

November 23: Ithaca, New York

At exactly 10 A.M. Alex finally received the long awaited call. It was Ms. Marcia Peake at the State Department. Could he be in Washington next Wednesday at 9 A.M? They would give him two, two-hour slots, to make his presentation, the 29th and 30th. Yes, she had said, two-hour sessions on successive days. *Odd!* She gave him the address. Her voice was low, well modulated, professional. Nothing he could read there, one way or another.

Then, as Bill Parkman advised him, he practiced—practiced—practiced. He'd even hired two highly regarded computer graphics artists to do slides for him. *Nothing but the best!* This was the most crucial presentation of his life. He hoped he would be ready.

November 29: Washington, D.C.

When Alex's cab dropped him outside the gray granite Federal building, the Washington sky was bleak, a light bone-chilling rain falling. The unmistakable smell of winter had arrived, mingling with the strong exhaust fumes of the city. *Nothing like carbon-monoxide in the morning!* The early morning's traffic still had its lights on, windshield wipers engaged. Even in the first hours of daylight, shrill horns blared. He wasn't used to being back in urban America; perhaps he never would be. "*Honk Honk!!!*" He heard a loud horn blaring nearby and someone shouting: "Where'd ya' get yer fuckin' license, inna' fuckin' Cracker Jack box!"

Welcome to Washington! Alex Wyckham shivered, not just from the bitter wind, but from the anxious churning of his nervous stomach. After so many years of teaching, he wasn't accustomed to having butterflies. He fought the uneasiness.

The weathered steps rose sharply toward the tall granite columns above. He had two Kodak slide tray boxes tucked under his left arm, a heavy briefcase in the other hand. Looking up at the imposing architecture, he felt oddly insecure. *This is my government. It is supposed to work for me, not against me.* For some reason, the thought failed to comfort him. Then he saw a smallish man standing at the top of the wide stair.

Elliott Rosen was exactly as he had described himself in yesterday's phone call: "*A short, bald-headed gnome.*" Rosen waved. As Alex started up, he thought of the last three weeks he had spent in Ithaca. He had polished his presentation to perfection. *Don't blow it now!* When he came in under the overhang of the wide portico, Alex was winded from the steep climb. Rosen mercifully relieved him of the burden of the slide boxes. *Out of shape. Damn!*

"Elliott Rosen, CIA." As they shook hands, Alex guessed his age at around fifty. Rosen led the way. The walk through the cold building to the conference room was mercifully short. Two clean-cut marines stood at attention outside the conference room door, and two more inside. *Might as well be Lima.* He frowned, made ever more anxious by the guards and the weapons at their

sides. The room was spacious, but dark and cold. Sterile, he thought. He could see that several of the invited officials had already arrived. They were tightly congregated along the back wall, where tables were set up, apparently for a breakfast buffet. They gathered and came forward single-file to introduce themselves. *Like a receiving line.*

“Marcia Peake, State Department.” She was attractive—fortyish.

“Alex Wyckham, Ms. Peake. Nice to put a face with a voice.”

“Dr. Wyckham, a pleasure.” Her voice was a cultured tool. “Why don’t you have a bite to eat? It looks like we have quite a day in front of us.” She’d said that without any pre-judgement, Alex was sure of that.

“Don’t mind if I do.” Alex looked over the buffet selections. Great mounds of fluffy yellow scrambled eggs, bacon and sausages were generously piled in cafeteria style, stainless-steel warming trays. Alex felt his stomach turn over. “Now that I think of it...I’ll just have coffee and a breakfast roll.” As coffee was poured, several others introduced themselves.

After a short interlude, with the normal pleasantries, introductions and breakfast, Marcia Peake called for the attendees to take their seats. The long, linen covered table faced a lectern. The participants, from left to right facing the lectern, were: Lt. General Chandler Anslinger, Director of Ft. Detrick; Mr. Asa Candlet, Deputy Director of DEA; Ms. Charlotte Henderson, Special Assistant to the President; Ms. Marcia Peake, Assistant Secretary of State—Bureau of International Narcotics Matters; Maj. General Arthur Q. L. West, Department of Defense, Intelligence Operations and Mr. Elliott Rosen, Narcotics Operations, CIA.

By the time the panel was seated, Alex had already taken his place at the lectern and arranged his outline and notes. Previously, he had given the slide trays to a technician. A push-button on the lectern would advance his slides, he had said. Alex was comfortable working with visual aids. There was a portable slide-control with a lengthy cord, just in case he wanted to move about during his presentation. *Thoughtful!* Another technician had taken his transparencies for the overhead projector and had taken a seat beside it. *Seems as though someone is trying to help.*

When they had taken their places, Marcia smiled and began her introduction. To Alex, she sounded too cheerful, like a chairperson of a National Press Club luncheon.

“Ladies and gentlemen. It’s our pleasure to have Dr. Alex Wyckham of Cornell University as our guest. Let’s welcome him.” As he stepped to the podium, their applause was short, but polite.

“Thank you.” *Thank God she dispensed with the rap sheet.* “I’m advised you have all read the synopsis of my credentials and Ambassador Parkman’s report,” Alex began. “I am indebted to him and to you for your interest. Thank you. I’ll try to make the best use of your time.” There was a general murmur of approval.

“My proposal, ladies and gentlemen, is a simple one, to request U.S. government participation and financial support for my plan to release host-specific biological control agents, plant pathogens and myco-herbicides, if you will; to permanently destroy the main coca growing areas of Peru, Bolivia, and Colombia. Without a drug supply; there is no demand. Biological control is not a solution to every problem plant, but, appropriately applied and monitored, it is an environmentally safe and desirable form of long term control.”

Already, there seemed to be a tangible tension in the room.

“Modern biotechnology has created the means for a quick, final and bloodless solution to the problem of criminal trafficking in plant derived drugs. Throughout my presentation, I will maintain that the curtailment of narcotic drugs and their trafficking is, first and foremost, a moral issue, not one of economics or international politics. That is even more true today, in my opinion, because a nation with a cure to the growing disease of drugs could no more withhold it than it could hoard a cure for AIDS. I will also stress that drug trafficking is both the primary and renewable source of funding for globalized crime, providing tax-free criminal revenues of at least five-hundred billion dollars each and every year, perhaps more.”

There was an uneasy shuffling at the table. Several persons poured coffee from the carafes spaced uniformly around the table. Someone coughed, nervously.

“I’ve taken the liberty to prepare some visual aids, which I will show you on both the overhead and slide projectors. I’ve also brought research documentation for the laboratory work already completed. I’ll discuss that with you over the next two days. You will find an agenda and photocopies of relevant exhibits already at your places. I’ll refer to several of these when necessary.”

While the participants courteously thumbed through their stacks of bound papers, Alex held a single folded piece of paper aloft. “You have also graciously agreed to this precaution for my personal security, and I thank you all. Neither the subject of this meeting, nor my name are to be mentioned other than to those who must be involved in reaching a decision on my proposal. Thank you for appreciating my situation and my concerns.” *I’m too young for hot flashes.* Alex felt uncomfortably warm.

November 29: The Peruvian Amazon

Alfonso Suarez-Paredes wiped away the dripping sweat, smoothed his dark hair and put his black Stetson back in place. Just so. As sticky as the late spring heat was, nothing made him feel better than to see his plant operating at peak capacity again. The full reconstruction of the Ucayali coca processing facility had been complete for almost two months, but production levels had just returned to his previously targeted goal of eleven hundred pounds per week.

In re-establishing the production complex, Alfonso had the opportunity to make improvements, particularly in the riverside unloading and docking areas. Two more fast hovercraft water-mules were in service. There were now conveyors to transport the coca leaf from the dockside hoppers, bringing it directly to the processing area. Since natural gas was conveniently discovered on the property, generators utilizing the on-site gas had replaced those using fuel oil. All in all, the Wyckham incident had been nothing but a temporary annoyance, an expensive nuisance.

Tomorrow, he and Francisco would be leaving at for Cali. There was one uncompleted order of business that had been on his mind ever since Francisco had hurriedly dismantled the plant in July. He looked at his watch. *Where is Francisco now?*

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“...that was a mustard plant, and that’s enough of plant genome mapping for now. Suffice to say it’s well advanced. After having established the how-to, from a scientific point of view, I will review the social, economic, political, and criminal implications of my proposal. These are from my point of view, of course, along with an assessment of a the required budget and the possible deployment needs of a covert operation.” Alex could see many of them referring to their printed materials.

“Biotechnology uses living organisms to create something usually thought to be useful to mankind. A similar process has been going on since the Stone Age when we began to domesticate animals and grow plants for food. In the past we called it selective breeding. Only recently have we called it biotechnology. It’s the fast-forward version of that saves generations of time and work. A biotechnology created organism used today can be as simple as a single-celled bacteria, one that produces life giving insulin, for example.” He clicked for the next slide.

“Now let’s go faster into fast-forward. I’ve told you plants are far simpler organisms than humans are, so let’s create some broad conceptual scenarios. There’s much talk about ‘smart bombs’ or weapons, where the ‘smart’ factor is generally some form of applied electronic or computer technology. But what happens when the smart weapons are pathogen carrying insects, like bees, ants or butterflies, which have a symbiotic relationship to certain plants? Such insects can act as a ‘vector’ for the transmission of bio-engineered fungus, molds, viruses or bacteria. In the application proposed, using recombinant DNA to modify a pathogen and insect vectors to introduce it, you create new kinds of biotech ‘buzzwords.’” It was hard to read anything from the faces of his audience, although Alex could see that whispered comments were being exchanged.

“We, in essence, are going to modify an existing pathogen, so that it can become a tool. This is the classical approach to biological control. You might also make it more virulent by increasing the dose of the organism. For exam-

ple, we all have small colonies of diphtheria bacteria living on our throats. Normally our immune system keeps them in check, but we have it. It's multiplying the number that makes the bacteria dangerous. We can increase the virulence of an organism just by increasing its numbers. Then the vector insect chewing on the plant introduces the pathogen as it eats. Insects don't brush their teeth! That's the key, insects don't brush their teeth."

Such a simple-minded dental hygienic reference bought a round of hearty laughs.

"Thank you. The insect vector becomes a transfer agent, precisely then, because it doesn't brush its teeth. As it or its larvae munch along from plant to plant, the insect transfers the pathogen. That's a plausible general scenario. I've actually advanced that scenario a few notches. It's a powerful tool." It was hard to tell if their mood was good or bad. Bill had warned him that political types didn't like to sit and listen

"Dr. Wyckham. You've chosen a very user-friendly term, tool, for your insect borne plant pathogens. Would it be just as appropriate to use the term weapon?" Charlotte Henderson, Special Advisor to the President, was the questioner. She smiled broadly.

Wow, she brushes her teeth! "If it's in the context of 'war on drugs,' I'd say definitely yes, Ms. Henderson. This is the final battle in that war!" Alex made easy eye contact. He was now more relaxed—still tense, but relaxed. He was right on his planned time.

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Alfonso looked disdainfully at his watch. "It's about time, Francisco."

"*Si, Jefe*, Sorry to be late."

"Do you remember where *Señora* Wyckham and the others are buried?"

"*Si, Jefe*."

"We've got to put that behind us now, Francisco, once and for all. Nasty business! Get a detail and dig them up. And do it now! I want to see you put their remains in the river myself, someplace where no one will ever find them. Do you understand?"

"*Si*." Francisco remembered how fortunate he had been that none of the searchers had found them before.

"As lax as the Peruvian government is, Francisco, they would have made another concession to the *gringos*. 'Make a policy example over this particular spot', someone would have said. The Americans would have insisted on that! And there goes our investment, flush, right down the toilet! I'm going to the hacienda. Call me on the wireless when you find the bodies."

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"It's a lot easier sending in bugs, aah, biological agents, than it is to send in marines. Or DEA agents, you're saying? Put a lot of my guys out of work.

That bugs me.” Asa Candlet, Deputy Director of DEA quipped brightly, but without much humor.

Alex wondered if Candlet really thought he had made a joke, or if he was just making the appearance of being friendly; that losing budget and body count of those working under him represented a loss of power—loss of jealously protected turf? Maybe the DEA man was just bored with slides of the physiology of the coca plant. Alex grimaced. Wait till they see the slides of my *Ralstonia* experiments!

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Finally! Alfonso put on his hat and climbed into the Land Cruiser. The drive took only two minutes. At last he would close the book on this chapter of his life.

“They dig them much deeper in Texas, Francisco.”

The grave was not a deep one, only about four feet. As he looked over the edge, he could see that the workers had cleanly excavated around the three bodies. *The jungle is not kind to the dead!* Other than bones, there wasn’t much left of them, only a few scraps of clothing clinging to the skeletons. *What was it they said, ‘dust to dust’?*

He was amazed at how different she looked from how he had last seen her. The only way she was clearly distinguishable from the others was by the large chunks of bone missing from her skull, where the bullet had entered and exited. Alfonso suddenly felt flushed—then he looked away.

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“What you are saying is that you may want to identify more than one plant pathogen and more than one insect vector, one or more of which may be used simultaneously. A multiple-warhead?”

“Precisely! Thank you Mr. Rosen.”

“Doctor, I don’t want to play Senator Hayakawa with you, but don’t you mean kill when you say control? What word would you use if we were talking about humans?” The barbed question came from Charlotte Henderson.

“We are not talking about humans, Ms. Henderson. Let’s put that notion to rest once and for all. There is little danger of any kind to humans. This whole idea of an *Andromeda Strain* is purely hocus-pocus. The idea of biological organisms causing an apocalyptic scenario is mathematically remote. The *Andromeda* concept ignores the reality that organisms learn to live together. The relationship between plant and human species is different. A disease that has inhabited elm trees for years, perhaps centuries, does not all of the sudden enter the blood stream of humans and cause havoc. It just doesn’t happen. We get sick because of imbalances in our system, not invasions by old bacteria friends turned angry. It is my belief that this plan is the equivalent of using

living cells to make this world a better place to live. It's no different than making a better milk cow, or a better ear of corn." Alex smiled. *I'm rolling now.*

"So," said Marcia, "to make a killer pathogen you'd basically reverse the process of making it more benign, using more and more virulent strains of the pathogen to make it more devastating."

"Thank you," Alex interjected. "Obviously, to develop a super-killer pathogen the process would be reversed, breeding plant pathogens for the most aggressive virulence possible. It is not normally the role of the plant pathologist or molecular microbiologist to create ever more virulent pathogens. In fact, that's just what I've done with the potato pathogen. However, when the objective is to kill a specific host, then the reversed effort searches for a pathogen that is both an efficient killer and can be made host-specific. Host-specific means that the pathogen is designed to attack only one specific host or related host. We do not wish to attack legitimate commercial crops.

"On that point," Elliott Rosen challenged, "how can you be certain that your disease will not kill a valuable commercial crop, like the potato? Didn't you just say that you proposed a potato disease to kill the coca plant?"

"I did indeed, Mr. Rosen. Now, I'd expect you might be wondering why I would choose what might be thought of as a potato disease to infect a coca plant? That would be a normal and an excellent question. So would, 'How do you keep a pathogen, that already has a history of attacking the potato, from completely wiping it out in its more virulent form? Part of the research I'm advocating is to make sure that the variety chosen will only affect one intended host, and no other plant. I've already done that with the potato pathogen. We're certainly not trying to duplicate the Irish Potato Famine.'" Unexpectedly, Alex paused. Somehow, he could hear Sharon's voice.

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"...wrap them in a tarp and dump it downstream. Make sure it's around the bend; 'out of sight, out of mind', I say. And put them in a place where the current is strongest. You will dine with me when you have finished your task, Francisco."

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"...that's what we mean by host-specific. The host is a specific plant. I am not a botanical bully. I can assure you, Ms. Peake, that I am neither Dr. Mengele, Dr. Frankenstein or Dr. Strangelove. I would not wish to be thought of in comparison to any of those gentlemen. There is good science and bad science. Being sure of your host makes all the difference."

"We've been waiting for you," Marcia Peake replied, deepening her voice in her best rendition of Count Dracula as host of the castle.

Alex thought she must be joking just to relieve the ordeal of just having endured so much grounding in the genetic building blocks of rDNA.

“I’d like to ask if there is any chance that some form of pesticides could kill your bugs, circumvent the effectiveness of your plan, ruin your whole idea?” Asa Candlet leaned forward in his chair.

“Not likely after-the-fact, Mr. Candlet. A combination of pathogens would be extremely difficult to protect against. It might well be assumed that *cocales*, that’s Spanish for coca farms, submitted to a multi-pathogen attack of high virulence would mark the true end of the plant in that environment, particularly if a wilt disease infected the soil. It would also be hoped that at least one pathogen in the package would become trans-generational in one or more insect vectors. That means the disease pathogen would be passed on to succeeding generations of the insect. I’ve said it’s possible that a variety of host-specific vectors could constitute a multi-pathogenic delivery system. In military terms, ladies and gentlemen, a multiple-missile warhead—in this case a living warhead, one that proliferates by itself.”

“Interesting. What gives you confidence that these concepts will work?” It was Anslinger, the man from Ft. Detrick.

“In the last four months, General Anslinger, before asking Ambassador Parkman to provide the opportunity for this meeting, I’ve taken the specific research further, much further. I’ve been able to complete a series of controlled experiments to test the concepts outlined for you today. I’m sure you’ll want to submit my research data to independent experts, or your own, perhaps at your own facility. Believe me, it works. With your indulgence, I’ll be explaining those results in later slides. Plants are much simpler organisms than humans are. There is no nervous system in a plant. They die quickly.”

“Does this make it easier to kill plants than humans?”

Who’s trying to kill humans? Alex was not quite sure how he should answer Charlotte Henderson’s oddly out-of-place question. “Hmm. Yes, easier and more desirable in this case. I’ve dedicated my working life to date, Ms. Henderson, to improving the potato as a food source, a source of protein to feed the world. In that regard, I’m not interested in a solution that kills the coca plant at the expense of the potato, the coffee plant, or any other. Like most people, I like my meat and potatoes, my morning coffee and my chocolate bar. However, host-specificity is one of the attainable goals of modern molecular biology. What I am asking of you is to take this research to the point where reliable host-specificity for more than one pathogen is assured. That, of course, will take funding. But calculations I’ve made indicate an expenditure in the four to six million dollar range, which is remarkably low considering what illegal drugs have cost us.”

General Anslinger had been ruffling through his black attaché case. “Doctor Wyckham, may I ask which insects are your vector candidates?”

“Insects of promise, General, are *Eloria noyesi*, a moth and its larvae, called *ulo* in Bolivia. Leaf-cutter ants called *coqui*. Another moth, *Eucleodora cocae*, or

gusano de tela, and the beetle, *la groma*. The beetle is an interesting vector candidate, General. It needs to hitch a ride to the site, but it might enable a fungal pathogen, a mycoherbicide, to penetrate the soil. It's a living roto-tiller. The ants and moths would carry a bacteria. When the plant pathogen is genetically modified, perhaps both it and the vector might be enhanced to be resistant to plant defenses and fungicides."

"I take it you'd prefer a fungus?"

"Fungal pathogens, like *Fusarium oxysporum*, or a modified coffee rust for example, hold much promise for long term destruction of coca farming, particularly if introduced during the wet season, as the fungal residues remain in the soil. For that matter, so do the bacterial wilt pathogens. We'll also look at mycoplasmas and spiroplasmas. These are like bacteria, but without a cell wall.

"Wouldn't you be facing the same problem of killing more than you wanted with a coffee-rust disease." Charlotte reached compulsively for her coffee cup.

"What you have to understand, Ms. Henderson, is that once a rust pathogen is modified to be host-specific to the coca plant, it isn't a coffee-rust anymore. It's a coca-rust. The Holy Grail of coca plant destruction is a highly virulent pathogen one already finds in nature. It's then made even more virulent by applied biotechnology. More than one pathogen can kill the selected plant. You might call what I've envisioned a 'biological binary', since it contains two or more pathogenic agents released together for purposes of increased destruction. It would be like a composite clone of Jack the Ripper, Vlad the Impaler, John Dillinger and Hannibal Lecter combined. I don't want coca plants to be replanted in the same soil ever again. My solution would be both lethal and relatively permanent. Rather than to deliver pathogens solely by insect vectors, you might release insect vectors and airborne pathogens from the same airplane."

It was Rosen again. "Why not use some sort of virus?"

"Good question, Mr. Rosen. Viruses do have some potential. However, my expertise is not as a virologist. I wouldn't feel competent working in that area." There was only a momentary silence.

"Speaking of confidence, Doctor, what's to prevent your plant pathogen from mutating to create some monster disease, totally unexpected and rampantly out of control! What guarantee can you give against a horrible mutation?"

"To use the word 'mutation' in such a context., Ms. Henderson, is a scare tactic, not one based on scientific fact. Any pathogen already in nature can mutate into one lethal to a plant host. *Fusarium* strains do not tend to mutate

at all. Therefore, to suggest this happens with any frequency or that the consequences are monumental, is false. It is so rare, statistically, that the chances are in ranges of millions to one. A pathogen added to nature's warehouse doesn't change the odds higher in favor of new mutations either. Most pathogens are already in the earth. Mutations are not lurking in the soil like dark monsters. Now, if you're asking for an iron-clad guarantee that there's no statistical risk, no matter how small, that's impossible. Life is not based on such guarantees. People are still killed in auto wrecks. What you have to do, is to deal with the odds, and then ask if the risk factor outweighs the benefits of the biocontrol in question."

"I guess you'd think me scientifically stupid," Charlotte whined, "but what if unreasonable guarantees are important to me?"

"It's no sin to be uninformed, Ms. Henderson," Alex grinned sardonically, "only to remain so. Why do we continue gamble on marriages with only a fifty-fifty chance and then demand a guarantee against an event with odds that are a fifty-million to one shot? "

"I haven't taken your first chance, Doctor. Why should I take the second?" Charlotte smirked.

"Would there be any reason why a government would have to sponsor you?"

"No, General Anslinger, there wouldn't. As you know, biotech is not a private preserve of governments. Any type of organization can use the same techniques that create cures for diseases to create more devastating diseases. Commercial biotechnology firms are not signatories to any biological weapons treaty, nor does the Recombinant Advisory Committee regulate them in America. In fact, a rich sponsor wouldn't need any experience in science, just motivation, big bucks and a staff of good scientists. Hired guns. This is a way a government could be involved while maintaining a position of non-complicity. However, perhaps that solution is putting the cart before the horse just now."

"Has the government created any precedent for research of this type?"

"Well, Ms. Peake, General Anslinger or others at Ft. Detrick might have better knowledge of that than myself. There are increasing applications where biotechnology is being used to change plants for the better and also to kill them. Currently, the 'Drug Czar' of Florida wants a biological solution for marijuana and I believe he also has adequate funding. There has also been secret government funding for the biological control, or killing, as Ms. Henderson prefers, of the marijuana plant. In that case, the pathogen was *Fusarium oxysporum*. If I have my facts right, it was funded by USDA and the target was California."

"How do you know that, Dr Wyckham?" Anslinger seemed irritated.

“I have a friend who consulted on it, General. In California, despite what is heard through the grapevine, the largest cash crop is marijuana, not grapes.”

“Humph! Sour grapes. Some of you academic people talk too much.”

“There’s a big difference between killing our own marijuana and Colombia’s or Mexico’s marijuana.” Charlotte countered sharply.

“Now, Ms. Henderson, let’s not get ourselves out-of-joint.” Rosen grinned.

“A very good line, Mr. Rosen.”

“I thought you were too young to remember that reference to marijuana, Ms. Henderson.”

“Very gallant, Dr. Wyckham. Thank you.”

The panel was back in good spirits again.

November 29: Corleone—En Route to Palermo, Sicily

Salvatore Vincente Leggio was fifty-eight years old. He had achieved the singular distinction of becoming the man of ultimate respect. That was not as surprising as was the fact that his particular occupation had allowed him to reach fifty-eight at all. After reaching a time in life when other men would think fondly of future retirement years, Leggio thought only in terms of a long reign of kingship. Leggio was already *capo di tutti capi*, head of the Mafia’s Men of Honor, the most feared criminal organization in the world.

Leggio had reached the pinnacle of the underworld not by luck, inheritance or bloodline, but by blood. Blood flowing red in the streets and gutters of Palermo, Rome, New York and other cities around the world. It was a paradox that a man of such diabolical terror, feared to the extent that those who crossed his path on the streets of Sicily also prayerfully crossed themselves, would also be a man of both culture and subtle cunning.

But cunning was not likely to allow him to be kept so regally in the future as it had in the past. Leggio was nostalgic for the time when competition between rival interests was reached by a single settlement, when a simple decision of the Sicilian leader, no matter who he was at the time, was the final word. There was a long history of men of common heritage who paid their respectful dues to the Sicilian Men of Honor.

It was drugs that had changed everything, not that anyone complained. They were richer than they could ever have imagined. The huge increase in revenues, which were already building rapidly in the 70’s, had exploded to epic proportions by the 90’s. And with increasing profitability, the seeds were sown to grasp control over the sources of such riches.

It was true that the long established Sicilian primacy at the distribution end of the drug pipeline had been recently challenged, but despite mounting pressures The Men of Honor maintained a firm, if somewhat tenuous hold. The competition was heating up, however, and getting smarter. Those who controlled the production of three substances: heroin, cocaine and marijuana, suddenly awakened to the fact that they had something their associates of

convenience did not, the plant resources of the drugs themselves. The Colombian Cartel, the Chinese Triads, the Taliban and the upstart Mexicans, each in their own ways, had eroded the Sicilian's power; each claiming what they thought was theirs alone.

And so, the holder of the throne at Corleone found himself reigning in an era of strained cooperation. It wasn't just meeting this challenge, but triumph through accommodation, that occupied the mind of *Don Salvatore Leggio*, still the unchallenged ruler of the Sicilians.

There was little question that the time had arrived when diplomacy could no longer be avoided. There was too much at stake. More and more power was concentrated in the hands of those who could control the flow; the growing, processing and distribution aspects of the trade. Perhaps, that was as it should be, he thought. These were the days of reward for 'value-added'. It was also why he had chosen to accept this opportunity to visit Cali. If things went according to plan, he would firmly establish his organization at the forefront of all primary activities. Success would bring the glories of the past, the riches of the future, and the proper respect for the *capo di tutti capi* and the Mafia's Men of Honor.

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"...in the simplest of terms, it is a failure of politics" As Alex prepared to read from his notes the somber change in mood was etched on their faces. "What is our present national drug control strategy? Let me read excerpts from a White House document by that name." Alex drew a paper from a manila folder.

"Item: There is an inevitable conclusion that a premium must be placed on dismantling the organizations that traffic in drugs. These organizations produce cocaine, heroin, marijuana and other dangerous drugs, transport them to our shores, distribute them throughout our communities and launder the profits that are used to finance the entire cycle. This strategy also declares that a systematic, deliberate and thorough dismantling of drug trafficking organizations will become an even greater area of attention for federal law enforcement agencies, as well as other arms of the federal government, including the Department of Defense, Department of State, the intelligence community and others."

"Item: Experience has also shown that a point where the drug trade is most susceptible to such disruption is at its organizational center of gravity—the traffickers home country base of operations."

"Item: The goal of our Andean strategy is to enable those nations to overcome the destabilizing effects of eliminating cocaine, a major source of income. In Peru, the United States supports the Fujimori administration's efforts to reform the nation's economy, but is concerned about its lack of commitment to combat cocaine processing and distribution, as well as coca

cultivation, as evidenced by the lack of a coordinated effort to combat trafficking organizations.”

“Item: Mexico is the primary transit point for cocaine moving into the United States.” Alex shifted his gaze from his notes to the assembly.

“Talk about Montezuma’s Revenge! By the way, those are all direct quotes, except my Mexican editorial comment, of course.” His words had flowed easily, as though they had been patiently waiting to be used, stacked in neat rows, organized thought by thought, all in perfect order.

Charlotte Henderson was impatient. During Alex’s lengthy quote she had glared contemptuously at him, tapping her pencil. She was well on her way to ruining a once perfect linen tablecloth. Now the pencil pointed at Alex as she spoke, moving its point in emphasis. “If I’m not mistaken, Dr. Wyckham, you are reading from a Bush Sr. Administration’s White House document. That’s ancient history. This is a much different administration.” She smirked reproachfully. “I know you’ve been away.”

“Perhaps I have missed something? Let me ask you, Miss Henderson, during my absence, has the drug strategy of your administration somehow changed in any material way?” *Too bad such a great looking woman is such a bitch.*

She shifted slightly in her seat. “No, I merely wanted it on record that you were not quoting this administration’s document. That’s all.”

What record is she talking about? “Well, thank you for setting the record straight.” There was more than a tinge of sarcasm in Alex’s tone. Be careful. He reminded himself to be cool. It was probably her reminder to him that biotechnology was his turf, but politics was theirs.

November 29: Palermo, Sicily

Salvatore Leggio had begun his intense scrutiny of the young Alfonso Suarez-Paredes over two years ago. What struck him, then and since, was that he had all the elements Leggio knew were essential ingredients for an action plan to change the fortunes of the Men of Honor. First, Suarez-Paredes controlled vast acreage of coca land, now in more than one country. Second, he had an intense dislike of the Colombians, much as he himself possessed. Third, he was young, ambitious and imaginative, willing to break new ground. He was also vulnerable, and this last reason was powerful. The growing strength of *Señero Luminosa*, the Shining Path, exposed him to their whim. Leggio reasoned that since *Señero* also threatened the Peruvian government, that the politicians wouldn’t be particular over who killed them. Once he could establish forces in Peru, Leggio would bring *Señero* to heel. It was a rarity in today’s world to find a place where the government was so weak that he could back a secret war without opposition.

The cornerstone of his plan was to make Suarez-Paredes a real partner, and on terms favorable to both of them. Leggio also wanted the Peruvian to think the plan was his own. The idea would be to suggest just enough, so that Suarez-Paredes would act in response to his own vulnerability. Although the

young man didn't know it, he was the primary reason the *capo di tutti capi* had accepted this invitation. Like good wine, the time was ripe. For two years, paid informants had traced every activity of *Señor* Alfonso Suarez-Paredes. Tomorrow, these wise investments were about to produce a bonanza of dividends.

The Chinese would be formidable competitors. He knew they had missed few opportunities to seek fortune in many lands. Now it was his turn. But before he could win the coming war, he must win at statesmanship. That was a different challenge.

As he was driven toward the airport, Salvatore Leggio looked out over the unfathomable blueness of the Mediterranean. Men along the roadway doffed their small peaked caps in respect as the limousine passed. If Sicily had a ruler, he was it. The time had come for a larger kingdom.

November 29: Washington, D.C.

Charlotte Henderson got right to the point. "Let's begin with what will be a common perception, Dr. Wyckham. The solution you propose will be considered an act of war! Worse yet, it will be considered the most despicable form of war, biological warfare. There is a public perception of this, our public's and the international public's perception. There is a worldview of this. There is a legal consensus opinion for this. It is an international public relations nightmare! I'm sure you have weighed these factors?" It was an undisguised, in-your-face challenge.

Alex remembered a seminar on presentation skills he had once attended. *Move around, they advised.* That always proved good advice, particularly when you are under fire. He walked away from the podium and stepped down to the same level as the committee's table, and walked right up to it, directly opposite Charlotte Henderson. *Damn, she is good looking!*

"Actually, I have, Ms. Henderson. I've had almost nothing else on my mind for the past several months. As I said in my introduction, this is a moral issue, one in which illegal crops are not protected by the same standards as legitimate crops."

Alex needed to gain control. *Slow it down!* "It might be said, folks, that there are many types of warfare. Ms. Henderson has just alluded to biological warfare. The first that comes to my mind is military warfare. There could be diplomatic warfare, applied pressure from a nation or group of nations. There might be psychological warfare. There might be economic warfare, such as eventually taking over a nation's assets. There could be the kind of warfare that withholds a needed commodity, like food or oil. Guerrilla warfare could occur within a nation's own borders. There might be terrorist acts that break the confidence in institutions. Perhaps religious warfare would ridicule another's values. There could be chemical warfare such as Iraq against Iran. I certainly might have missed something, but there is a common thread that runs between all these forms of warfare. What is it?"

General Anslinger's reply was immediate. "They're all acts of war directed against people, humans."

"We biotechnologists make a good team. Thanks, General. That's exactly the point. The conventional wisdom regarding concepts of warfare, including the language surrounding it, implies human targets, human casualties, human victims." He paused for his point. "I will make the case that victim, casualty, murder and assassination, are words not even remotely applicable to plants."

"I think you are splitting hairs when humans suffer as a result, but make your case. We're not here to stifle dissent." Henderson's coy smile was practiced.

She probably has bad breath. "I will not make the argument man is different because he has a unique thumb, that he plans for the future, that he has a soul, or round up any or all of the usual humankind suspects. I will let each of you decide what makes a plant different from a human. I will say that like men and women, there are good and bad plants, that all plants are not created equal, nor are they treated with the same regard."

"I'll be your straight-man, Doctor." Rosen chimed in. "What term would you like to apply to warfare against plants?"

"I prefer biocontrol, thank you," Alex said, "I prefer control because it's the scientific term. Fungal pathogens as control agents are called mycoherbicides. As biotechnology advances, so will the applications. Weeds considered pests, like poison ivy, crabgrass and kudzu have been the subjects of much study. Their presence is undesirable. They have been classified as bad plants. The fact is, biotechnology is so new that new words are created every day to describe techniques and options that were not possible yesterday. It wasn't so long ago that a mouse was only a small rodent and modem, hard-drive, floppy disc and CD-ROM had no common meaning. Technology changes things. The technological reality is that eliminating a troublesome plant has only recently become an option for biological control. During the Vietnam years, killing foliage that hid the enemy was called defoliation. In more recent times, chemical control of drug producing plants has been referred to as eradication. What obvious problems did these latter words have?"

"Correct me if I'm wrong with my facts." Rosen cleared his throat. "One, in terms of Agent Orange, it killed all the foliage, not just one kind. Second, although it was not legally proven in court, the out-of-court settlements suggest that there were serious ill-effects to humans as well. I admit, this was a chemical, not a living control agent. In another case, Parquat contaminated the plant leaves so that a drug user could be adversely affected, particularly in regard to marijuana. Another chemical herbicide, Spike, does kill specific host types, although not permanently. It's expensive to make, expensive to use and its use has been politically unacceptable."

"Aha! That's exactly the point," Charlotte Henderson spoke with emphasis. "Neither the semantics nor the type of control agent used mask the reality of unacceptability."

Charlotte's mounting anger unnerved him. Her harsh reply had startled him. Alex struggled to regain control.

"Unacceptable?" The word hung ominously in his mind. "I hope a decision hasn't already been made, Miss Henderson. Am I wasting my time?" Alex's searching eyes traveled slowly up and down the table. There was no comment, no giveaway look or gesture. "Let me come back then to good plants and bad plants. We would all agree that humans are a greater species than plants. Yet, even in our high regard for the superiority of man, we still acknowledge the distinction between good and bad men. If bad is in man, why not in plants? When men are bad enough, we execute them by gas, lethal injection, electrocution, hanging, decapitation or firing squad. When groups of men are bad enough we get the UN to recommend that we cluster bomb them. When the UN does not agree, we sometimes bomb them anyway. If we can say Hitler, Stalin and Saddam are bad men, why can't we say coca is a bad plant?"

"Dr. Wyckham, if you think the poor peasants who grow coca are common criminals to be deprived of a livelihood just because you think their crop is bad, you may be a much worse person than you suspect. I cannot speak for this group, but to me it's still warfare against innocent human victims. Besides, when we condemn a criminal we don't eliminate a whole race. What if the coca plant is a cure for cancer?"

"That's more than one question, Ms. Henderson." *A cure for cancer?* Alex thought Charlotte's arguments were tired, worn out. "Let's look at your last question first. A cure for cancer. The answer is I don't know. I can say, however, it's not likely to be, because the coca shrub is one of the more studied plants in recent times. It's been tested, tried and used by scientists from all over the world, including Sigmund Freud. By now, there's not much we don't know about it. If it were the cure for cancer, we'd probably know that. If we are wrong, however, we haven't destroyed the coca plant itself, because its germplasm can be preserved intact. As to your race question, you can't equate plant races with human races! The word 'race' just doesn't mean the same thing. There are very few human races. There are literally hundreds of thousands of different plants. In the Amazon regions alone, there are an estimated eighteen thousand plants. Entomologists have classified over fifteen hundred butterflies there."

"What do butterflies have to do with plants?" General West asked in confusion.

"Nothing, other than to indicate comparative numbers. What I'm getting at is, you can't compare 'races of man' to kinds of plants or to different insects. There are a very limited number of human racial types. You can see how easily emotional rhetoric can make incredible leaps to connections between things that don't exist." *Take a break.* Alex held his water glass to his lips and drank slowly. "On the contrary, man's warehouse of plants is huge. Even so, both animal and plant species become extinct all the time. Extinction of other

species created the human race.” He paused again to let the truth of that fact sink in. “It’s also possible that dinosaur teeth are a cure for cancer. We can pine over the value of one of nature’s creations, but what we know for sure is that life goes on, with or without a group of plants or animals. Since the beginning of life, there are literally millions of species that have become extinct and more that will become extinct, with or without our efforts. I don’t know if any of them, Ms. Henderson, from the Dodo bird or the carrier pigeon, were or would have been a cure for cancer, impotence, or migraine headaches. What is true is that creation, evolution and extinction is the cycle of a living universe. And speaking of extinction, there is no greater threat to plant and animal species today than from the rapid deforestation of tropical areas caused by new coca and opium poppy cultivation. Each year, hundreds of thousands of acres and many plant, insect and animal species are themselves lost to drugs. My proposal is the serious environmentalist’s dream! The sacrifice of one plant saves thousands of others. One plant leaves the cycle and better preserves our human species in the bargain. That is a great trade-off. Up till now, people had never envisioned a living herbicide. That’s a fact! Therefore, it leads to the question, if a biological control solution is a legitimate option for the marijuana ‘grass’ or crab-grass, what makes the coca plant any different?”

Marcia Peake jumped on the question. “Let me put a different spin on it. Coca plants are the private property of someone else. The last I looked, California and Florida were still parts of the U.S. Another country’s plants are immune by reason of ‘sovereign immunity.’”

Bullshit! “It’s probably not possible to stop connecting distinctly differing concepts, but it would help!” Alex’s exasperation was beginning to show. His face flushed. “Private property is a concept. Sovereign immunity is a concept. They are not the same concept.”

“Coffee break!” The loudly shouted declaration came from the lone man sitting on the aisle in the rear of the room. Alex thought earlier he was some sort of security person. In a sense, he was right. The man was John Pemberton, the Deputy National Security Advisor. Another deception was that the hearing aid in his left ear was actually a receiver, capable of receiving messages from the two observation rooms built into the back wall of the presentation auditorium. One observation room was occupied by a three-person psychiatric team; the other by three carefully selected intelligence analysts. Later, both the intelligence analysts and the psychiatric team would compare notes. John Pemberton began walking toward the front of the room.

Rosen came over to Alex. “You should be delighted this isn’t a confirmation hearing. We haven’t even warmed up yet.” He grinned.

“Remember what Will Rogers always said, ‘I never met a plant I didn’t like.’” Candlet joked.

The man from the rear had arrived. Rosen turned to Alex. “Alex Wyckham, meet John Pemberton, the Deputy National Security Advisor.”

“Well.” He hesitated. “Thanks, Elliott. Dr. Wyckham,” Pemberton shook hands, “a great pleasure. I’ll be joining the rest of the committee at the table. I’m looking forward to getting in my two-cents worth. If you’ll pardon me a moment, I need to make a phone call.”

In the next half-hour it became clear that it was John Pemberton, not Marcia Peake, who was in charge of the meeting.

“Intent, intent! That’s the only word that you need to remember, Doctor.” Pemberton instructed pompously. “We interpret our own Constitution that way. What was the intent of the founding fathers? What was the intent of the Biological Weapons Convention?”

Are they the same? Momentarily, Alex had the look of a man trying to catch a butterfly without a net. “The laws of the land, including the Constitution, Mr. Pemberton, say what they say, nothing more.”

“If I may,” Pemberton interrupted, red-faced. “Let’s come back to Marcia’s concept of ‘sovereign immunity’. This is an extremely sensitive subject at our State Department. Without it, nations would have no inviolable rights—no sacred rights.” They all nodded in agreement.

“Perhaps insects can pierce that thick shield of ‘sovereign immunity!’” Alex countered. *Dammit, be a diplomat, Alex!* “Of course, Mr. Pemberton, the State Department may be the proper place for diplomacy. However, criminals and professional politicians are always the most difficult to indict, especially when protected by the almost religious vestments of ‘sovereign immunity’. Even in cases, for example, where state sponsored terrorism or ties with known criminals are firmly established, attempts to indict political leaders as criminals invariably meet with the activist opposition of that same State Department. It’s diplomatic immunity in its most malignant form. In international criminal conspiracies, the ideology of the criminal is money. It’s commercial terrorism for profit, aided and abetted by diplomacy. And we do violate your so-called inviolable rights, Mr. Pemberton, if and when it serves our interests. No rights are inviolable! We didn’t think Saddam had the sovereign right to annex Kuwait. We thought Panama would be better off without Noriega and the Russians didn’t need an airstrip on Granada. President Reagan decided to bomb Libya. Clinton bombed Bosnia. So much for inviolable sovereignty.”

“Dr. Wyckham, our President is neither Ronald Reagan or George Bush senior.”

“Mr. Pemberton, I apologize if that’s your interpretation. I was searching for recent examples to indicate that there are reasons deemed important enough that one nation does impose its will on another, often successfully. Wouldn’t you conclude that such nations will always be accused of interfering with the inviolable rights of the self-proclaimed offended nation?”

“Point made.” Pemberton grudgingly conceded. “Continue. Why don’t we play ‘what if’? What if your proposal was approved by the President and the Congress? What type of political fallout would we be facing?”

“Against the Green Knight strode Sir Gawain.” *Congressional oversight. What a can of worms.* Alex held a heavy imaginary sword aloft with both hands while they laughed heartily at his plight. “Let me begin by exposing the prejudice in my own tarnished armor. I believe Presidents can, and should make decisions they are not expressly forbidden to make without oversight. Plausible deniability has merit. Such deniability isn’t a recent brainstorm concocted to protect evil and devious chief executives. It’s always been intended to insulate leaders from traceable involvement. Now, however, what the President knew, or when, has become a big issue. Did the President have extra-marital sex, smoke pot, accept foreign donations, etc., have become issues someone feels is their right to know. Balanced against that, there are legitimate needs for nations to conduct secret operations. In this way, in conjunction with diplomacy, governments have always fostered their aims over those of others. It seems that as long as our presidents must deal with other governments, deniability is a concept worth saving. Bureaucrats rarely say no to presidential directives. Perhaps if the directive is both properly ambiguous and specific, a creative bureaucracy will then mold the intended ambiguity into the precise shape that the president had in mind in the first place?”

The conferee’s table exploded with genuine mirth. “Dream on brave knight,” Pemberton smiled, “the sword of ‘plausible deniability’ has lost its edge. And speaking of sharp instruments, lunch will be served in ten minutes. Let’s adjourn now. Rest rooms are at the rear. For anyone with phone calls to make; phones are available. After we’ve finished lunch we’ll adjourn until tomorrow at 1 P.M. That will give all of us time to re-formulate our questions for Dr. Wyckham.”

November 29: The Peruvian Amazon

Francisco knew that Alfonso needed to escape the bad memory of *Señora* Wyckham, to have her anywhere but here on his own land, certainly out of his mind. *But why the diamond? Surprising!*

Garcia was not surprised at being asked to lunch at the *hacienda* today, though Alfonso usually preferred to dine alone. But today, because of her, he would want to talk. As Francisco had also anticipated, the meal was excellent and Alfonso generous in pouring the wine. Soon, too, the wine had worked its magic. When coffee was served, Alfonso offered the finest of Cuban cigars. He passed one under his nose, savoring its aroma; before holding it up to make a point.

“This is about all Cuba still has to offer, Francisco. It’s hard to build the economy of an entire nation on cigars, but I know how it can be done. Here, please let me light your cigar.” The aroma was pleasant. “Look closely, Francisco, at the smoke as it rises. In that smoke, Francisco, is the key to riches beyond your wildest of dreams. Imagine smoke rising from an Aladdin’s Lamp of riches. Imagine yourself a magic genie. What would be your smoke of choice? Here then, Francisco, is Aladdin’s secret! Here’s how Alfonso

Suarez-Paredes will become the world's richest man, not just for now, but the richest man the world has ever known! This is how the greatest of the Gods of the Sun will rise from burning ashes!

November 29: Washington, D. C.

Luncheon was being served on the podium level by a polished marine unit. Pemberton had joined them. Unfortunately, Alex thought, the conversation had too quickly drifted back to the topic at hand.

"Speaking of deniability," Pemberton interjected, his mouth half-full again, "how would you handle the media on something like this, after the fact?" Alex listened to him champing.

Alex laughed, feigning a misunderstanding; grinning as he wiped his mouth. "About this extravagant lunch at taxpayer expense? Gingerly, Mr. Pemberton, most gingerly." Pemberton waited impatiently for his answer. "You caught me with a mouthful, Sir. I'm certainly glad you said, after the fact, because the media's obsession for a dig up dirt certainly complicates the search for rational policies. Thank God there will be no opportunity on something like this for the press to be irresponsible before the fact. Like too many of us, the engine of the press runs on immediate gratification. It thrives on sound bytes rather than analysis. They shoot from the hip."

November 29: The Peruvian Amazon

Francisco was startled by the intensity of the man.

Alfonso Suarez-Paredes radiated the burning zeal of the religious mystic. "The world is growing, Francisco, and very fast now. The UN reports that the population by 2015 will increase to almost ten billion people. Despite the fact many African countries will be devastated by the spread of AIDS, high fertility rates will still double their populations. Isn't that amazing? A lost continent! That will make most men poorer. In such poor men's lives, good dreams will become fewer and not often pleasant. For them, I will provide marvelous dreams. I will provide dreams for those disenfranchised of the right to have them. I will create a magic smoke, Francisco, an Aladdin's Lamp of instant pleasure. It will not come through fine tobacco like this majestic cigar, but through lowly cigarettes laced with coca paste and morphine base—then eventually by cigarettes which substitute marijuana for tobacco, but also magically impregnated. My magic smoke will transport those without hope to dreams of wonder. If my calculations are close to being correct, and they are, Francisco, within five years I expect revenues of a minimum of ten billion U.S. dollars a year. Imagine that! That's a hundred billion dollars in ten years, maybe more!"

Francisco gasped aloud. Alfonso was on a sacred mission. *A passion, a Holy Crusade!*

"That is what we are working for, Francisco. 'Abracadabra'! That is the vision. Open Sesame! You will be rewarded beyond the riches of the Arabian

Nights, Francisco. There will be those who will want to stop us, some accidentally, like *Señora Wyckham*, and others not so accidentally, who will oppose us to the death. It is those we must watch. It is not only our known enemies who pose a threat, but others who present themselves as friends. It is these so-called friends, Francisco, in particular, that should make us wary. We will be among them tomorrow.”

November 29: Washington, D.C.

“Consensus is a difficult issue.” Alex said. He clenched his teeth. They were extracting a high price for the free lunch “First, you’ve got the issue of consensus that surrounds secret or covert action. Second, there’s the consensus of taking an action in combination with friendly nations, like in Desert Storm or Bosnia.”

“How do you separate the two?” Asked DEA’s Deputy Candlet.

“Having consensus operations is good, when possible, but setting a precedent that actions must be by consensus is often morally wrong. The Serbian situation was a perfect example of that. Whoever was willing should have gone in right away to put a stop to it! At least to punish the Serbs, if nothing else. Why? Because killing civilians is terrorism and raping women is worse. Mass graves! Cokie Roberts was right. Both people and nations have to do what’s right. I see nothing naive in that. Because we waited, people are dead. And when we waited for UN and NATO consensus, we also accepted a thoroughly flawed battle plan. They’re digging up the evidence of genocide now in Kosovo. And what about Rwanda? I’d hate to see all of America’s interests become subject to definition by the UN.”

Alex tried to look non-plussed, as though he were not speaking about those present. *They sure have a ‘you certainly don’t mean us’ look about them, these political types.*

November 29: En Route to Cali, Colombia

Soaring high above the Andes in his new Gulfstream, Alfonso finally slumped back into his seat. *Ab, the symbols of success!* People would notice his beautiful new acquisition. The long awaited Cali Cartel meeting had finally come.

He, Alfonso Suarez-Paredes, didn’t intend to share anything with anyone. *Not a chance!* There would be no guided tours offered by him. *Like the American car manufacturers gave before the Japanese cleaned their clocks.* If his competitors were going to beat him, he wasn’t going to give away proprietary technology or license it to them either. *Those bastards can either figure it out for themselves or fuck them!*

Alfonso took a deep breath, exhaling slowly. With help from the Agricultural University, and inadvertently from the Americans, too, his leaf potency content was approaching one-percent. Soon he would have his own plant geneticist to go with the agronomists he had already hired.

Now, with the latest technology at Ucayali, he would be able to refine almost twelve-hundred pounds of the purest cocaine ever, each week. He was going to leave Diego Rivera, his main Peruvian competitor, in the dust. *The rest of them, too!*

If he could sell the Colombians on his new cigarette idea, he could sell inferior paste without having to sell his higher grade paste for making refined cocaine. He'd have to think about just how much he wanted to tell them. Fifty-percent of the Americans that had ever smoked had already quit. *I will bring the quitters back!*

November 29: Washington, D. C.

The raspberry sorbet reminds me of blood. Mine!

“It all ties into the ‘who did what’ or ‘who knew what’ mentality. In our society, people hold their own minority rights against the will of others, even when the others are an overwhelming majority. And when issues are closely contested, the ‘almost winners’ rankle over having their imagined victory in sight, only to be snatched from the grasp of their mind’s eye. Furthermore, the criminalization of policy decisions makes political consensus difficult, painfully so, when secrets are involved. If secrets were entrusted to always honorable persons, there would be no reason for operations to escape the scrutiny of oversight. However, the sore losers too often leak sensitive matters to the press. It’s their sour grapes vote against the democratic process. Covert operations are disfavored, therefore, because there is liability associated with leaking our nation’s secrets. Difficulties with covert action that we have today, are largely a result of politicians being forced to eat the crow they have prepared for themselves.”

A brigade of white-aproned marines had begun to break down the luncheon buffet. *Clanking dishes sound like a train-wreck, when you’re the only one talking.*

November 29: En Route to Cali, Colombia

Alfonso hated visiting Colombia, even to stay at the plush Intercontinental Cali. To be certain, Cali was more cosmopolitan than Lima, but he never felt safe outside his own borders. He particularly didn’t like meeting his competitors, *think friends*, in the drug capital of Colombia. Colombian *machismo* put other Latinos to shame, he thought. Who was to know what small word or gesture might be taken as an insult? Even worse, their brand of machismo could so easily be used to feign insult, when insult was desired. The thing that made him most uncomfortable didn’t have a thing to do with *machismo*. *They all want to play the ‘value-added’ game, but the damn coca leaves are mine!*

God how he snores! As he glanced across the plane’s aisle, he wished he could sleep as easily as Francisco did now. Alfonso remembered he had expressed his growing fears to Francisco. He’d asked what might happen if the *Señero* tired

of being the bank guard and wanted to own the bank! The ten-percent fee he paid the Maoist terrorists was a fair exchange, a symbiotic relationship, Francisco had called it. *What had he said?* “Like bees and flowers.” But when Russia’s bee went out of the communist hive, he thought it would change everything in the long-term. One of the first casualties, of course, was Cuba. How could Castro export communism’s nectar without enough honey to support it at home? Alfonso was convinced communist movements were in big trouble. Eventually, that might be trouble for him, too.

What would happen when they decided to become capitalists? *Holy shit!* It drove him crazy. They had the armed forces and the violence to use them. What would happen when the guys with guns got the ‘value-added’ bug?

One of the things he’d learned at graduate school was that the people who made the real money were the ones who controlled the ‘value-added’ aspects of the product. That was true, whether it was turning logs into high-grade veneer or coca paste into high-grade cocaine. That lesson was the first one he had applied.

Alfonso remembered his MBA case study about Pennsylvania’s hardwoods. They had the biggest standing reserve of native hardwoods in America, but the Japanese were buying all their best red oak, cherry and walnut logs. Even with the cost of shipping the heavy logs from Pennsylvania, the crafty Japanese still commanded top price for their high quality veneered end-products. Why? Pennsylvania had failed to make the investment in finishing facilities, so they couldn’t keep the profitable end of their own raw material for themselves. ‘Value-added’ was a painful lesson many others had learned from the Japanese.

Alfonso’s plan was hurting the Colombians. He’d already applied ‘value-added’ to what was once a paste-only business. Globalization. The more he could do to process Peru’s natural product in Peru, the more money would stay at the Suarez-Paredes end of things. That was just simple arithmetic. The Colombians just didn’t like the way the numbers added up. *Screw them!*

November 29: Washington, D. C.

The tables were cleared, except for coffee cups. “That brings us to this plan. It would have to be a covert operation, mainly because political consensus is impossible. No producing government will face the reality of the drug problem. And with upwards of twenty drug producing nations, how would you ever reach any true consensus to use a plant pathogen solution?”

“A point well made.” Rosen offered. “I guess if we knew the answer to that question, decision making would be simple. We’ll, Dr. Wyckham, perhaps on that note, we should call it a day. Any objections?” There was a general murmur of agreement from the assembled diners. “In that case, we’ll all come together again tomorrow. If you’d appreciate an offer of a lift to your hotel, Doctor, come along. Where are you staying?”

“I would, thank you, if its not too much trouble. I’m staying at the Georgetown Inn.”

Outside, a car was waiting for them. It had turned much colder. Large flakes of snow had replaced the rain. During the ride, Rosen was friendly enough, but didn’t say anything that was a tip-off on how well the presentation was being received. Alex was drained and was looking forward to a nap. He would have a light dinner, review his notes and try to be prepared for whatever tomorrow might bring.

When they arrived, Rosen opened the door. “If you’d like, Doctor, I’d be happy to pick you up tomorrow. How about 11:45; there will be a light buffet served first.”

“We’re eating first. *Thank God!* Thanks. I’ll meet you right here.”

November 29: En Route to Cali, Colombia

The peasants could stomp coca leaves in an old bathtub forever. What was once largely a hands-on, cottage-style industry was fast becoming mechanized and much better organized. He had the Americans to thank for a great deal of that. *One of the best things about Americans is that they’ll teach you how to do almost anything, agriculturally, then sell you the generators, pumps, presses and materials handling-equipment you need. Viva America—Viva enterprise!*

At Ucayali, he’d brought the earthmovers in on barges. The same was true for the production buildings and prefabricated dormitories. *They weren’t shabby.* He’d hired an architect. The dormitories had modern showers and baths, a well-equipped lounge with a large screen Mitsubishi projection TV system; even a good music library for the compact-disc system. The dining areas could feed two hundred people at a sitting. Workers were handsomely rewarded for their time in the jungle, much better than any other job opportunity in Peru. *Who would want to grow substitute crops that generated only a twentieth of the value? For as smart as Americans think they are, they are pretty stupid to think that anybody would voluntarily give away ninety-five percent of their income. Eradication my ass. Fucking gringos!*

He would beat the Colombians and Bolivians at their own game. That was the free enterprise system. Of course, he also had to figure how keep them in the ballgame too, because they had too much firepower. Maybe he should make *Señero* partners, but under his terms. *What’s that American slogan, ‘politics makes strange bedfellows’?*

So Alfonso kept asking himself: *What happens when guys don’t care about diplomacy?* Maybe Peru could get the Americans to go after the *Señero*. *Yanquis* love to fight communists? He thought that very amusing. Then, when the smoke cleared, he would truly be in heaven. *No parasites!*

His daydreaming made him feel better, even though he really didn’t think it was ever a good idea to consider *Señero* as partners. Nothing changed the fact that he was on his way to Cali, where some ambitious kid might make a

name for himself by subtracting Colombia's main competitor from the guest list. If they can mow down their whole Supreme Court, what kind of chance would I stand? *I think I'll keep all my business school 'value-added' to myself.* Let the Colombians figure it out on their own time. Somebody's already figured it out, some damn kindergarten kid.

By the time Francisco jerked awake, he could see the Gulfstream was already circling above the runway. From the air, the general aviation section of Cali International looked like the air show of the rich and famous. *Their toys are certainly expensive ones.* There were Lear Jets, Citations and even a few Gulfstreams. He could see that each plane was guarded by men in dark raincoats. *Pawns!* It amused him. From so far above they looked like tiny black pawns guarding their knights and bishops. Francisco smiled. *The fools don't know the white king hasn't landed yet!*

November 29: (Georgetown), Washington, D.C.

Alex sat alone at the Guardsmen's, not far from the Georgetown Inn. He felt totally exhausted, sapped by the rigorous questioning of the day. *More like inquisition!* He slumped in his chair and nursed his martini, almost in disinterest, trying his best to savor an almond-stuffed olive. The waiter seemed to sense his mood and didn't hover near his table. The dim candlelight was comforting. He could just as easily have stayed at the Inn and slept. Earlier, he had given serious thought to renting a car and driving the hour or more to Johns Hopkins to visit Rovertó. Alex just couldn't do it, but it wasn't that he didn't want to. Out of a gnawing fear that a premature replay might impair or even wreck his ability to finish the appeal on the right note, he knew he just couldn't rehash the day's difficult proceedings with anyone. On the other hand, he badly needed companionship, now more than ever. Rovertó was the only friend he had even remotely close at hand. He hadn't yet opened the leather covered menu, when he saw it move. *Maybe it wants me to order.*

The cockroach scurried up onto the expanse of empty white table linen directly across from him, its long feelers twitching. Alex didn't flinch at its uninvited presence, but observed it closely, as the insect did him. Maybe cockroaches hated eating alone as much as he did? *God, I miss Sharon.*

That was the crux of the thing, why he felt so rotten. *Hero, hell!* He was a traitor. Not once in the entire day's presentation had he even made the slightest acknowledgement that Sharon Wyckham had ever existed, or that she had died because of cocaine. He couldn't believe he had actually taken Bill's advice. He hated himself for that. Of course, at the time it all seemed so logical, that they would jump on Sharon's death as another reason to duck making a hard decision, a political decision. And maybe Bill was still right, but to talk for three hours without a single mention of her. *Jesus! What do they expect of me, that losing your wife has no effect at all?* Would they throw out the baby with the wash, reject a perfect solution to the trafficking of drugs just because

Sharon's death gives them a reason to say I'm not thinking rationally? *Aren't there enough benefits to them?* He absentmindedly began to count on his fingers. It's a low cost solution; less than one per-cent of the annual direct expenditure budgeted to fight drugs. If you add in the indirect costs, it's less than a tenth of one percent. Every country affected could receive foreign aid on an unprecedented scale. *Damn! Never once did I mention that I had a wife who had spent her whole life trying to feed the poor and that her reward was being murdered by drug traffickers.*

"Ahem... Sir, did you wish to order?"

Alex looked up—somewhat startled to see the black-tied waiter standing above him, pencil poised just so. "As a matter of fact, I'm not feeling well. Perhaps you'd be kind enough to bring my check. And if you would, could you call a cab for me?"

"Of course, Sir. I'm very sorry that you aren't well."

November 30: Washington, D.C.

Alex was glad he'd made the decision last night to have the cab take him to Johns Hopkins in Baltimore. Seeing Rovertio was the best thing he could have done. Rovertio also agreed with Bill. Hearing him say that had made a difference. Despite eating at the hospital snack bar and returning to the Inn well past midnight, he felt refreshed. At least he was certain they understood he already had one pathogen that worked. He had showed them the proof of that.

Pemberton glanced over his half-glasses at his watch. It was exactly one o'clock.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began, "I hope you are all well rested. I assume Dr. Wyckham has thought of—well, a provocative opening for today's session, so I'll give him the honors." There was a general chuckle at the good-hearted posturing.

Take command Alex. "Thank you." Alex walked to the lectern.

"Provocative, eh? In that case, folks, I realize that the nature of my proposal is controversial, perhaps both politically and scientifically, but not so, morally. This subject cannot be discussed without emotion, conflict, and perhaps even anger. I am not advocating a continuing of past policy, a half-hearted recommitment to the so-called war on drugs. My provocative opening is that I'm proposing to win that war! You remember 'Say no to drugs! For our children, will you now say: Yes to bugs!'" First they tittered, then there were outbursts of genuine mirth. Alex was pleased. It was a good beginning.

"Thank you. Maybe a night's sleep was just what the doctor ordered." Alex paused to take a manila folder from his briefcase. "I want to discuss a less obvious issue now, one in which drugs are the invisible engine of a huge iceberg that runs faster and grows larger, instead of melting down. This is a cor-

nerstone of my presentation. I am talking about the international criminal conspiracy, what you may call organized crime. The engine of crime's iceberg runs on drugs! Why this is such an outstanding solution is that by saying 'yes to bugs', you can say no to both crime and drugs at the same time. You'll note that there are several printed exhibits at each of your places. Exhibit I is titled *The International Criminal Conspiracy*. There is a bibliography in the back of that paper. I'd recommend it for your further study. Other references are made to unclassified government documents and from recent congressional testimony. *Thanks, Bill!*

"But we can't apply RICO to nations!"

"You're getting far ahead of me, Mr. Candlet. With your indulgence, I'd like to stay on my track for now. The Racketeer-Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act will be covered later. What criminal organizations share is approximately seven-hundred billion dollars in fresh money each year. That's from drug related activities alone! It's this huge and steadily growing income that funds all the other illegal activities; beginning with money laundering and including murder, kidnapping, hijacking, prostitution, loan sharking, extortion, gambling, arson, car theft and so on. The mind boggles. Now, imagine that as the tip of the iceberg; before their fully legitimate investments."

"Let me get you straight, Doctor. You think we can cut organized crime's fresh money supply? Just turn off the faucet for good?"

"Only to cut the ongoing flow of illegitimate money, Ms. Peake. With each passing year, fully half their illegal money is invested in legal businesses. Globalized crime has now diversified into banking, ground, air and sea transportation, entertainment, food processing and distribution, hotels and motels, and many service industries as well; all funded with tax-free money!"

"So," she smiled, "you are trying to get them to play by everybody else's rules; to level the playing field?" There was a scattering of laughter at the table.

November 30: Intercontinental Hotel—Cali, Colombia

Cali, the capital of Colombia's Valle Province, is a city of one and a-half million. It is known as the cocaine capital of the world. Nestled in the mountains of Colombia, it competes vigorously with Medellín, nearby and northeast, to retain its position of leadership. The authorities in Cali report an average of ten drug-related killings per day. No one knows how many murders go unreported. In that regard, the competition with Medellín is keen. Civilian casualties of the drug war in Columbia are nearing 90,000 each year. The rapid decimation of adults is amply compensated for by one of the highest regional birth rates in the world, but that is of small consolation to the dead. There are also large numbers of unemployed. Colombian drug centers are not safe places for tourists. Conspicuous wealth—a camera, a watch, a ring—all are

magnets for thieves and muggers. The ordinary visitor must be very careful in Colombia.

But for certain special visitors, the attendees of the Cali meeting, for example; the kings, princes and barons of this modern kingdom, there is ample respect. Mere vassals of this fiefdom would not endanger the lords gathered at the Intercontinental Hotel. In fact, this meeting is blessed by the Church. No less than a Bishop's prayer has graced its opening, with a solemn prayer for good fortune.

I've underestimated the strength of a fierce competitor As he studied the crowd, Alfonso wondered if he hadn't sold the Colombians short.. *This could be dangerous!* Was their influence so great as was reflected by the prestige of their international guests? Most impressive were the Men of Honor from Sicily: Don Salvatore Leggio himself, along with Stephano Greco and Gretano Bontate. From America: Giovanni DiCarlo, Carlo Gambino, Carmine Spatola and Mario Luchese. Hugo and Ramon Herrera and Jesus Rivera were just three of the Mexicans he recognized. From Peru, himself and Diego Rivera. Jorge Rodriguez from Bolivia was there. Medellín had delegates like Jairo Loperó, Jose Gavira, Hernan Trujillo, Pablo Ochoa, Santiago Garces and many others. The Cali Cartel sent Manuel Orejuela, Luis Ocampo, Gonzalo Santacruz, Gilberto Rivera, Jose Londono and five or six he didn't recognize. Then there were the Russians. It was rumored that Escobar, himself, had planned for just such a meeting long before his death.

The meeting had been in progress for over four hours. The hotel's air conditioning system was taxed to its limit by smoke from many dozens of cigarettes and cigars. They had already argued, somewhat tentatively, about a number of issues. Now, they had just finished lunch. All anticipated one issue that so far had not been addressed. They were patiently waiting.

The speaker was Gonzolo Santacruz, of the Cali Cartel. "...That brings us to a delicate point of our discussion. Most of us here are of Latin stock. To date, the music that directs our motion has a distinct Latin rhythm." The applause was generous. "Bluntly, with minor exceptions, those of Italian and Hispanic blood, those of the Catholic faith have created this bonanza." There was a more moderate sprinkling of clapping. "We have already discussed the problem caused by the Jamaicans and their '*posses*' and other ethnic gangs. It is not so easy to melt into a light society when you are dark—or otherwise." Amidst laughter, there was a hush.. "That leads to another problem, that of our Chinese Triad associates." There was no laughter now.

Alfonso Suarez-Paredes knew less than he wished of the Chinese Triads. They were the biggest players in the heroin end of the business, but nevertheless maintained a tight secrecy around their actions and identities. He thought it provocative that Santacruz should address the Chinese issue in a

public meeting, particularly with non-Spanish guests from Sicily, America and Russia present. But he knew drug related gang wars were out-of-hand in the inner cities of Los Angeles, New York and Chicago, cities where turf challenges were growing among non-Chinese distributors. He wondered how the rest of them would control the methodical, patient Chinese, when they couldn't control the hotheaded, careless youth of the inner cities, including the Colombians and the Jamaicans? Alfonso knew some of the Triads had thousands of members, versus the comparatively small numbers of members of the Cartel and the Sicilian and American Mafiosi. He wondered what would happen to the markets when the Hong Kong Chinese moved to all of America's major cities? Competition was not a good idea. Then, there was the growing problem of street gangs, from the Criminal Disciples to the Crips. When people think of gangs, they think of *West Side Story*. The Crips today were not neighborhood kids, but armed gangs, ten thousand strong and not just in one city. *Who could control this?* Newspaper stories made Washington D.C. sound not too different from Cali or Medellín in terms of their murder rates. *Not a pretty picture!*...

"...we have prospered to date," Santacruz continued, "because we have all found ways to profit, while not becoming a burden on each other." Alfonso glanced at the Italian. He could feel the dark eyes bore into him, even when he looked away. "This meeting is a reflection of that cooperation, which has been aided by our guest of honor from Sicily." There was applause. "Thank you. The question is, how do we best prepare for the future? Perhaps, our young friend from Peru has ideas? Señor Suarez-Paredes, would you enlighten us?" Santacruz somewhat over-dramatically extended an open palm toward him. Alfonso could sense tangible animosity disguised in the Colombian's gracious gesture.

Alfonso acknowledged the polite applause and smiled, his perfect white teeth a striking contrast to his deeply tanned face. *I've been set up!* He hadn't been expecting it so soon, and certainly not on the Chinese issue, but he wasn't totally unprepared. As he walked down the aisle from his seat and stepped up to the podium, he felt confident. It is a lot like an MBA class, he thought. You never knew when your professor would call on you, so you'd better be prepared.

There was an undercurrent of murmuring. People were always taken aback by the powerful presence of Alfonso Suarez-Paredes, even those who had seen him before. It was surprising to see someone who looked so totally uncommon, so handsome. There was often more than male envy in the eyes that followed him. Today was no exception.

“Thank you, *Señor Santacruz*. Gentlemen. There are several ways to control a market. One, of course, might be by force or intimidation. That is easier when you are dealing with political institutions which are your own, where you are at home, speak the language, know the culture and the custom. It would seem that these desired advantages are formidable obstacles to foreigners in any country, even those that don’t look like outsiders. Of course, I operate solely at the production end, so I defer to those of you more expert than I. However, the most reliable control for gaining and keeping market share, in my opinion, is smart marketing of good products. To me, smart means to obtain the best prices consistent with good profits. At the manufacturing end, it means updating technology and therefore product quality. This would seem to hold true whether the product is cocaine or heroin. My current understanding is that Chinese chemists have an exceptionally high quality number four injectable product and that they have created a product so good between three and four, that it can be either smoked or injected. As you know, AIDS has created an increasing need for smokable products of high quality, rather than a market dependent on needle-based products. In addition...”

The Sicilian, Salvatore Leggio, listened to the translation through ear-phones. He repeatedly smoothed his gray-streaked, blue-black hair away from the leather headpiece. He couldn’t help but be amused at how much like a UN meeting this all seemed. They were even sitting in a terraced room. Each group had its own translators and each contingent had name-plates. And of course, each group had other personnel present, along with accountants and lawyers. *Except we have more power and a bigger budget!* Leggio thought this young man interesting indeed, less hotheaded than the Colombians. He talked like a business school professor. Leggio lit a cigar. *Everything is going perfectly according to plan.*

November 30: Washington, D.C.

“...Why ‘China Snow and the Seven Dwarfs’? My attempt to be funny, I guess. That’s what I call the ‘Golden Triangle’ and the seven countries the UN permits to grow the opium poppy. Why they still permit it,” Alex shrugged, “I don’t know. The seven countries are Turkey, Iran, Japan, Yugoslavia, India, Pakistan and Russia. Major unsanctioned growers are Afghanistan, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Colombia and Mexico. The ‘China Snow’ part, Myanmar, Laos and Thailand, are usually referred to as ‘The Golden Triangle’. Our friendly neighbor, Mexico, has reason to be pleased with our more open borders. It is now a major producer of heroin. I am neither an expert on the opium poppy, nor its plant pests and diseases. My comments today, however, do have a bearing on this other huge source of criminal income.”

Marcia looked confused. “How is that?”

Alex turned his gaze to her. "That the same approaches to technology that can create biological control for the coca plant can also be used against the opium poppy and marijuana. Then international crime would lose its primary funding sources totally! With this solution we can go to war all over the world against people who are truly dangerous enemies, globalized criminals, and without firing a shot, sending a marine or having a drug enforcement agent tortured to death by a so-called friendly neighbor. What I'd like to envision, if this operation is successful, is to follow up in a reasonably rapid succession against the opium poppy, then marijuana. A good place to begin is Mexico. Now that Western liberal democracies, at an enormous cost in money and lives, have triumphed over international communism, it would be a tragedy to surrender without a fight in the war against globalized crime. If there is a single point to my entire presentation, this, ladies and gentlemen, is it!

"*Snap!*" Henderson had snapped her pencil point loudly, leaving a dark jagged mark on the white linen. "You are saying that we do this in the Golden Triangle, to Iran, to Mexico? Jesus Christ!"

"Not right now, but yes," Alex calmly agreed, smiling easily. "He let his sardonic glance to her linger. "I've already read from the White House report that Mexico is the main transit route for drugs into the U.S. I called it 'Montezuma's Revenge'. But more than distribution through Mexico has hurt us. Cultivation of both the opium poppy and marijuana are exploding there. Someone recently quipped that the real *Treasure of the Sierra Madre* is not mined, but grows in the hills of Sinaloa, Chihuahua and Durango. So, Ms. Henderson, why not Mexico? That's my question!"

"Mr. Candlet tried to ask you this before, so now I'll try. Is there an implication, Dr. Wyckham, that RICO laws could be used as a justification for violating sovereign immunity?" Charlotte Henderson was pointing a fresh pencil directly at him.

She must have brought a dozen. He hated anyone pointing at him. *I'd like to break another one for her.* "Remember, I'm no lawyer," Alex hesitated, "but conspiracy law is a powerful weapon against organized crime. You know that, of course. It's not my area of expertise, Ms. Henderson, but if I were a legal type, the thought of exploring whether it extends to criminal governments would interest me." *It's good I'm smiling at her.* "Latin democracies are powered by drugs. When drug money controls the political process, the voting process, then democracy becomes only the form rather than the function of government. In every drug-producing country the government is tacitly involved in the enormous profits that are made from drug trading. Such governments become criminal conspirators as defined by RICO laws. It's a proven legal route to get at people isolated by power or position."

"You are certainly not a lawyer, Dr. Wyckham! Thank God you are not making policy at the State Department!" Charlotte Henderson was still pointing her pencil aggressively.

Bullcrap! Alex reached down and fumbled noisily in his briefcase. *The only God she thanks is in her own image.* He held up a wrinkled sheet of paper. “To quote Richard Nixon, who started the war on drugs: ‘I consider keeping dangerous drugs out of the United States just as important as keeping armed enemy forces from landing in the United States. We are going to fight this evil with every weapon at our command’. End quote. Why doesn’t every weapon include RICO laws? That, too, is a weapon at our command!” He paused deliberately. “Biotechnology is also a weapon at our disposal. Perhaps we are only fighting the shadows, not the criminals that cast them. No wonder an America wearing sanitized rubber gloves is trying to explain the absence of fingerprints at the drug scene. It’s time, folks, to take off the gloves, and leave the prints of decent men!”

“*Buzzzz*” *It’s time!* In John Pemberton’s false hearing aid, a low-toned buzz had just alerted him that Aaron Zimmerman, the chief psychiatrist, had an observation. “Sir, now’s the time for the first question. The question is this: ‘Dr. Wyckham, you are very persuasive. What if, however, we were to tell you no? What would you do?’ Ask that, Mr. Pemberton, exactly that way.”

Across the room in the hidden intelligence analyst’s booth, someone said, “Wow! What do you think the damn shrinks are saying now?”

Alex was listening intently to Pemberton’s question. The room fell silent. He was afraid the curtain was about to fall on his presentation. *I’ve blown it. Goddammit, get hold of yourself!*

“That would be an unwanted surprise, Mr. Pemberton, because I expect you to say yes. However,” he smiled, “I’ll play the game. First, I’d want to determine if no meant no, you don’t want anything at all to do with it, or you meant no, we don’t want to run the risk of getting caught, or no, we don’t want to do it with you, but we will help to find you someone who may assist you. For reasons of my own emotions, let’s work through that list, last to first. Beforehand,” he grimaced, “could I ask to excuse myself for a moment?”

The psychiatrist’s immediate response rang through Pemberton’s earpiece. “Tell him no. Don’t let him organize his thoughts.” Zimmerman said.

Pemberton cleared his throat. “Dr. Wyckham, if you would, let’s work through these first; please. It’s only three short scenarios, and then we’ll break for a leg stretch. Okay?”

Alex smiled. *Damn!* “Aah, of course, Mr. Pemberton.” *Pemberton’s cagey.* Alex thumbed through a set of three-by-five cards. “Since Ross Perot became a political figure, people have read about the events described in Ken Follett’s book, *On the Wings of Eagles*. It’s based on Mr. Perot’s privately financed mercenary rescue of two of his employees from Iran. This was during the same hostile period when American diplomats were illegally held hostage in our embassy in Tehran. Without passing judgement on what is fact or fiction in

Mr. Follett's account, what interests me is that a private citizen undertook his own covert military action against another country, an action usually reserved exclusively for the United States government. It was a private citizen's military intervention into the foreign affairs of a sovereign state. To the best of my knowledge, Mr. Perot has never been penalized. Perhaps our government knew about his plan and was willing to look the other way?" He continued, tongue-in-cheek. "For all I know, Ross Perot might be an excellent place for me to start asking for support?" Alex smiled faintly. He wanted them to wonder if he was kidding, or only half-kidding. "The point of this is that the first group not restricted by the present BW Convention are private citizens. Since tax returns have become a snooper's paradise, you might even get the IRS to provide a list of rich potential donors." Alex smiled. "That's scenario one: We'll help you find a sponsor."

"Next." Pemberton prodded. He was certain Alex Wyckham was thinking about himself.