enterprise."

Ariana followed with her own summary of her travels to London and Madrid. Her sources included leading economists and business executives, and mid-level government civil servants, in addition to Joselyn Prescott and her editorial board. From them she gleaned information about the increasing flow of illegal narcotics into Europe, money laundering through North American and EU banks, and fears that apparently legitimate pharmacy plants in EU countries crippled economically during the recent economic downturn intended stunning increases in the production of prescription opioids for domestic consumption and export. News of the increase in overdose deaths among US women was disturbing to Europeans because women were rising through the ranks of business and government throughout Europe, and increasingly discontented Islamic conservative activists who were believed to be moving into the transit of drugs through Southwest Asia and North Africa into southern Europe might be sorely tempted to provide Western women with self-destructive narcotics.

She also talked in strictest confidence with Terry McCrory about the pharmaceutical plant near Bilbao. Ariana learned a couple of things she thought added to Marcello's report about the PMF and pharmaceutical operations: The isolated, explosion-proof facilities developed surreptitiously at the plant were already on-line, and an unidentified but highly respected engineering scientist who had recently emerged from an extended sabbatical somewhere on the Saharan littoral would head the facility and direct the R&D activities in it. He was considered an expert on IEDs, trigger mechanisms and miniaturization, and he had brought with him military veterans having extensive field experience with mines and EOD. If that weren't enough, extensive production of prescription opioids—Vicodin, OxyContin, and their generic forms including a powerful newer drug called Opana or oxymorphone—was recently added to the architectural program. The addition did not seem to be a surprise for the owner's representatives, and they were fully prepared to cover the additional costs for A&E and construction. Given the current news, Terry was a bit concerned, but the proposed additions were not uncommon in such plants, the professional opportunity was gratifying, and the money was coming in with unerring fidelity. McCrory's account was verified in the field by Kavanaugh

and deViscaya, and the finances and contracts were matters of banking and public record. And, like Marcello, Ariana had heard uncorroborated rumors among business leaders about Simon Stoddard, the Bilboa plant and the four-country project in Central America.

Marcello suggested that if they could strengthen the plausible links among business interests, drug cartels and international terrorism, the new book would clearly launch from the elevated platform built by his previous book, *Nexus*, and bolster their positions among the leading investigative journalists worldwide. Access to the highest levels of wealth and power would surely follow.

Ariana Lentz could hardly contain the rush coursing through her at the thought that she was returning to the pinnacle of her profession, and the power that had eluded her in the past.

After lunch, Ariana and Marcello planned the writing for their separate forays. The next few days found them, after breakfast together, retiring to their private studies to draft articles for publication in North America and Europe and develop the next parts of their book. They were immensely happy to be immersed first in their own thoughts and then in the intense discussions during which they reconciled their contributions to the joint ventures.

Rosada Angel Jesus was describing for Devon Xander her hybrid program for investigating the associations among disparate people: “It is a combination of two simple ideas, six degrees of separation and family genealogy. Beginning with a subject of interest, I build a tree of known associates to six or fewer levels. Each subject on each of the levels then becomes the subject of interest for a tree unique to that individual. A matching routine looks for close and distant associations among the subjects. The subjects are compared with lists of people of interest to whomsoever, and when we get a hit, the network of associations for that person is traced. The tree for Malcolm’s successor required only three levels to reach some very interesting associations.

“When Jack Kavanaugh and Lillian de Viscaya escaped following the episode at Nogales, there was some suspicion regarding a couple on a cruise ship shore excursion in Puerto Vallarta. I was able to find travel records for two couples who were very close in appearance to Irish Jack and Lillian, indicating that both couples were in Puerto Vallarta during the same few days. One of the couples was a pair of attorneys from Arizona on a state drug task force in the office of the attorney general of Arizona. Using those identities, I constructed unique trees for



each, and the male of the couple was networked with the czar of a Mexican drug cartel known simply as ‘The Sinaloa.’”

Xander, who had been listening intently to Rosada’s recitation, was suddenly leaning forward and speaking as if to himself, “Sinaloa ... Nogales ... the Colon consortium ...”

“And,” continued Rosada, “Davis Thurston, Deputy Attorney General and director of the state drug task force for the State of Arizona, and the man chosen to succeed Malcolm Garfield.”

“Can you prove it?”

“Devon, I am confident that the information is accurate enough that it is actionable, but it is not legal proof. I am in the information business, not in law enforcement, and certainly not in the business of proving guilt beyond a shadow of doubt in court. The analytical methodology is sound, and the data input is well and confidentially sourced. I judge it to be likely, perhaps highly likely, to be good enough to warrant delivery to Malcolm and Amos. Malcolm may be skeptical; Amos, however, will know immediately what to do with the information.”

Devon Xander sat quietly for a moment, then said emphatically, “This has to go to Malcolm immediately, Rosada, and to Amos. Malcolm must be on guard, and if he has said anything to Thurston about Amos, Amos may be in great danger. I’m going to Washington immediately rather than on our timetable for the discussions in Mexico. Tell Malcolm that I’m coming early with important information, so don’t sign the retirement papers yet, and tell him not to tell Thurston that I’m coming. Send everything to Amos, and tell him to be extra careful. And, Amos may want to talk with Jack and Lillian about their exit plan for the Nogales op.”

Xander paused as he reached the door, turned and said quietly, “This is a game-changer, Rosada. If Thurston isn’t one of us, I need to be able to convince the right people that he is too much of a risk to be trusted and must be eased out or buried in the mushroom patch.”

Before Xander reached Washington, he was informed by Rosada Angel Jesus that Lillian de Viscaya had recognized the picture of Garfield’s replacement as a lawyer from Arizona who had collaborated in her passage with Kavanaugh through a cruise ship port in southern California to Puerto Vallarta after the affair in Nogales. Lillian was certain; her certainty was usually unerring. Xander was confident that the identification of Davis Thurston was confirmed and the association with the Sinaloa was genuine. But, he was not as confident that the information would be received well in Washington.

Malcolm Garfield met Xander at a fast-food restaurant between DWI and Xander's hotel in Arlington. Garfield listened with growing impatience as Xander made the case against Davis Thurston. Interrupting Xander in mid-sentence, Garfield said angrily, "I don't care where you got your information. I've known Davis Thurston for years. We've shared our files with his task force, and the Arizona AG's office has cooperated fully. Together, we've busted transits all along the border ..."

"How big were the busts, Malcolm? How many shipments crossed the border without incident? The cartels lose tens of millions of dollars in cash and product annually to your intercepts, but they don't seem to skip a beat. Even with our success in the Nogales crossing, a lot of product ended-up on the streets in America. The cartels consider such losses to be expenses against the profits, and they don't seem to skip a beat. And the stakes are going up. They are tougher and more professional in the boardrooms and on the streets. They are buying special ops people all along the pipelines. As soon as we cut them down, they grow back bigger and meaner and more sophisticated than they were. We can't stifle the demand, and we don't appear to be making much headway against the corruption. They're like penicillin; we accomplish just enough to prime their pumps, and they come back stronger than before. We legalize addictions by putting more and more powerful drugs on the market, and we can't keep the duds from selling illicit prescriptions or bribing crooked cops and doctors and God knows who else on both sides of every border along every pipeline in this totally horizontally and vertically integrated global industry. Yes, you get some of them, sometimes even a lot of them. Their accountants mark it down to business expenses, costs against profits, in lieu of taxes to local, state and federal authorities.

"Malcolm, how much of your operating budget do you get from drug busts? How many cars and boats and planes and houses do you confiscate and turn into cash to finance your operations? Without them, you'd have nothing to do. Without them, the politicians would be robbing your budget to finance whatever sweetheart project will keep them re-elected. It's a symbiotic relationship that keeps people in business and voters at the ballot box. Why are we spending so much to keep track of the four-country PMF school and the pharmaceutical plant in Bilboa? Both are legitimate businesses; but, we know they have a dark side that may be more profitable than their light side.

“I may be a simple beat cop, but I’ve been up to my eyeballs in the Balkans, Iraq and Afghanistan, and border towns from the Sea of Cortes to the Gulf of Mexico. I’ve lost people on the streets and in the countrysides of three continents. I’ve seen the grunts take the beatings while the white tie and tails crowd toast themselves with champagne. Whether it’s in the cartels or the boardrooms or the legislatures’ hallowed halls, crooks are crooks. *And, in my professional and personal opinion. Davis Thurston is a crook.*”

Devon Xander paused, then continued quietly, “If you still want me on this operation, I’ll stick with you. But, I’ll be watching Thurston like a hawk, and if he gets out of line, I won’t look around for an OK from some political wonk, I’ll do what hawks do best: I’ll take him down faster than a Red Tail snatches a barn rat.”

“Jesus H Christ, Devon, I want you there! If Davis Thurston is what you think, you’ll have to keep an eye on him. I’ll be up to my eyeballs with the negotiations, and if he is what you say, I’ve missed it all the time I’ve been working with him, and I might miss it again. This conference is damned important, and my job is important too. If Thurston is not the man for the job, I’ve got to know it sooner not later. But, Devon, if you make a move on Thurston, you damn well better be more sure than you’ve ever been in your whole life, because *professionally and personally*, I’ve got all my chips on this table and I’m going all-in ... and I want you riding shotgun. OK?”

“OK, Compadre, but you watch your 360, and don’t get too far away from the cavalry.”

“Roger that, mi Amigo,” replied Malcolm, “now listen up. Martine Santos and I are the principals in this conversation. Whatever we decide will go into the report with recommendations to our policy folks. The main topics are, first, the increasing flow of drugs from the Far East, how that impacts the volume of traffic through Central America and Africa into North America and Europe, and, as always, where is the money coming from and going. The pharm plant in Bilboa will be part of that discussion because prescription drugs are a growing problem, and because the plant could be an important link in the money path.

“Second, the PMF training camp in Central America: Lots of faces identified during the earlier project are showing up at various points in the food chain on both sides of the streets. We’ve got to sort out which are the good guys so we can hit on the bad guys, and watch for the turncoats. Between us, Martine and I have pretty good information, so we should be able to put our fingers on the bad guys. To do that, though, we will have to put some details on the table.

“That’s where your eyes on Davis Thurston come in. He will be included in my talks with Martine, so he will be privy to our deepest secrets and, possibly, their sources. If he is who you think he is, we’ll have to deal with a serious chink in our armor before the information gets outside our little circle. Dealing with it probably won’t be our responsibility, but we’ll have to make the case for it. Davis likes to toss his weight around; I’ll deal with keeping him on a short leash. I hate to load you down with keeping track of him. You’ll have plenty to do without that additional burden. But, you brought it up, so you handle it ... any way you want. OK?”

“Will do. Do I have a bit of loose change to put to it?”

“I think the ‘petty cash’ pot will cover it; but let me know when you plan to drop a sizable bundle.

“Finally, and this is just between us, I’m looking for links between the cartels and mid-east terrorists. Terrorists are always looking for cash, and cartels have lots of it. And, terrorists can muddy the waters anywhere at any time. With just a little effort, they can divert a lot of our resources. Drugs on the streets have become common everyday activities; a terror pop can spin everything out of control in an instant. The media, our politicians, almost everyone goes off the deep end when terrorism is involved, either actually or hypothetically. Santos and I agree on the level of the threat, but our higher-ups don’t want to deal with it. They seem to think that ignoring it means it isn’t there.”

“The pharm plant,” said Devon, extending the range of the conversation. “I want someone to keep tabs on their R&D. That might be the pin tying the cartels to some terrorist groups. Our current information leads me to think they are working on small high-impact devices that can be applied by any and all involved in the game. It can be justified in the legitimate arms trade, especially for covert activities, and marketed anywhere cash is available. Stuff like that means you don’t have to drone-dive a city block to swat a fly; the PR value alone is worth the effort. If they work up something that absolutely defies detection, we’ll all be behind the eight ball. They’ll have all the time and money they need to work on it, and they won’t have to try to hide it in some government budget. The pharm plant and PMFs, Malcolm; both are above board and can keep legitimate deep, dark secrets, and both have access to more money than any government or corporation can hide from political hacks or the tax man.”

“I don’t disagree, Devon, but you hit the biggest obstacle to watching them when you point out that they are legitimate businesses. I’ll do what I can; but, at some point, Homeland

Security will want to take over, maybe even Justice or Commerce, if for no other reason than the cost of the surveillance. It's more than we can handle, financially and politically. Those of us in the stove pipes can only do so much; personal chits don't cover this much *cooperation*."

"It's hell being a working stiff in the soot and heat."

"You got that right. I'll see you in Guanajuato."

Guanajuato: The pleasantries had hardly got under way when Davis Thurston broke in to announce that the conference should get on to the business at hand, that polite palaver was not getting to the agenda driving the conference, and that although Malcolm Garfield was leading the charge for America, he was directing the charge. No one seemed surprised; Davis Thurston needed no introduction among those dealing with the drug traffic along the border between California and New Mexico.

Thurston was the current leader of an influential clan that had emigrated to the American West from England in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century. These second sons who had helped build the great cattle baronies that dominated the vast western open ranges were part of the lore and legends of cowboys and vaqueros that still captivates young and old alike. Thurston's branch of the family tree had switched from cattle range to courtroom as water rights came to dominate the legal landscape of the southwest. Davis Thurston had gravitated toward public service, making his mark in negotiations with Mexico over use of the waters of the Colorado River. His experience in dealing across the international border provided a platform for his selection to join, and eventually head, the Arizona Attorney General's drug task force. Intelligent and politically astute, Thurston was well connected in Phoenix and Washington, and appeared to be the perfect choice to replace Malcolm Garfield.

However, Martine Santos did not share the opinions of the US DEA leadership regarding Davis Thurston. Santos also had people who understood the narcotics trade along the border with los Estados Unidos; and they were clearly concerned about opening their intelligence and operations activities to an American delegation that included Thurston.

Devon Xander quickly picked up on the Mexican reluctance to deal with Davis Thurston. The information supplied by Lillian de Viscaya weighed heavily with Xander, so his initial discussions with Martine Santos were a bit uncomfortable. Xander was part of the US delegation, but he was seriously concerned about the integrity of the delegation as long as

Thurston was part of it. After a lot of thought, and a quiet talk with Amos Sanson, he decided to share his concerns with Santos. Talking with Santos without informing Malcolm Garfield was a bit unnerving. For an American to take such a step would be interpreted as disloyalty, even treason, by those engaged in the war on drugs.

Martine Santos listened attentively, asking occasional questions but making no statements of his own. When Xander finished, both men sat quietly for several minutes. Santos broke the silence: “I must treat this as important intelligence, and hand it over to my people. I will classify it 2-B, possibly true, from a reliable source; but, I will not reveal the source. My DDI will be directed to verify the information, but to send the report no further unless we can upgrade the accuracy to *probably* true, and then only upon my direct order. Thank you, Devon; I know how difficult this is for you. We will no doubt talk privately many times during the conference, but will speak no further of this unless one of us learns more. Solid evidence is preferred, but I trust your assessments. So please do not hesitate to tell me what you think. There is no record of this conversation: the fewer who know about it the better. We’ve navigated this landscape many times; no doubt we will walk this walk many times in the future. We will watch Davis Thurston very closely; keep that in mind if your people report our heightened interest. Thank you, Devon, for your trust, and your friendship.”

They stood, shook hands, and walked in opposite directions. As soon as Xander was out of earshot, Martine Santos spoke into his encrypted phone to his DDI. “Meet me now. We’ve got a rather large fish to fry.”

Without a ripple, Amos Sanson retreated from the scene.

Three days later, the bi-lateral Guanajuato Conference closed with little fanfare. The principals hoped to complete their work and return to their capitols with detailed, confidential reports that would guide policy decisions in both Washington and Mexico City. However, while passing through the Guanajuato airport to board a plane for Phoenix, Arizona, Davis Thurston paused for an impromptu interview with the press. During the interview, he praised Martino Santos as “the heart and soul of the agreements reached during the conference, agreements that will lead to sweeping actions against the drug cartels on a number of fronts.” Without Santos, effective action to curb the cartels would be impossible, claimed Thurston.

Regularly monitoring discussions among the old grandfathers idling away their days in the plazas and cantinas, Amos Sanson overheard many details of the agreements reached during the conference. He knew that the old men would know more about the secrets behind those walls than anyone in authority imagined, so he unobtrusively listened as they speculated. He heard, for example, that the head of the US delegation was often contradicted, and privately belittled, by the man said to be his successor, and that Thurston clashed openly with Martine Santos during the meetings. Among the speculation Sanson heard were rumors that the cartels intended to assassinate Santos soon after the conference adjourned. The old grandfathers said that Thurston's statements during the conference and the airport interview were clear signals that Santos was to lead the crackdown but that Thurston would challenge that assignment, and failing that, would keep tight controls over all the US assets appropriated for the crackdown. Sanson reported all of these observations, carefully noting the sources claimed by the old men, and finished his report with his opinion that the information should be investigated further because the people in the plazas and cantinas were just as likely to get it right as to get it wrong.

The day after the Guanajuato Conference closed, Martine Santos was found in his office, dead from a single gunshot to the head, the bullet passing from the left side of his brain to the right, his service pistol tightly clenched in his left hand, his watch on his left wrist. Santos was known to be equally proficient with firearms with both hands, but his close associates knew that his periodic pistol qualification schedule was always shot with his right hand. Not long after, Davis Thurston returned to the private practice of law in Phoenix, Arizona. Nothing more was heard about Malcolm Garfield's retirement.

Seated at the book-strewn coffee table in the corner window of the bookstore, coffee and tea cups on the table between them, Devon Xander finished telling Rosada about the funeral.

"It was a quiet, private service on a gentle slope up to a western ridge. The sun was about to set when I thought I saw someone standing by a tombstone on the ridge, but the sun was in my eyes so I wasn't sure. My attention refocused on the ceremony as it ended and the sun set behind the ridge. When I looked back up at that spot on the ridge, no one was there. After the service, Malcolm and I walked up to the grave stone on the ridge and turned to look back at the funeral site, and I thought, 'a perfect perch for watching the funeral and everything going on for two or three hundred yards around the grave site.' I'm beginning to think like him, find a place

where I can see everything that goes on and have the sun at my back so people I'm watching can't see me.”

Rosada spoke softly: “From time to time, he retires from the field, rests on the sideline for a bit, then returns for another joust. His rests appear to be lasting a little longer ... rare books seem to be occupying his time a little longer than before.”

Night overtook the sun in the small mid-American city as Devon and Rosada talked quietly and sipped occasionally from brightly colored paper cups, content with their company and their personal thoughts.

Amos Sanson quietly sat thinking in the softening light of the disappearing sun, a glass of light red wine of local vintage in his left hand. He very much liked Devon Xander and Rosada Angel Jesus, and the idea of liking someone troubled him, and he was not sure why. His reluctance to become close to anyone during his life in the unforgiving shadow universe and the unexpected loss of his childhood friends left him strangely melancholy, looking to the solitude of books, yet longing for the presence of friends whose lives could not be lost, or threatened, by his relationship with them. Professional associates, no matter; but, acquiring personal friends heightened his concern for them, and for himself.

Lately, his profession seemed to be bringing him closer to enemies and more distant from friends. He thought it only a matter of time until their skills grew while his aged and they threatened him and everyone they thought close to him. More and more he thought of being out, but where and to what? Books satisfied him, but exposed him to the light while he searched and dealt with others in that vocation. The darkness provided protection; but, as with 16<sup>th</sup> Century maps of the edge of the maritime world, in the darkness there be demons and dragons. And the brief moments of twilight were so ... well ... brief.

Sanson decided to speak directly to Simon about Devon Xander. That Xander had become a useful and dependable asset was clear; but, Amos thought Xander not to be well suited to the dark side. Though he had spent time during his youth with Jack Kavanaugh and the PIRA, he had opted for law enforcement as both soldier and civilian; he had become a dedicated lawman. Serve and protect: In that role he excelled; and in that role, he had served and protected Sanson well. His brief foray into assassination had been carried out with skill and courage; but, the circumstances were singular, and exceptional. The hurt visited upon Rosada



Angel Jesus had fueled Xander's anger, but not his appetite for murder. That Xander could kill when the occasion demanded was not in question; but, while his mind could engage in the transaction, his conscience seemed less open-ended. *Serve and protect*: That placed Xander more at the side of Malcolm Garfield, where he had done well and was positioned to do more. With Garfield returned to his role and authority in the DEA, Xander would be sought for contracts that would extend Garfield's reach into, and perhaps a step or two beyond, the twilight. There, Xander would cement Stoddard's legitimacy with Garfield and a number of "authorized agencies" of government. Sanson would remain in Simon's employ, but his assignments would reflect the more graceful pace of his ever-prodigious powers of observation, and the inexorable march of time. Sanson (and others) on one side, Garfield and Xander (and others) on the other, and Stoddard bridging the twilight in between: A dancing landscape in which only those comfortable amidst chaos could hope to flourish.

"Thank you, Amos," began Simon Stoddard as he moved to the conclusion of his post-op debriefing, "for your usual thorough report of our most recent foray south of the border. Despite the loss of Martine Santos, it proved in all other aspects to be most successful. The loss of Santos will, I think, be a temporary setback because the new administration in Mexico City appears to be cooperative. Exposing Thurston was very beneficial, and our hand in that has strengthened our position and that of Malcolm Garfield as he returns to his station with DEA. And, I appreciate your counsel as I wrestled with the opportunity to take a more active role in operation of the training facility and pharmaceutical plant. Having resumed my role as legal advisor and representative, I am breathing a bit more easily.

"There is, however, one last detail, and a most disconcerting one, before we conclude.

"I have, upon most reliable authority, a cautionary tale not of our making but extremely pertinent to our activities. In his relationship with Ariana Lentz, Marcello Barcqe is exposed to danger and is endangering us. It seems that Ms. Lentz's association with Joselyn Prescott has created a pipeline into the offices of a most nefarious network of high-level executives in charge of financial and operational activities tied inextricably to international criminal behavior, especially drugs and weapons sales and transport. Prescott is an important link in an intelligence ring employing journalists to ferret out vital and timely information related to legitimate business enterprise and governmental regulatory and law enforcement policies and field operations.

Wittingly or unwittingly, Ariana Lentz has been feeding the beast, transmitting to Prescott the findings she and Barcqe are compiling, both on and off the record. Ariana's restoration to journalistic prominence through her association with Marcello, and her access to his contacts, notes and drafts, are producing information and identifying sources that are finding their way into this intelligence network, perhaps to lead to exposure of the sources to 'offers they cannot refuse' in the well-known jargon of the past."

"And, Simon, you know this how?"

"Dear friend, there are matters that I dare not discuss even with you."

"More movement in the dancing landscape, Dear Friend?"

"As you well know, Amos, in this game of musical chairs, the music never stops ... except, of course, when it does. It is most important that one is not the last man standing when the music stops."

"Simon, have you something for me in this matter?"

"Yes, Amos. If you will arrange your rare book expeditions most judiciously, you might watch over our friend, Marcello, and his consort, Ariana, and especially her growing relationship with Joselyn Prescott. If you can peer into Precott's associations with the upper one-tenth of one percent, by all means do so. But, and I mean this Amos, do not, I say again *not*, get too close to the flames. Do not get burned this time, Amos. It would most assuredly prove fatal."

"And my associates?"

"Engage Rosada Jesus, and perhaps, at your discretion, Kavanaugh and de Viscaya, though neither of them should do much outside of the continent ... UK is definitely out of bounds for them. Leave Devon out of this for now. If our examination proves true, we will want him to deal the hand to Malcolm. When the time comes, if it comes, I will talk with Marcello."

Turning to gaze into his *Deus Ex Machina*, Simon continued, "Amos, I am beginning to think about the light at the end of the tunnel, to think about focusing more on my firm's business with the international community. We may wish to approach these gray matters at a more leisurely pace in the future, leave the crusading to Devon and Malcolm who are younger and still imbued with thoughts of winning the wars on drugs and terrorism. Who knows, winning this never ending kaleidoscopic Super Bowl just might be a pleasure worth pursuing ... but I doubt it, the winning that is. When, and I think it is a matter of *when* rather than *if*, terrorism mingles with cartel cash, as Marcello so rightly wrote earlier, we might be well advised to sit it out.

“Situational awareness, Amos.”

“Always, Simon.”

And with that, Amos Sanson departed.