

The Silent Watchman
Part 4. Master

Special to the Euro Press Syndicate

Three Deaths in Panama's Caribbean
Free Trade Zone a Mystery

By Arianna Lentz

ZONA LIBRE COLON, PANAMA – Yesterday, the body of Juaquin Pretemo was discovered in a warehouse inside the free trade zone, bringing to three the number of business executives dying under unusual circumstances during the last few days. The entire FTZ CEO community is on edge because law enforcement officials appear to believe that high-ranking officers of international corporations are being murdered at random, leaving everyone to wonder who is next. Beneath the surface, however, some say that the three commercial leaders were linked to a drug kingpin consortium responsible for a major border incursion into the United States that recently achieved limited success in the never-ending battle for supremacy in the US illicit narcotics market. Unofficial sources are suggesting that the three deaths are the results of black ops mounted in retaliation for the *Nogales Verguena*.

Previously

Sanson and Xander were in the café early, seated in the back left corner, their backs to the walls, where they could see both the front and rear entrances. They had already checked the neighborhood and the approaches from Kavanaugh and de Vizcaya's apartment.

When Irish Jack and Lillian entered, the barman greeted them and with a slight nod directed their attention to the two gentlemen seated in the back left corner. Kavanaugh and de Vizcaya glanced toward Sanson and Xander, de Vizcaya clearly showing a defensive attitude, but after the brief look, Kavanaugh smiled, walked directly to Sanson, and extended his right hand: "Amos, much time has passed since last we were this close." Then turning to Zander: "Devon, old chum, the years since you left Belfast

have served you well.” Gesturing for Lillian to come forward, Jack said, “Lillian, come ... say hello to our old friends.”

Looking directly at Sanson, de Vizcaya said, “I felt your presence in Nogales but could not settle the reality. Jack, however, recognized, or so he thought, your form in the shadow of the tree near the cantina.”

Pointing to the back right corner, Jack said, “Lillian, please play hostess for Devon. Amos and I have much catching up to do.”

Lillian and Devon moved across the room and sat in the corner, each with back to a wall, a clear view of Sanson, Kavanaugh and both entrances to the café, and one hand hidden beneath the table. A waiter served them orange juice, café con leche, and rolls. Both scanned constantly from the doors to the table in the opposite corner. At the same time, the barman served a similar breakfast to Kavanaugh and Sanson. The other patrons moved to benches and tables along the right wall, leaving de Vizcaya and Zander with clear views (and fields of fire) encompassing the entrances and the room.

“Simon has occasionally placed us in the same theater, Amos, but never to sit in the same box. What path has he set for you that brings you into the north of Spain?”

“We have need of your special talents, Jack, and Simon is not at the helm for this voyage, though I know him not ever to be totally unaware of the interests among his associates.”

“Tell me, old ... associate.”

“Devon and I are off the books for this one. We seek retribution for a terrible wrong against a friend.”

“Ms. Rosada Angel de Jesus?”

“You remain perceptive to the point of clare voyance, old ... associate.”

“Ah, the lovely Mara. Unfortunate and unnecessary: Lillian and I did not know, nor would we have countenanced it had we known.”

“Shall I continue?”

Irish Jack paused for a moment, then nodded, gestured subtly to Lillian, and replied, “Por favor.”

In the mean time, de Vizcaya and Xander had been fumbling with their breakfasts, each with eyes constantly moving, each aware of the other’s hand hidden beneath the table. At Kavanaugh’s gesture, de Vizcaya visibly relaxed, raised her hidden hand, and said, “We may as well be comfortable, Mr. Xander. I think we will be here for a while.”

Leaning forward, Jack spoke softly: “You do realize that Pretemo is Malcolm Garfield’s man. Mara was their link, and when the three acted prematurely, they severed that link. Moreover, Pretemo did not know what they might have wrenched from her during her ordeal. He had no choice but to eliminate them to protect his relationships, and his life, within the Consortium. All of this, of course, is not known widely within Consortium or cartel circles.”

“No, Jack, I did not know of Pretemo’s association with Garfield. If our caper becomes known to Garfield, or to Stoddard for that matter, it may produce rough seas for all of us. Zander has acquired Malcolm’s confidence, and I do not wish to threaten that. I have come today, however, with a project for which Devon and I have personal reverence. The stakes are raised by this revelation, but perhaps we can turn Pretemo’s

treachery to our benefit. If Pretemo's double dealing is discretely revealed, perhaps the Consortium will collapse as mistrust and confirmation of old suspicions shake the foundation of their conspiracy. And cartels that have suffered at the hands of the Consortium might react savagely to the appearance of the Consortium's "special relationship" with the authorities. The internecine warfare may work to Garfield's advantage, and that may assuage his sense of loss. Costs and benefits, my Gaelic compatriot; the crux of risk assessment."

Jack leaned back: "Eternal optimism, Amos. You've always been one to see the glass half full."

At Jack's movement, Lillian de Vizcaya stiffened and Devon Xander shifted in his chair. Jack looked at Lillian, smiled and waved his hand. "I need to be a bit more careful, Amos me laddy, for Lillian's reflexes remain as efficient as ever they were. Pray tell me about your project."

For some time, with occasional questions from Kavanaugh, Sanson spoke quietly and earnestly.

"Amos, I wish to council with Lillian before responding to your proposition. Why don't you sit with Devon for a while? Please ask Lil to join me. We'll signal our decision in a nonce."

Amos nodded, rose from his chair, and walked over to Xander and de Vizcaya. "Jack wishes to finish his breakfast with you, Lillian; Devon and I will rest here for a bit."

Lillian joined Irish Jack and they immediately launched an animated discussion. Though Sanson and Xander could not hear their conversation, their initial disagreement was apparent.

When Lillian de Vizcaya returned to continue breakfast with Jack Kavanaugh, she spoke without preamble: “What did the silent one want?” Jack replied, “He has a mission that requires our expertise, not in its execution but in its planning and design. He knows we were not pleased to learn that we were used by the narcotics smugglers in the Nogales affair, and thought we might be interested in his and Devon’s response to the assassination of the Latina Border Patrol agent. Our hands will not be visible in the project, and he offers no compensation beyond our travel and sustenance while we tutor Devon and him in our arcane arts. They will come to us for the instruction. In that way, our risk is more within our control.”

Several minutes passed as Jack provided more details; occasionally, he and Lillian appeared to argue. Finally, they sat quietly for a moment; then Lillian asked, “Can they be trusted?”

“Sanson’s reliability is beyond question; Xander is new to our business, but he is trusted by Amos. And, for a year, Devon and I shared the cause. I think we can rely on their discretion.”

“Then, I will agree to the association. But, please forgive my inclination to reservations for the time being.”

“I rely on your ... inclinations ... Dear Lillian; they have assured our safety for a long time.”

They raised and touched their cups, and Irish Jack nodded toward Amos, gesturing for Amos and Devon to join them. The four sipped coffee and chatted for an hour. Sanson and Xander rose, laid a few Euros on the table, and departed. Kavanaugh and de Vizcaya finished their breakfast.

Amos and Irish Jack had agreed to meet in Bilbao in a fortnight.

Marcello Barcqe was more than mildly interested in the plane descending into Mexico City's international airport. Arianna Lentz was aboard that plane, and she was coming to interview him in the wake of his immensely successful book, *Nexes*. Written more as a technical review than an insider expose, the book had captured the attention of political and law enforcement officials across the globe and, surprisingly, a broad array of general readers. The interview by the well-known investigative reporter could launch him from regional expert to global authority. He had prepared as if he were the interviewer for he wanted to make the most of this opportunity.

Ariana Lentz possessed an encyclopedic knowledge of last generation terrorism, and she was a superb interviewer. Barcqe felt himself responding much more freely than he wanted as she probed the depths of his relationships with DEA, the PIRA, and the Sonoro drug cartel (i.e., Malcolm Garfield, Jonathon Cotswold Cavanaugh, and, surprisingly, Joaquin Pretemo). She had prepared, or had been prepared, to dig deeply into the nexus. There were moments when Marcello felt as though he was being interrogated rather than interviewed as she pressed him to reveal his sources and shields.

Arturo Pretemo and Mansel Barcqe had been diplomats assigned to the Mexican embassy in Washington, D.C. Both were successful industrialists fully engaged in negotiations for NAFTA, so their appointments as commercial officers in the U.S. capitol were welcomed by the D.C. diplomatic community. Their casual acquaintance had solidified during the negotiations as their association grew both professionally and socially. It seemed natural that their sons, Joaquin Pretemo and Marcello Barcqe, would become close friends as they grew up in the capitol of the free world. School, tennis court, chess board: Joaquin, brash and forward, and Marcello, reticent and introspective, excelled and drove each other toward the top of the diplomatic social scale. As they advanced through university, however, they drifted in different directions, seeing each other less and less until they lost touch. For several years, their friends would ask, “Have you seen ... ?” They hadn’t.

During his time at George Washington University, Joaquin Pretemo had caught the attention of Malcolm Garfield. Pretemo was supplying a few of his friends with high quality cocaine transported from Mexico by diplomatic pouch, an arrangement unknown to his father. Garfield recognized that Pretemo was motivated by the opportunity to curry favor among the scions of legitimate members of the diplomatic community and the highest echelons of the U.S. congress. Pretemo was discrete and clever; Garfield admired the degree of favor he had established among contemporaries who would one day exercise considerable power in Washington and perhaps among the Mexican drug cartels. Garfield knew a promising career when he saw it, so he approached Joaquin with an offer he could not refuse: “Work for me and you may keep all the money you make and your name off the DEA charts. I will shield your rise through the cartel hierarchy. One day, however, I will call on you. Cross me and I will bury you in Leavenworth, or worse, a

choice prison somewhere off the beaten track.” It was the kind of high risk, high payoff action that appealed to Joaquin Pretemo, and a threat that he had no doubt could result in a life not worth living. Pretemo chose a life of adventurous living; and though it had produced anxious moments through the years, he had not regretted his decision to accept Malcolm Garfield’s offer.

Then, unexpectedly, Pretemo and Barcqe found themselves seated at the same table at a dinner honoring the arrival of a new U.S. ambassador to Mexico City. Their friendship rekindled.

Amos Sanson spoke nonchalantly to his book-selling colleague over the open phone: “Rosada, take a sabbatical, research for a conference honoring the work of Jorge Luis Borges. Spend some time with Tim Spurgin at Lawrence, and in Buenos Aires. It will be an outstanding opportunity for the University and for you to host an appreciation for Borges’ work and for Latin American literature. During your absence, a friend will watch over the shop. Also, while you are away, he will oversee a slight renovation to your store, one I assure will meet with your full approval.”

The following day, a casually but fashionably dressed gentleman entered Rosada Angel Jesus’ shop, extended a manicured hand featuring long graceful fingers, and with a surprisingly firm grasp introduced himself as Terrence McCrory. His tall, slender figure moved easily, and his ready smile was disarming; but, though his eyes sparkled, they did not smile. Soon, he had captivated Rosada with a wry wit and a melodic mix of Irish English and Gaelic lilt. He was, as Amos had said, well versed in the history and literature of Ireland, and had with him a grand array of Irish music that soon filled the

shop with delightful aires. In just a few days time, Terry McCrory established himself among Rosada's students and shop patrons as an affable substitute while she was traveling to arrange for the tribute to Borges.

When Rosada departed on sabbatical, the shop closed for a week of renovations. When it reopened, it was even more amenable to the display of books and graphic arts, with the check out station relocated to provide 360-degree visibility and encased by an armored service counter-wall with laminated glass to a height of eight feet, and store front and side glazing of the same laminated glass.

Simon Stoddard spoke into his secure private phone: "Amos! Its good to hear your voice."

"Good morning, Simon. I have need of your council."

"What's on your mind, old friend?"

"What do you know of Devon Xander's life before he joined the Army?"

"Amos, the record is sketchy ... sealed, actually. Malcolm Garfield was able to penetrate it when vetting him for the mission in Mexico. It seems that Devon was Irish born and brought to south Texas at a very early age to escape his Da's bad standing with the Brits. He had a rough upbringing, an Irish temper in a Latin community, but he flourished because of his affinity for Spanish and his skill with his fists. When about 15, he went to Belfast to spend a month with his aging grandmother, fell in with a PIRA cell headed by Jonathon Kavanaugh, and when it came time to board his plane to return to Texas was nowhere to be found. A year to the day after he was to have returned, he appeared at Heathrow, boarded a plane, and flew home to Texas. The rest you know.

And now, I must run upstairs to meet with some folks who are always happy when I earn my keep.”

“Thank you, Simon. Might we meet later this week in a private place where you can tutor Devon and me in the subtleties of international free trade zones, perhaps using Hong Kong and Colon as cases in point?”

“Thursday, lunch at 2 o’clock in Fredericksburg?”

“Thursday in Fredericksburg. Adios.”

The quiet pub in Fredericksburg had served the southern aristocracy continuously from times long before the mid-19th-century confederation of southern states. It was sedate, softly lit, solidly timbered, and old in a superbly maintained rather than refurbished way. Occasional bullet holes and scorched beams accented the décor and suggested its place in the local historical society’s walking tour. People came and went, so three more out-of-towners seated in a corner booth did not seem out of place.

After a round of pleasantries and local lager, Simon Stoddard went straight to the principal topic: Free trade zones.

“FTZs, including export processing zones, ie. ETZs, are areas in one country where a group of countries has agreed to reduce or eliminate trade barriers such as tariffs and quotas in hopes of attracting new business and foreign investment. The theory is that the zones will attract international corporations that will establish industrial and commercial enterprises, thereby reducing unemployment and poverty by stimulating the local economy. Hong Kong has the world’s largest, and Colon is said to be number two and rising in importance. FTZs and ETZs have existed in Latin America since early in

the 20th century. They played heavily in the development of NAFTA and its extension to other countries south of the border, and are of special interest to the Chinese as they increase their activity in Latin America because of the relaxed connections among Hong Kong, Colon, and other zones in South America.”

An hour of brain-numbing legalities and technicalities later, Simon wrapped up the discussion:

“Recently, the zones in Colon and other western hemisphere countries have become more interesting to several US national agencies because they may be growing in importance in black market operations, including the movement of illicit drugs. We still can’t cover all the bases through which goods and services flow into the US; the special arrangements characterizing FTZs and ETZs may exacerbate our paranoias.

“*You* seemed quite interested in today’s topic, Amos, particularly as it applies to Latin America. Are you considering importing rare first editions, say, by Jorge Luis Borges?”

“Rumors, Simon?”

“Ah, Amos, much that passes for information today is mere rumor; but, then, much that gains the status of intelligence today is first perceived merely as rumor.”

“Speak to me of rumors, Simon.”

“Some believe Pretemo is heir apparent, next in line to head the Consortium. The Sonoran is ill, terminally our own medical people advise, and we fully expect Pretemo’s ascension after a stormy transition. Garfield believes he owns Pretemo, and owning the man at the top is a prize not to be squandered. If rumor becomes information, and information becomes fact, you may never work again at your current level in the game, or

you may be sacrificed to secure another perch within the Consortium leadership. Please understand that I cannot be linked with this ... rumor: Too much is at stake, professionally and personally. I appreciate your devotion, but ... well, risk management; you know how that goes. Please open your minds to alternatives, if not in objective, at least in timing. If Pretemo succeeds, Garfield thinks the industry can be made vulnerable. The future holds endless opportunity, and your objective might succeed as a collateral or unexpected outcome sometime in one of those futures. Patience, old friends: vengeance is a meal best served cold ... or so it is rumored.”

Amos Sanson and Devon Xander were in Colon, separately accompanying tour groups casually meandering through the city and the free-trade zone, taking lots of pictures of their new friends (carefully attending to the backgrounds of select shots, of course). With Simon Stoddard’s last words still in their minds, they took their time, managing to survey most of the zone and returning for additional looks at several places of interest. As they traveled, they noted places from which their target locations and routes could be observed, many of which were occupied constantly by people who appeared to be just hanging out. Sanson and Xander concluded that counter surveillance operations were being conducted to protect the three cartel O&I chiefs and the routes between their homes and offices. They were increasingly confident that their pre-operation research was being confirmed on site, and that soon they would see movement. The three were, after all, legitimate executives attending to business in the zone. Before long, their patience was rewarded. One by one, each traveling in a protective three-vehicle convoy, they converged on a warehouse adjacent to a deep-draft pier on the waterfront. Sanson and

Xander now had an origin-destination study including residences, work places, a common meeting place, and modes of travel.

They planned exquisitely for the strikes, including the diversions designed by Irish Jack and Lillian to provide parity, perhaps even advantage, under the difficult conditions. Along the two routes, Sanson and Xander selected attack zones lying in the final block leading to the secured gates into the FTZ. Their plan was to force two of the three O&I chiefs out of their cars and to run for the gates, thus exposing themselves to lethal blasts from rocket-propelled grenades. All materials and resources used in the assaults would be left behind and were traceable to mid-east arms merchants who supplied European customers. Only two of the targets could be hit at the same time, fitting perfectly with their intent to leave Pretemo standing. If all went well, two of the three cartel O&I chiefs would be dead, and Pretemo would be living on borrowed time. Malcolm Garfield would have to make good use of that time if he was to maintain his penetration of the Consortium or take advantage of any disruption to Consortium operations; but that was at best the very least of Sanson and Xander's concerns.

The operation went very well, as far as it went. The very quick follow-on of Pretemo's murder, however, was unexpected. By that time and by separate routes, Sanson and Xander were out of Panama. Several days later, they read Arianna Lentz's account in an EPS story on an inside page of *USA Today*, as did Simon Stoddard. Earlier, Malcolm Garfield had got the story more directly through his own sources; he was not pleased.

In a comfortable and secure conference room in the center of an inconspicuous office building in the heart of Colon's Zona Libre Panama, a hastily called meeting of the Consortium directors began:

Seated at the head of the small table, the host looked at his two companions and opened the agenda: "Senores, the Nogales operation met with limited success. Final reports from our associates in Washington, Phoenix, and New York tell an interesting and not surprising story. When the sum of product reaching the distributors and reported by the authorities as recovered contraband are added to our anticipated losses in transit and compared with our shipping manifests, we see a substantial amount unaccounted for. We believe it was skimmed from the product seized in the field by unscrupulous senior officials with whom we do business to feed their personal habits or enhance their offshore bank accounts and such. Furthermore, we suggest that this loss should be considered simply as a cost of doing business in the Estados Unidos. While we profited little financially because our operating costs were unusually high, we very well may have profited greatly by costing them quite a sum of money, greasing some palms to enhance future operations, and as the Americans might say, rattling their cages.

"Item two: The performance of our forces proves the value of our training and development program. We are approaching the point that our paramilitary capabilities match those of any private military force provider, and though our special units are not yet equal to SEALS and DELTA, they match-up well with the special units of police forces and most military establishments in Latin America. If the newly organized Community of Latin American and Caribbean States proves successful, the Norte Americanos may not continue their support for anti-drug operations at current levels. In

the Estados Unidos, strong political reaction to CELAC has been detected; we may wish to focus some of our financial “investments” to further such concerns. However, though they may reduce the size of their contribution, they may enhance the quality of their force commitments, may even intervene directly in some cases. We may be able to gain from CELAC reaction to such insurgencies.

“We may wish to offer PMF services through legitimate commercial organizations to the world market place. I suggest two principal benefits to commercializing our paramilitary operations: First, we can create open training facilities to prepare such assets for the open market, and for ourselves. Second, we can commit as much or more of our resources to such open activities than can the authorities in Central America, even with their US assistance. To accomplish this, however, we must be disciplined with our business practices and conservative in our personal profit goals. I suggest this as a way of sustaining our very good standard of living through legitimate enterprises.

“Item three: If the American FDA approves the use of hydrocodone and other full-strength opiates, we may wish to consider acquiring a reputable pharmaceutical company to produce medical opiates and surreptitiously transport other products. If the past is truly prologue, they will not be able to prevent abuse of these highly addictive substances; they will increase the market for our products. Supply is our part in the process. I believe they cannot control the demand. The Zona Libre Panama, and the connections among FTZs throughout the Americas, the Euro Zone, and the Orient provide a sound base for the pharmaceutical enterprise.

”The next item is the very important reason I asked you to advance the time of our usual board meeting. The timing of Pretemo’s trip to Hong Kong was a critical consideration in my request. The two assassinations that prompted this meeting are disconcerting; however, they may present a timely opportunity. They were precise, surgical as the Americans might say, aimed not at us but, rather, at our operational capability. Why: To cripple us? To set in motion a succession that would identify our best and brightest as we promote within our organizations? And, who could have accomplished these attacks: The Americans definitely, the Brits or Canadians probably, a few others perhaps ... but more likely the Norte Americanos. Because we have access to police reports concerning the assassinations of two of our operations officers, we know that the police are no better informed than are we. And why is my man Pretemo still alive? Did the assassins miss him or had they a more sinister motive: Did they leave him in place because he is more valuable to them alive, and privy to our thoughts, than dead? Rumors of his involvement with the authorities persist; and, while he continues to contribute to our bottom line, I have an able replacement. Pretemo will return this evening, and I believe he can be eliminated in such a way that it will be interpreted simply as an extension of the other attacks. So, with your approval, I will manage this risk.”

“How will it be seen by the public?”

“The news will be handed to a journalist with good credentials, and in need of a good story.”

“Barcqe?”

“A matter of such sensitivity can not be entrusted to Barcqe. I have in mind another who is capable and anxious to restore her place in the community of investigative reporters. Arianna Lentz is in Mexico to interview Marcello; perhaps we can interest her in our story ... and gain a deeper appreciation for the various lives of Mr. Barcqe as well. Money will not hurt, but we believe regaining her professional status is foremost in her mind. We have arranged through our European colleagues to provide an outlet for her exclusive view. Being the able investigator that she is, she will be able to glean a plausible “truth” from the “facts” available to her. Pretemo will become merely one more dot, and a possible threat will be eliminated.”

After nodding slightly to each other, the two consented by raising their right hands. The elder of the two continued, “You have done well with your appraisals. And your proposals appear sound for the moment. We agree also to the employment of Ms. Lentz after you have dealt with Pretemo. Please prepare a brief summary of the audit of the Nogales operation, and business plans for the PMF and pharmaceutical proposals for further discussion.” The third director added, “The plans should be in two parts: plans for legitimate enterprise that can be discussed with the financial community, and confidential plans for integrating our narcotics operations.”

With that, the leaders of the Consortium agreed to meet in a fortnight and adjourned.

Shortly after the body of Joaquin Pretemo was discovered, Ariana Lentz was startled by the sound of a late morning telephone call from London. She liked to write from six a.m. until noon because interruptions were infrequent, allowing her to concentrate totally. The

piece about Marcello Barcqe was going well. He was an interesting subject, and, being a capable interviewer himself, understood the value of cooperation with an investigative reporter. He could become quite reticent at times, but he did not refuse outright to join in exploring the issues she raised. It was a grand assignment, and she was pleased with the way it was progressing.

“Ms. Lentz?”

“Yes ...”

“This is Joselyn Prescott, managing editor of the Euro Press Syndicate London bureau. How are you this afternoon?”

Pleased, and curious, Ariana replied, “Things are going well here, Ms. Prescott. What can I do for you?”

“May I call you Ariana? What I intend to propose will go so much better if we are colleagues approaching what I believe you will find as interesting as I think it is.”

Flattery, thought Ariana; why? “Yes, please do. Now, what is it that you find so interesting?”

“I’ll get straight to the point, Ariana: Three murdered high-ranking managers of free-trade zone international corporations in Panama. We have read the wire service articles, but we want European eyes on the story. We know you are in Mexico City to interview Marcello Barcqe, and we believe you are in position to provide us with the type of story we want. We can provide contacts in Panama’s Zona Libre Colon, other corporate and unofficial sources in addition to police insiders, willing to speak on background. Any information you might get from Barcqe would ice the cake. We are in a hurry, so you will have to leave what you are doing in Mexico City to spend the next

few days in Colon. Some others would like a piece of this action, but I think you are the one for this assignment. I'm sure we can come up with an exclusive deal that will satisfy all of our interests. Will you go to Panama to check this out for EPS?"

Ariana Lentz was excited by the opportunity to work with EPS, but she remained calm. "I am interested, Joselyn, but my time with Barcqe is precious."

"I know where you are coming from, Ariana, but your piece about Barcqe is, as I understand it, a lengthy feature, and the Panama story is hot right now. I have convinced the top brass that *you* are the best person for this job. This is a good one, and you are right for it. We won't forget that you were willing to help us put this story before the European community. We want *you* for this job."

After a brief pause, Ariana replied, "Thank you for your confidence in me. I accept your offer. I will need an advance for expenses."

"I will arrange immediately for a line of credit through the London branch of the Euro Bank Internationale. You can draw upon the line in both Mexico City and Colon. Thank you, Ariana. I won't forget your help with this one. I'll ring off now and call the bank. You should have confirmation from the bank by close of business in your time zone today. Chow."

"Buenos dias, Joselyn. Get back to you soon. And, thanks."

Cradling the phone, Ariana Lentz was pleased. "I'm coming back," she thought, as she dialed Marcello Barcqe's number.

"Simon, we did not hit Pretemo. He was on our original target list, but we decided on a different path for him. Rumors extant at the time suggested that he might be suspect

within the Consortium. His relationship with Mara de Jesus was part of the equation. Another part was his time in Washington and the likelihood that his dealing had not gone unnoticed. Garfield was moving up at the time and was a competent investigator whose jurisdiction included Pretemo's home ground. Having a sleeper with Juaquin Pretemo's credibility among the cartels and his father's reputation in the diplomatic community would have been a great asset. That Pretemo, who did not share his father's diplomatic immunity, escaped prosecution was an indication that he might be a person of interest to the DEA in the great game. Amos and I thought leaving him standing was sure to raise questions within the Consortium. They are no less capable than we at connecting dots, and they are far more likely to deal directly with such problems. His father's retirement from active trade diplomacy removed a prop under Juaquin. Inadvertently, Amos and I provided the opportunity for the Consortium to effect a change in personnel without suggesting a breach of security. Pretemo was executed very near the time we took down the other two, but it clearly was not the same MO. And with Amos taking down one while I executed the other, our formats differed somewhat in minor details. We hit them simultaneously, Simon; but, as you have repeatedly noted, we are not duplicates. Juaquin Pretemo's death was not unanticipated; however, the timing was unexpected."

"I understand. But Garfield lost his eyes within the Consortium. And the local Mexican authorities are treating the three killings as related events, though they have not associated them officially with drug cartel violence. We shall have to ride this one out quietly on both sides of the border. Go home, Devon, play policeman for a while."

Not quite knowing Stoddard's mind on the matter, Devon Xander turned, moved quietly to the door, and left Simon staring into the depths of *Deus Ex Machina*.

Several weeks later, at 0300, the soft light and sound of an awakened secure satellite phone whispered, “My place, 191200 Instant.” Devon Xander depressed the acknowledge button, then immediately returned to a deep, restful sleep.

And Amos Sanson?: On a veranda overlooking a western sea, a waiter placed a glass of red wine of local vintage near the gloved hand of a solitary gentleman gazing into the waning light from a crimson horizon.

He had entered a new universe, effortlessly moving throughout the world of rare books, searching on consignment or simply to indulge his abiding affection for the feel and smell and sight and sound of the written word: Whether bound in Corinthian leather or illuminated by a medieval master or encasing an esoteria decipherable only by a handful, perhaps a hundred, but no more. He still searched silently, moving gracefully through city streets and country by-ways and ancient monasteries, wherever necessary or inviting, and causing no ripples. As often as occasion permitted, from sunset minus fifteen to plus forty-five, a glass of red wine of local vintage at his gloved hand, he sat in the fading light as the sun descended through brilliant scarlets, purples, and yellows into a western sea. Some spots don't change.