

A white motorboat with a cabin and a yellow buoy on the water under a blue sky. The boat has a cabin with a ladder and a yellow buoy is attached to the back. The text 'MURDER IN PANAMA' is overlaid on the image in a large, black, serif font. The text 'ROBERT HATTING' is overlaid at the bottom in a smaller, black, serif font.

MURDER IN PANAMA

ROBERT
HATTING

MURDER IN PANAMA

Robert Hatting

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Published by Robert Hatting

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Reviews of this recent release.

5 Stars --Murder In Panama (Kindle Edition) Raymond Samek

Murder in Panama, besides being a romantic fast moving adventure set along coastal Panama, questions how far government and large corporations can go in steering our lives. Super-hero, Jimmy Hart, thinks they have out stepped their bounds and takes corrective action in this fiction that you will not be able to set down. Another winner for author Bob Hatting.

4 Stars --Murder In Panama (Kindle Edition) Elizabeth Worley

Murder in Panama, set amidst the tropical languor of the Pacific coast of Chiriqui Province, is an intriguing mix of murder, corporate malfeasance by Big Pharma, greed and understated heroics.

All that's needed to enjoy this is a hammock and a pina colada!

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A note from the author:

This novel is a work of fiction but there are some truths included in this story. The two-hundred-thirty-seven deaths in Panama due to medicine manufactured with Diethylene Glycol is the truth. The spread of KPC (Klebsiella Pneumoniae Carbapenemases) in Panamanian Hospitals has killed one-hundred-seventeen folks -- at this writing (September, 2011) – that's true! Just reporting the facts pertaining to the above atrocities justifies the title of my novel.

Ozone Therapy is real! The descriptions and results written in this novel are true; right down to the details of application. I have firsthand knowledge of this alternative form of medicine. Several months ago I had a serious heart attack. The doctors wanted to operate and do bypass surgery; tests indicated I had serious aorta blockage. I chose Ozone therapy as an alternate route and here's why: Ten years ago I witnessed an Ozone Therapist cure my riding partner, Rick of Prostate Cancer. I was intrigued. So I researched the processes and eventually purchased an Ozone generator. I had it shipped to Panama, and I treated a lady friend that suffered from Chromes disease. In six weeks she was cured, and that was five years ago. I should have found someone to give me injections back then -- even an injection once a month would have prevented the blockage and subsequent heart attack. Five months after the heart attack, I'm careful with my diet, take ½ of a Blood Pressure pill each day and have two injections a month of 50cc's of Ozone gas directly into my bloodstream. I'm living a normal life without heart surgery.

The mention and description of a Tide Pump is not fiction. I designed and implemented three systems in the last thirty years. One can indeed use the forces of twice daily tides to pump water and air; lifting large volumes of seawater to heights and distances only limited by ones imagination and financial resources.

The mention of author J.A. Jance and her novel is real. The reference to the author Ray Novak is fiction. (Alaska be Damned)

This novel is the first of a series. I chose a number of the characters from EMPTY KAYAK; a screenplay I wrote with Reuben Blades in mind for the lead part. Since the odds of ever selling a screenplay in today's economic climate are a billion to one, I elected to use the story line and a portion of the character set as the skeleton of MURDER IN PANAMA. Characters developed in other novels and screenplays are interspersed throughout MURDER IN PANAMA; Ben Reed (Alaska Be Damned), Conner Light (Gavioto's Gold), Meg Larsen Reed (Alaska be Damned), Ebony (Alaska be Damned), Danny Folger (Gavioto's Gold), Borden Hughes (Alaska be Damned), Wade Ramsey (Alaska be Damned), Xenia Folger (Gavioto's Gold), Joe Brock (Gavioto's Gold), Ray Novak (Alaska be Damned) and Miguel Arias (Gavioto's Gold).

One would ask why I chose to mix characters from different works? The answer is twofold. First, these characters are established in other works. If one has already read the back-stories, it makes good sense. Second if you haven't, I would hope you will purchase those works mentioned and add them to your e-book collection by Robert Hatting.

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Prologue

December 21, 2005

Two distinguished men stepped away from the festive Christmas party and sequestered themselves in the library of an opulent New York Penthouse. One man was polished and fit, he was also twenty years the senior. Both wore business attire, but the younger man who looked rumpled had loosened his tie, adding to his slovenly image. He paced the floor in front of the doctor's desk. It became obvious to the doctor that Arthur had not slept for some time.

"Doctor, I've considered your proposal. You're one of the leading nutritionists in the world. Each time we publish one of your books it becomes a number one seller and stays in the top ten for months; your diet and nutrition plans have changed the lives of millions. Why risk it with this radical dissertation on a subject that you aren't considered an expert?"

"I'm a medical doctor. Because I deviated into nutritional science doesn't mean that I don't know about medicine. I researched this specific therapy and chose it over the conventional medical applications that gave me a fifty-fifty chance, at best, to live out my golden years. This treatment cured me in a manner of months. It helped thousands of others who have somehow stumbled upon it and mustered the courage apply it to their lives."

"Why you? And why now?"

"Because, it needs to be explained in layman terms by a doctor, an MD with credibility. Also to elaborate why it has been banned and suppressed by the medical community at large. It's the truth as I see it, and it's time for the world to know it exists."

"I won't publish it!" Arthur proclaimed.

"Are you afraid of one literary failure? If so, I'll finance the printing and you can handle the distribution."

"It's not that. This manuscript is dangerous. It redefines medicine as we know it, and it's going to piss off a lot of people; people with a lot to lose. I believe your life is in danger as well as mine. Stop and think – be reasonable. If some clinical scientist wrote this; someone obscure, he wouldn't be in jeopardy. You, on the other hand, have worldwide clout. Hundreds of millions of readers will begin questioning their doctors, hospitals, pharmacists, and drug companies. Your expose' will bring chaos into an industry that needs to remain stable. I'm refusing because of what a book like this will do to the world of medicine, and frankly I'm afraid anyone associated with this could lose their life."

"That is exactly the intent of my manuscript. To encourage people to question an industry that is as corrupt as a Somalia election.

The doctor held out his hand. The publisher removed a jewel case from his jacket pocket and placed it on the doctor's desk.

"I'm sorry you feel this way, Arthur but this manuscript is complete and will be published. The world needs to know the truth! Someone will have the courage to publish this book. If they do, they can have all my future work, as well."

"Are you suggesting we terminate our longstanding business relationship?"

"It was your call, Arthur. Life is full of dangers. You've published seventeen of my books,

and we've both become rich men. Now, I believe it's time to use my iconic status to make a difference in the world; endorsing this therapy involves a lot more than teaching overweight people to become slender. This book will change the paradigm of medicine. I'm moving forward without you."

Chapter 1

Jungle darkness; an inky shroud of high humidity, cobwebs, suspicious movements and foreign sounds imprisoned the two women in their makeshift camp. Coreen fought to stay alert, to keep her weariness at bay. Tired sandy eyes stung from eyestrain and sunburn. She willed them open, but fatigue finally won the battle.

Dreamscapes appeared, and the thrill of being somewhere safe was dashed when she felt a large insect climbing up her bare leg. She awakened with a start; adrenalin coursing through her system. Coreen stifled the urge to brush it off. Peace Corp instructors had lectured all the volunteers on the dangers of brushing or striking unknown insects. Coreen wondered about Sue. Was she also plagued with night fears and creeping insects? Coreen assumed she was awake.

“I have something crawling up my leg. Can you see it?” she asked.

“Just brush it off,” Sue instructed. “The worst thing that will happen is that you’ll die.”

“You’re kidding, right?”

“Relax, Coreen it’s probably nothing.”

The insect crawled high on Coreen’s naked thigh; just below her shorts. She was about to slap it when a dim flash of light illuminated the blackness for a moment.

“It’s only a small land crab,” Sue said as she flicked it off Coreen’s leg.

Sue flashed the light again. Coreen could see it had come from Sue’s cell phone. The enterprising woman had used her wits. There was no cell phone service, but it provided enough light to conclude there was no centipede, scorpion or snake on her leg.

Relieved and still exhausted, Coreen tried to sleep but now it continually eluded her. She tried to remember all her achievements, to gain a positive outlook to their dilemma. The successes flashed willy-nilly in her head, but her mind always came back to the realization of their current plight. They were in grave danger. They were ill prepared to be stranded on this lonely Panamanian beach. Their boat was gone; they had no drinking water, no food and no hopes of rescue. The walk to civilization required slogging through a dozen mangrove swamps; avoiding crocodiles and poisonous snakes. Neither woman speculated on how long it would take, not wanting to quantify their predicament. Millions of insects, snakes and poisonous plants were out to devour them, and then there was the constant annoyance of the mosquito’s and sand fleas. Coreen’s throat became constricted; partly because of thirst but mostly fear. She willed the fear away, focusing on her companion.

Sue flashed the light again. “Shit, it’s only five o’clock. This has to be the longest night of my life!”

Coreen didn’t respond. She seldom participated in idle or meaningless conversation; an early life choice which became a character trait. This mannerism gave the perception to others that she was shy, a snob, deaf or mute; isolating her from her peers.

Sue was just the opposite. She was constantly chattering on a variety of subjects. Perhaps her exuberance was what made her an effective site inspector. Having to visit all the sites and volunteers in the district, Sue’s job was to evaluate their progress. Her gregarious personality masked her intelligence and experience.

“This is my fault,” Sue declared. “When we die out here you can blame me.”

Coreen’s smile was hidden by the jungle blackness.

“Explain why you are to blame?”

“Because I’m from San Diego, I play beach volleyball; I’ve watched the tides go in and out twice a day my entire life. That’s why!” Sue exclaimed.

Coreen stifled a chuckle. She was beginning to like Sue. The woman was taking the blame for their calamity just because she had friendly feelings toward her. Coreen wondered how far their friendship would go. Would it scatter like smoke in the wind once their Peace Corp service was over? Or would it sustain for several decades or a lifetime? They had very little in common other than their volunteer service and current posting; Chiriqui province in Panama. This debacle was their first outing together.

“Okay, I’ll let you take the blame,” Coreen said softly. “We don’t have tides in Arizona. That’s my excuse for tying the boat to a driftwood log.”

Sue was amazed. This was the longest conversation she’d ever had with Coreen. Three sentences! The petite woman was an enigma; always performing to the highest level but not saying much. Since Coreen wasn’t very forthcoming, Sue had expected the shy woman to be naïve; especially when it came to men. Yet, Coreen had a boyfriend, another Peace Corp volunteer. Sue didn’t like the man. She knew he wasn’t right for Coreen. She suspected she knew more about Darin than Coreen did. Sue reflected back to her last boyfriend, a highly respected sports announcer in San Diego. Unfortunately, there was nothing memorable about their short relationship. He kept a party boat at Mission Bay Marina; the focal point of his superfluous life.

“Another reason I should be blamed!” Sue exclaimed. “I dated a guy who owned a boat. We went fishing several times. I should have remembered about the tides.”

Sue knew she wouldn’t get an answer out of Coreen. Three sentences were more than she expected from their prosaic conversation.

A large bird roosting somewhere in the jungle canopy began to squawk. Coreen took note and looked seaward. Through the dense undergrowth she could detect feint lightness.

“I have to pee. I’m going to the beach,” Coreen announced.

“I’ll come with you.”

Coreen took the lead as they felt their way through the dense underbrush containing cobwebs and rotten foliage. She moved slowly, as each step was fraught with danger. The denseness of the underbrush dissipated the closer they got to the sand. The light of day was approaching; shadows of the verdant jungle were perceptible. Through the palm fronds, Sue could see the beach. Phosphorescent waves broke gently on the hard sand; the sea was calm.

Chapter 2

Hart brought the boat off step when he spotted what looked like a canoe or kayak ahead.

“Is just a log,” reported Alex.

Jimmy knew his deckhand was wrong. Experience and instinct suggested it was some kind of craft. Hart’s distance vision was still good. It was the “up close” that had begun to cause problems. From years past, in his other life, Jimmy recalled his Commander’s comical statement, “When you reach age forty, your eyes don’t go bad – your arms just get shorter!”

Alex reached out with the pike pole and snagged the bow line of a two person kayak. The rope was tied with two wraps and a clove hitch around a branch of a large driftwood log. Jimmy inspected the lightweight kayak. It was a rental from the marina in Pedregal. Two backpacks were stuffed in the fore and aft compartments.

“You right, jefe, turistas no savvy tides.”

Jimmy nodded. It was a landlubber who tied the knot. Hart guessed there were two people stranded on one of the turtle beaches.

“Tortuga uno o dos?” Hart asked Alex.

Alex, tying the light craft to the stern cleat, held up one finger. Once the kayak was secure, Jimmy kicked his boat in gear and soon had it on step. The ocean was calm so he could see further; he notched up the speed. Dawn was just breaking. Exploratory rays of light and the eerie blackness of the coastline gave the surf a purple hue. Jimmy followed the coast east toward the first turtle beach. To keep his mind from flashing back to his old world, the one that had a fiancée, the military and some semblance of normalcy, he played the scenario game.

“Here’s my guess,” Jimmy told Alex. “Two young people, or two old folks from Boquete rented that kayak and left the marina in Pedregal around first light yesterday. They paddled down the river on the ebbing tide and reached Tortuga One at low tide. They tied the craft to a driftwood log and went to search for the waterfall. They couldn’t find it and came back to find their kayak gone,” He deduced.

Alex nodded his agreement; no questions or remarks. Evidently he was experiencing his own reverie, thought Hart as he slipped back into memory.

Motoring east toward the rising sun and the first turtle beach, Jimmy reflected again about his commander. He wondered if the man was still alive. Jimmy made a mental note to find out. His team, some ex, some still active, was scattered all over the world. He stayed in touch with the team but had not with the commander. Hart guessed the commander would be in his early sixties and retired. That would be normal. Jimmy glanced at his watch, noticing the scars on his wrist. Normal? The word stuck in his craw. He’d never been normal, not in the American Dream way. Norman Rockwell would never paint a likeness of Jimmy’s life. It would require too many canvasses; warrior, patient, mad inventor, businessman, and finally a retired quasi hermit.

During his reverie, Hart scanned for movement in the mangrove swamps. He saw no life in those dangerous lagoons. He throttled back as he approached Tortuga One. He could see no life. He was about to turn away and go back to sea when two young women rushed from the jungle, waving their arms. Jimmy put the boat in neutral. Alex jumped overboard to hold the boat away

from the surf. Once stopped, Jimmy was able to jog the boat in place. Alex waded towards the surf, helping the tall blond with her daypack. "You found our boat, thank you!" Sue exclaimed in Spanish.

The smaller woman was just entering the water as Alex tossed the daypack into the boat. He rushed to assist the petite woman. She was chest deep by the time he reached her.

Sue was climbing over the bulwarks. Jimmy reached out to give her a hand. "We need to give these guys a blow job for helping us," Sue joked in English.

"I'm not sure accepting sexual favors are covered in the manual of rescue protocol," Jimmy replied with a smile.

Alex and Coreen began laughing.

"Shit, they speak English!" Sue stated with embarrassment.

Alex tossed the day pack to Sue and lifted Coreen over the bulwarks. Once Alex was aboard, Jimmy backed the boat away from the surf and turned it seaward. Alex moved the kayak away from the motors so there wouldn't be a tangle in the props.

Coreen felt a flood of relief as she looked into the eyes of the skipper and witnessed a hint of a smile.

"You ladies may want to sit down; I'm about to pour on the power," Jimmy cautioned.

Once they were seated, he brought the boat up on step and motioned Alex to take the helm. Jimmy went to an ice chest and pulled out two bottles of water. He handed them to the women; they immediately began chugging the elixir of life.

"How long were you stranded?" Jimmy asked.

Coreen lowered her water bottle. "Just overnight. We hiked to find the waterfall. When we got back our Kayak was gone. I had tied it to a log on the beach."

"Do you ladies have names?"

Coreen put her bottle down and looked at Jimmy. "I'm Coreen Lewis, and this is Sue Packer."

"Jimmy Hart and my associate Alex Rodriguez at your service," Jimmy stated.

"Oh, like the Yankee third baseman, A-Rod," Sue exclaimed.

"I'm not sure Alex would know about that," Jimmy presumed.

"Oh, si. A-Rod on team with Rivera," Alex interjected. "His name same as me?"

Jimmy nodded and motioned Alex to watch the instruments.

"We never found the waterfall," Sue remarked

"Wrong beach," Alex advised.

"There are two turtle beaches with the same name. The other one, with the waterfall, is three kilometers further east," Jimmy explained. "Were you able to get some sleep?"

Coreen finished her water and looked for a garbage receptacle. "I was able to get about an hour."

"Not me! I was awake all night waiting for you to die so I could eat you! God I'm hungry!"

Jimmy, Alex and Coreen laughed at Sue's bawdy remark. Jimmy opened the cooler and handed each of the girls a sandwich. Sue ripped off the wrapper and devoured the sandwich in four bites. Coreen was a bit more demure but was still ravenous. Hers disappeared in a couple of minutes.

"Where are you taking us, Mister Hart?" Coreen asked.

Jimmy began rigging a fishing pole as Alex throttled back on the power.

"Well, since you ladies just ate our breakfast, I'm taking you to my place. I'll fix us a proper breakfast. But first we need to catch tonight's dinner. We won't be long," Jimmy stated. "Have

either of you fished?"

Jimmy cast the lure a few feet from the boat. He let it sink for a few moments, and then held out the pole for one of the gals.

"We're Peace Corp volunteers. I'm from San Diego and have fished a lot. Coreen is a cowgirl from Arizona; I'll bet she hasn't," Sue explained.

"Sue's right. I've never fished before."

Jimmy handed the pole to Coreen. "Just wind the line in slowly. When you feel a tug, jerk it and you'll hook the fish," Jimmy explained.

Sue knew the boat that rescued them was expensive. She recognized the brand and could see the skipper had not skimmed with his electronics, accessories or outboards. She could tell by the accent, Jimmy was an American, but he seemed Latin. The deckhand, Alex, she knew was Panamanian.

"I like your boat, can I check it out?" Sue asked.

Jimmy nodded yes as he reached for the fishing pole to instruct Coreen.

Sue began opening lockers. Safety and spare parts were in the forward locker. The thwart locker contained fishing equipment; lures, sinkers, line, and extra reels. When she opened the live bait locker she discovered a small school of Fargo and some Covina.

"You have enough fish in the bait locker to feed a village," Sue announced.

"No for eat. Fish for aquarium," Alex stated.

"Must be a huge aquarium," Sue remarked.

"Yippie! I have one," Coreen shouted.

Jimmy rushed to assist her. He reached around her from behind to show her how to hold the pole and adjusted the drag on the reel. Coreen was excited, almost wanting to jump up and down. "Just keep the line taut, and reel it in slowly. You've caught a good size fish."

Coreen settled down as she began the task of reeling in the heavy fish. Jimmy's presence had a calming effect. His arms around her waist brought forth sensuality and slight embarrassment; she flushed.

Alex handed Jimmy the gaff. Once the fish broke the surface and was close to the boat, Hart reached out with his left hand, grasped the leader and pulled the large fish to the boat. With his right hand he gaffed the fish and lifted it over the bulwarks, allowing it to flop on the deck. He dispatched the fish quickly with a swift knock on its head with the back of the gaff. He opened a locker on the stern of the boat, cut the fish's throat and put the saltwater wash down hose in the tub.

Coreen was mesmerized at the events. She tried to remember the feeling she'd just experienced of catching the fish but only recalled the sensuality of the touch and excessive scar tissue on Jimmy's wrist and forearm. It finally dawned on her why he wore long pants and a long shirt. He had burn scars to cover.

Coreen was not squeamish about killing animals; killing the fish was as natural to her as slaughtering a chicken for dinner back home on the ranch. She even understood the purpose of bleeding the fish. She caught Sue's attention and grinned.

"Congratulations, Coreen you've caught a thirty pound Wahoo. It's a great eating fish as you'll see this evening. You ladies will be staying over, right?"

Alex put the boat up on step and headed to a small group of islands. Jimmy switched places with Alex. Coreen looked on as Alex began filleting the fish.

"We have to check in with our supervisor sometime today. We're off for another day," Sue explained.

“Our cell phones don’t work out here though,” Coreen added.

Jimmy throttled back on the motors. The boat came off step.

“Not a problem. I have a satellite phone. You’re welcome to use it.”

The boat slowed and drifted toward a buoy. Alex snagged it with the pike pole and began yarding in the line. A bamboo fish trap appeared on the surface. Alex opened the small door and placed the innards and the skeletal carcass of the Wahoo into the trap and let it submerge. Coreen watched in amazement; she’d never been exposed to the bounty of the sea.

“Is that how the locals fish?” she asked.

“Actually, no,” Jimmy said. “Fish traps are perfectly legal but the locals prefer hand-lines out of their old cayukas or pongas; a good example of willful ignorance.”

Jimmy guided his boat to the entrance of a small lagoon. A long concrete dock with a bamboo and thatched roof rancho was the only building visible; a long switchback of stairs were built into a high bank, and a waterfall cascaded down the bank a few yards from the ramp on the dock.

Coreen knew this was not his living quarters. The house was hidden, and she assumed it was above them.

“Where is your house? Surely you don’t live here in the hut,” Sue rudely remarked.

Jimmy laughed as he and Alex, without communication, expertly docked the boat.

Alex pulled the bow line of the Kayak toward the starboard bulwark. He unloaded the two packs. Sue picked hers up, and water ran out on the deck. She tossed it on the dock. “They’re wet but we still have them,” Sue said to Coreen.

Coreen nodded at their good fortune. “We lost the paddles, though,” she reminded her companion.

Jimmy disembarked and carried the ice chest to the rancho. He snagged the plastic bag of fish fillets and started up the ramp. He stopped and turned.

“You can leave your packs here if you like. Alex and I can bring them up later,” he offered.

“That’s chivalrous, but we brought it so we should pack it!” Sue stated affirmatively.

“Is that a Peace Corp motto?” Jimmy asked.

Sue giggled. “Nope, I just made it up.”

“How far is your house?” Coreen asked as she debated leaving her heavy backpack.

“At step thirty-two you can see the house. At step fifty-one you will be at the top landing; my front yard.”

“Why do you live way out here?” she asked as she shouldered her back.

“So I won’t be bothered by Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormon Missionaries,” Jimmy stated kiddingly.

“Why are they so persistent?” Coreen asked.

“Once in a while they find a lost and desperate soul that needs converting.”

“That’s sad,” said Sue.

“Not really. Everyone needs to believe in something. Suicides would be common occurrences if it wasn’t for religion.”

Jimmy was anxious to change the subject. What started as a joke was turning into a religious lesson. He wanted the girls to get comfortable, feed them a meal and then take them back to the marina in the morning.

Sue could taste salt in the air; something was wrong with the waterfall. She took a couple of steps off the stairway, pushed her hand into the cascading water, tasted it, and immediately spit it out.

“This is saltwater!” she exclaimed.

Jimmy nodded and continued the climb; Coreen immediately behind.

“That waterfall is the overflow from the aquarium,” Hart explained.

Jimmy was about to expound how the tides effected his saltwater ponds when a loud screeching began. The noise startled Coreen. “What in the world?”

“Peacocks, my early warning system; they heard strange footsteps.”

Sue was perplexed and a bit dubious. Obviously Jimmy Hart was a rich guy with a great boat, but salt water cascading from a ridge and now peacocks for an alarm system? It wasn't computing in her mind. He had to be eccentric. She paused and then realized the deckhand, Alex, was just behind her, lugging two large buckets of live fish in seawater. Sue stepped aside so Alex could take the steps more quickly. She was curious. This situation was surreal.

Jimmy showed Coreen how to take the angst away from the large birds. He knelt and the hen put her head on his thigh. He stroked the head and neck and the plumage receded. He repeated the process with the rooster. Coreen followed suit. Alex walked past as Coreen looked up to see a young Panamanian woman approach with a newborn baby in her arms. “Is that your wife?” asked Sue as she knelt before the birds.

Hart handed the fillets to the woman and took the baby. “This is my housekeeper, Marcella. Alex's younger sister,” he explained.

Marcella dashed toward the house as Jimmy led them toward the guest house. Another waterfall plunged from the heights above the houses into the large pool. The baby cooed at Jimmy as he played with his miniature hands and feet. The peacocks followed the visitors to the guest cabin next to the waterfall. The birds stopped at the porch and begin foraging in the grass.

“My kids now have your sight, sound and scent. They won't be alarmed anytime you visit,” Jimmy explained as he opened the door to the guest cabin. “Make yourself at home. I'll go fix us some breakfast. Oh, by the way, I have a washer and dryer if you want to run a couple of loads,” he added.

Coreen, still on the porch, watched Alex deposit the fish into the pond. “How long have you lived here?” she asked.

Jimmy tickled the baby as Marcella approached. He delayed his answer as they exchanged a thermos of coffee for the child. Jimmy handed the thermos to Sue as she came out of the house to get Coreen's pack.

“I finished the house and shop five years ago. The guest house was completed last year,” he answered.

“It sure is beautiful,” Coreen said in earnest.

“What I want to know is how do you get a saltwater lagoon above sea level?” Sue demanded.

Jimmy laughed and stepped off the porch. “I have an infrastructure in place that pumps seawater to a lake above those falls. Both waterfalls run Pelton wheels for hydroelectric. I'll explain the details over breakfast. I'm hungry!”

Coreen remained on the porch of the guest house and surveyed Jimmy's estate. The view was fantastic. All the buildings appeared to be constructed of bamboo. Coreen could tell it was just a façade. No bamboo structure could support the roof systems she was seeing.

“I just poured you a cup of coffee. Check out this place!” Sue exclaimed.

Coreen stood in the doorjamb and mentally measured the distance from the outside bamboo façade to the interior wall. She estimated a distance of eighteen inches. Then she looked at the interior roof structure. It was all galvanized steel cleverly disguised by the false bamboo and

native wood beams.

“This place was built like a fortress,” Coreen announced as she accepted the cup of coffee.

Sue knew their host was a very intelligent individual. It showed in his planning and execution of the compound. The infrastructure was still a mystery.

“I think we’re going to learn a lot from this man, Jimmy,” Sue remarked. “Did you see all the scars?”

“Yes I saw the scars and yes we’re going to learn a lot,” Coreen agreed as she began pulling soggy clothes from her backpack. “You can have the shower first, give me your clothes. I’ll start a load of laundry.”

Sue bundled her dirty clothes and gave them to her friend. “I wonder what happened that gave him all those scars?”

“I wouldn’t know, and I won’t be the one rude enough ask,” Coreen stated.

Chapter 3

“This is the first real American breakfast I’ve had since coming to Panama,” said Sue as she helped herself to a second helping of hash browns.

Jimmy was watching the women closely. Sue was a prodigious eater; stuffing herself. Coreen was eating slowly but steadily, a sign of someone who was famished but ordinarily a light eater. He enjoyed their company. It had been a long time since he had an American woman visit his slice of paradise. His last gringa lady friend, an airline flight attendant, wasn’t impressed with Jimmy or his home. The two young women hadn’t remarked or even seem repulsed by his burn scars; extremely evident after he’d changed clothes.

“Your property is magnificent, but other than the peacocks, I don’t see any security; like barred windows and fences. Don’t you have problems?” Coreen asked.

“I had some problems when I started construction, but the locals soon learned it was better to work for me than steal from me,” Jimmy replied as he looked across the table at Alex.

Coreen noticed the young man grin sheepishly and rub the scar over his right eyebrow. She shared a look with Sue.

Sue caught the drift. Threatening, paying and even intimidating neighbors and sneak thieves wasn’t a new concept. Jimmy’s infrastructure was defying the laws of physics. She had to know how it was done.

“I still don’t understand your electric generation system. It doesn’t make sense according to the laws of physics that I was taught. Doesn’t it take more electricity to run the pumps than the Pelton’s can generate?” Sue asked.

“You were taught correctly, but I don’t use electric pumps. I use a tide pump,” Jimmy said as he began clearing the table.

Coreen jumped up to help but was stopped by Marcella. She handed the baby to Jimmy and took over the chore. Jimmy walked outside; Sue and Coreen followed.

“I’ve never heard of a tide pump,” Coreen stated.

“No one has. I invented it. Wait until low tide this afternoon, and I’ll show you gals how it works,” he said as he settled into a hammock under the rancho.

Coreen visited the laundry room and transferred a load to the dryer. She was about to start the electric dryer when she heard the dishwasher start. She stepped outside just as Jimmy was handing the baby to Marcella.

“Excuse me, is it okay to start the dryer when the dishwasher is running?” Coreen asked.

“Sure, no problem, we have much more electricity than we can use,” Jimmy replied with a grin. “Do as much as you want; even the packs, otherwise saltwater will rot them,” he advised.

“I think Sue brought her entire wardrobe,” Coreen giggled. “I’d like to wash these clothes I’m wearing. May I borrow a shirt?”

Jimmy nodded. “Take anything you like. Have Marcella show you my bedroom.”

Jimmy sensed an uncertainty from the young woman. He could tell she was a reserved and reticent person; somewhat like himself. He helped her. She wanted to visit, but it wasn’t part of her base character.

“How long have you been in Panama?” Jimmy asked.

“I’ve been here a bit over a year. I have another year to go before I go back.”

“To Arizona?”

Coreen took the other hammock and relaxed into the conversation. She noticed Sue climbing the stairs to the upper lake, above the guest house.

“No, not there. Maybe someplace overseas. I like the excitement of new cultures,” Coreen explained. “You have a beautiful place. It looks like you have everything you need. Is that today’s paper?”

Jimmy nodded and handed Coreen the current news.

“Do you have everything you want?” Jimmy asked. “Are you happy?”

“Pretty much, I have a degree, I’m helping people less fortunate than myself, and my life is ahead of me.”

“What about boyfriends, husbands and a family?”

“I have kind of a boyfriend; we’re not lovers, but we seem to have a connection.”

“I guess I’m too old to understand. Explain seeming to have a connection?”

Coreen’s body language suggested she was beginning to get uncomfortable. She rose from the hammock. Jimmy put his hand out, the one with a lot of scar tissue.

“I’m sorry; I didn’t mean to put you on the spot. I don’t get much female company. Please forgive me and stay awhile.”

“Let me change clothes and I’ll come back,” Coreen said as she rose from the hammock. “You didn’t put me on the spot about Darin; I can’t define our relationship to myself. Why aren’t you married?”

Jimmy laughed. “I’m hard to love. I’m not flamboyant, gregarious, or unstable enough.”

“You certainly live well. Do you mind if I bring my boyfriend here to visit? I have more time off in a few days. Maybe we can stop by. I still want to see that waterfall.”

“You are welcome here anytime.”

“Jimmy, how did you get burned?” she gently asked.

“I was in an accident a long time ago. In answer to your next questions; no, it doesn’t hurt, and no I’m not ashamed of how it looks. I need to keep the scar tissue out of the direct sunlight, however.”

Coreen nodded and left the rancho headed for the utility room.

“Coreen, bring a whole gang if you like. I only have two rules; no drugs and no drunks!”

Coreen waved and disappeared inside.

As Coreen entered the laundry room, a shaggy head appeared around the corner of the house. “No drunks!” the big man exclaimed. “I’ve been coming here for years.”

Jimmy looked up from his newspaper and saw his friend Lowell Downs approaching the rancho. He had a six pack of beer in one hand and his guitar case in the other. His warm smile was evident amidst his six day old motley beard. Jimmy didn’t rise from his hammock. Lowell strode over, shook Jimmy’s hand, laid his guitar case on the floor of the rancho and stretched out in the other hammock. He placed his head in the opposite direction so he could face Jimmy. He noticed Sue descending the stairs from the upper ponds.

“Shit, mate, I didn’t know you had female company, I’ll be on my way.”

“Relax Lowdown, I have two women here; Peace Corp workers. You can be our entertainment,” Jimmy said with a chuckle.

Lowdown watched the tall willowy blond approach the bohio. He stood up and offered her his hand and the hammock.

“Sue, this is my friend, Lowell Downs. He answers to Lowdown.”

“Nice meeting you, Sue,” Lowdown said with his slight British accent.

Coreen realized Jimmy had a friend arrive. The deep booming voice couldn't mean anything else. She approached the door to the outside and hesitated; looking at her soiled clothes. She opted to find something to wear before she joined the group. Coreen pointed to Jimmy's bedroom and Marcella followed. She explained to Marcella she was borrowing a shirt to wear. Coreen looked in the closet and held up a starched white shirt, but it was huge. She decided to wear a t-shirt. Coreen was selecting the shirt and was about to close the drawer of the dresser.

“Wait! What is this?” Marcella asked in Spanish as she reached into the drawer and removed a carved hardwood box.

She opened the box to show Coreen several military medals, citations, and some newspaper clippings. There was an account of Jimmy's heroism and the reason he'd been burned so badly. Coreen read every word, mesmerized by the facts pertaining to the gentle mannered man who was their host. Coreen carefully folded the clippings and placed them back into the carved box. Marcella stood with a quizzical look on her face.

“Jimmy was a hero for our country many years ago. He was burned saving his men from a crashed helicopter. He is a very brave man,” Coreen translated to Marcella. Marcella's eyes widened and then she smiled. “Jimmy is good man,” she said in English.

“I'm learning that,” Coreen replied.

Marcella left the room and closed the door. Coreen stripped out of her soiled clothes and glanced at her body in the full length mirror mounted on the bathroom door. She was filthy. Not bothering to ask, she draped the t-shirt over the door handle and stepped into Jimmy's shower. She was just rinsing her hair when she heard a favorite tune sung by the deep voiced visitor she had yet to meet.

“...said you were leaving tomorrow – that today was our last day. I said there'd be no sorrow...that I'd laugh when you walked away. But a little bitty tear let me down – spoiled my act as a clown – I had it made up not to make a frown..oh, but a little bitty tear let me down.”

Coreen was possessed by the song. She skipped toweling off and pulled Jimmy's t-shirt over her head. Forgetting her soiled clothes and sandals, she ran from the bedroom and out to the back yard. Everyone was in the shade of the rancho, Coreen stood near the door in the sun.

“Please play it again. Oh, please,” she begged.

Startled by Coreen's sudden appearance, both peacocks fluffed their plumage. Lowdown's jaw dropped as he stared at the petite woman's body through her wet t-shirt. Backlit by the sun, the white cotton became transparent. Jimmy too was mesmerized by the sight. “Coreen, this is my friend, Lowell Downs. He answers to Lowdown. Come here and take a seat. Get out of the sun,” he offered.

Coreen stood dazed by the man who had sung the song. He was huge. He stood six foot six in bare feet and looked thin; although he wasn't.

Marcella slid an unoccupied chair toward Lowdown and Jimmy. Jimmy assumed she was assisting in lowering the sexual atmosphere prevalent in the bohio. Coreen, unaware of her transparent attire stood for a moment longer before approaching the rancho. “Nice to meet you Lowdown.”

“The pleasure is mine, Miss Coreen. No one, not even the drunks at the Marina have ever asked me for an encore,” he replied in his booming baritone.

Jimmy watched the young woman closely. She pulled the lounge chair close to his hammock but was focused on Lowdown as he began strumming his guitar. Goosebumps appeared on her

arms and legs as Lowell began to sing the lyrics. Jimmy tried not to look at her. She was stirring an emotion long buried in his soul. Her closeness and the pureness of her youth conspired to unbridle his embryonic yearnings.

A quiet came over the group as Lowdown finished the song. Coreen applauded as did Sue, Jimmy and Alex. Marcella, breastfeeding her baby, smiled brightly and left the Rancho. Alex drifted off toward the stairs; the peacocks followed.

“Does that song have significance in your life?” Sue asked.

“Yes, it was played often around our house when I was younger; the happy times before my parents divorced. I think it was their song. Thank you Lowell.”

“Shoot, we need to call our supervisor,” Sue exclaimed. “Jimmy can we use your satellite phone?” Jimmy reached into a pocket of his cargo shorts and produced a small unit resembling a Blackberry. He handed it to Sue. She took one look at the unit and handed it back. “Too technical. I have the number up at the guest house.”

Jimmy followed Sue to the guest house. No sooner were they out of earshot, Lowdown whispered a question.

“What’s with this Sue chick? Is she married? Does she have a boyfriend? Is she straight?”

Coreen was shocked. His questions reeked of desperation. In a Latin land, it was just assumed gringo men had their choice of women.

“I can’t give you all the answers. I know she’s not married and has never mentioned a current boyfriend. As for being straight, I don’t know, but I assume she’s heterosexual like me. This is our first outing together.”

“Sorry, I just assumed you were girlfriends,” Lowdown stated. “How well do you know Jimmy?”

“He just rescued Sue and me this morning. We don’t know him at all. What’s that medallion you’re wearing? Alex and Marcella have one, too.”

Lowdown fingered the medallion and smiled broadly.

“Everyone in Jimmy’s circle of friends has one. Since you don’t know him, I should tell you he’s a bright guy and he’s invented a bunch of stuff. Like this transponder medallion; it works with his sat phone. If I push the button in the middle once, it means I want him to call me. If I push it twice, it’s an emergency; it’s like nine one—one! He’ll tell you all about what he’s invented if you ask him. Otherwise, he won’t say a thing. He’s not a bragger,” Lowell explained.

It only took a moment to show Sue how to use the Sat phone. Jimmy suspected she played dumb for some other reason. He was standing on the porch of the guest house watching Coreen and Lowdown. He felt a slight tug at his heart; a twinge of jealousy when Coreen rose from the lawn chair, kissed Lowell on the forehead, and then went into the house. Sue stepped out on the porch and handed Jimmy the phone.

“Thanks. Our den mother says we can stay out another day.” She took Jimmy’s arm like they were a couple and walked off the porch. She stopped suddenly. “Okay, tell me about tallboy. Is he married? Is he gay? Is he rich? What’s the story, Jimmy?” Sue demanded.

Jimmy was stunned. “You’re asking about Lowdown?”

“Call him what you want, he’s tallboy to me!” she stated.

“He’s single, has a rich family which provides him a small income from a trust fund. He’s also a songwriter and gets residuals from that enterprise. Whether he has a girlfriend, I have no

clue. He's never brought anyone here," Jimmy related. "Do you feel some chemistry?"

"Yeah, his height! Since I've been in Panama, it's like living with midgets. Tallboy has to be the only one in this entire country that can stand toe to toe with me and look down at my cleavage."

Jimmy laughed at her absurd remark and headed her toward the rancho. "Where's Coreen?" Sue asked Lowdown.

Lowell popped the top of a beer and took a long chug. He nodded toward the house. "She's inside doing your laundry."

Sue nodded, walked through the rancho, and entered the laundry room. Jimmy took his position in his hammock. "Okay, what's happening, sport?" Jimmy asked.

Lowdown took the last sip of his beer, crunched the can and pitched into the garbage receptacle.

"Remember the pot growing gringo that was murdered up near Boquete last year?"

Jimmy tried to recall the name of the man but couldn't. "Yeah, he received the ultimate cure for stupidity. They caught the killers, right?"

"His name was Bart Bartholomew. I was hired by his family to handle their affairs down here. His sister finally came down after the arrests were made. She took over and I was out of the loop. But being the curious sort, I kept up with the case. There were four teenagers involved; they admitted to being his dope distributors, but they denied killing Bart. None of them tested positive for gunshot residue, and the weapon was never found. The slug came from a .357."

"That caliber is as common as white on rice," Jimmy quipped.

"Not if it was fired from a Sig Sauer, model P229," Lowdown stated.

Jimmy chuckled. "They found the weapon."

"Yep, it was being brandished about by a thirteen year old kid trying to rob a tienda near the marina in Pedregal. The cops caught him in the act," Lowell chuckled.

Jimmy held out his hand. Lowdown reached into his pocket and handed over a slip of paper in a zip top baggie. Jimmy stuffed the baggie in his shirt pocket. "I'll run the numbers after the ladies go to bed," Jimmy stated.

"Yeah, mate, let's keep the seamier side of my life from the girls," Lowdown suggested. "The less people know the better."

Jimmy considered Lowdown's new evidence. A Sig Sauer weapon was very unusual in Panama. The Panama National police were recently issued Glocks. Prior to that it was mostly a hodgepodge of hand-me-down weapons. No serious effort was made to regulate their weaponry. The Sig had to have been stolen from a gringo. It was a very expensive pistol.

"So explain to me why you are getting involved in this case again?" Jimmy asked.

"Curiosity, mate. Just curiosity. Bart is still dead, his affairs have been settled and his ashes have been scattered somewhere in the Carolinas. But just for grins...what if those four malientes didn't pull the trigger? What if the murderer is still out there?"

"What if Bart was shot with his own pistol? That makes sense to me," Jimmy surmised.

"Nope. This guy's politics says different. He was an anti-gun nut, wanted to abolish the second amendment and according to his sister didn't even know how to use a weapon. Back in the day he was some kinda consultant for that Mother Earth News; the hippie magazine."

Jimmy thought about the statement and could see merit to Lowell's theory. Sue poked her head out of the laundry room. "Jimmy, can we swim in your pond?"

"Sure, that's what I built it for. There are masks and snorkels in the spare bedroom."

Jimmy turned back to his friend. "Did you see the pistol?"

“Yeah, it was in good condition. The clip only had two rounds of .357 Sig,” Lowdown answered.

“I would assume the cops know the .357 cartridge for the Sig is different from the .357 magnum used in revolvers,” Jimmy offered.

“I would hope so. At least one shot was fired to make the ballistics test. I’m assuming they know.”

Sue emerged from the laundry room in a skimpy string bikini. She was carrying a mask and snorkel. Coreen followed; also carrying a mask but in a more modest bikini.

Lowdown grabbed his guitar and began singing – “...she wore an itsy bitsy yellow polka dot bikini,”

Sue grabbed Lowdown by the hand and pulled him out of the hammock. “C’mon, Tallboy, we’re going swimming!”

Lowdown set his guitar on the floor of the rancho, emptied his pockets and stripped off his shirt. Coreen approached Jimmy in a demure manner.

“Will you join us?” she asked shyly.

Jimmy liked what he saw. Her youthful body had not seen much sun; not like Sue’s. It was creamy white. “I’d love to, but I’m afraid I’ve had enough sun for today,” he answered gently. “Do you have sunscreen? You have a very pale skin; you’ll be burned and blistered in twenty minutes.”

Coreen shook her head no. Jimmy reached into his outer cargo pocket and produced a plastic tube of sunscreen. “I have this formulated for my scar tissue. It would be equivalent of a 60 or more on the UV scale. Cover yourself,” he advised.

Coreen reached for the plastic container. She squeezed a dab on her left arm and began to rub it into her skin.

“It will be dark by the time you get finished, give me the tube,” Jimmy said as he reached forward and drew her to his hammock. He applied a generous amount and began rubbing her. “I shouldn’t use it all,” she protested.

“You can’t. I have twelve gallons in my shop,” he replied as he squirted a generous amount on her legs. Jimmy left his hammock so he could attend to the chore at hand.

Coreen sensed intimacy in Jimmy’s touch. He was firm but gentle as he treated her like a child and enshrouded her with the lotion and sensuality. Placing a dab on her forehead he looked her directly in the eye. His gaze did not waver. Coreen blushed at her inner feelings. Jimmy gave her a gentle smile and a pat on her naked shoulder. “I recommend no longer than an hour in the sun and water.”

Coreen was too sensually moved to speak. She nodded and left the rancho. Jimmy assumed his place in the hammock and watched Coreen walk slowly toward the pond. She chose a spot far away from where Sue and Lowdown were frolicking, sat on one of the boulders that ringed the pool and looked back toward the rancho. Jimmy picked up his newspaper and began turning the pages. It took him a moment to realize the periodical was upside down.

Sue and Lowdown became a couple within ten minutes of entering the water. Their relationship was playful and natural. Sue considered herself lucky to find a man with height and humor. Lowdown felt the same. It took Coreen a while to regain her basic comportment so by the time she swam toward her frolicking friends, she felt like an intruder. An aura of lust and raw intimacy prevailed in their presence. She lingered for a moment to be polite and then swam back toward the waterfall; sitting under the cascading spray of seawater. Coreen was perplexed. This day had strained her emotions. Sensing her sexuality was the cause of her perplexity; she

replayed her past. She'd lost her virginity to a rodeo cowboy when she was a freshman at the University of Arizona. There had been one boyfriend since the bull rider, but it never developed into anything carnal; similar to her current relationship with Darin. Although she had experienced lust with her cowboy, she had never ever had the feeling of deep emotional stirring she'd just experienced.

Jimmy forced himself to focus on the current hard news of the world. It was difficult with Coreen within his peripheral vision. Once he reached the fluff and political nonsense, he put away his paper, left the hammock and walked to the pond.

"I'm going to do some office chores. If you're hungry, tell Marcella. She and Alex are leaving in an hour," he said to no one in general.

"I'm not hungry now. When are we going to have the fish Coreen caught?" Sue asked.

Jimmy looked at his watch before he spoke. "I'll start the grill in about three hours. It will be raining by then."

"Could you show us the tide pump before you go in?" Sue asked.

Jimmy nodded yes. Sue motioned to Coreen at the other end of the pond.

Coreen saw the motioning gestures from Sue and Jimmy but couldn't hear because of the waterfall pounding beside her rock perch. She slipped into the water and swam toward the trio. Sue was being helped out of the pond by Jimmy. Her string bikini bottom almost came off as the water sucked at her. Lowdown began clapping.

"That's as close as you're going to get, Tallboy if you keep up your lecherous antics," Sue replied in jest.

Jimmy reached out to assist Coreen. She too, had problems with her bathing suit; one breast popped out of her skimpy top. "I'd like to give you both a round of applause," Jimmy joked as Coreen righted the accident. As if appearing from thin air, Marcella approached with three large beach towels. Coreen and Sue immediately wrapped them around their bodies. Lowell stayed in the pool and began a deep resinous laugh. "What a hoot! These gals wear swimming suits that combined wouldn't pad a crutch and then get indignant when we see their bodies," he observed.

Coreen blushed at the remark. Sue went on the offensive; threw off her towel and jumped back into the water. She splashed Lowdown several times and was finally able to dunk his head under water. Jimmy led Coreen to the Bohio, away from the rowdy play.

"Maybe you can show us the tide pump system later. I'm going to your guest house to take a nap," Coreen stated.

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Chapter 4 – 19

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**The next novel in the Jimmy Hart series:
REVOLUTION OF FOOLS
Sneak Preview
Prologue:**

New York Police detective, John Demotte opened the very elaborate file on the four missing corporate tycoons. Several witnesses at each kidnapping site related only one consistent fact. The kidnapers were of Middle Eastern descent. No other leads, no trace of forensic evidence. Nada, nothing, zip. Most of the file pertained to what happened to the companies they owned. There was a side bar attached to the file describing a similar take-down of a Spanish drug distribution company. The owner of that business had gone missing, too.

Demotte was a realist. The FBI had run its course, the SEC had broken their pick, and now his captain wanted him to take over the case. A nine month old case that was cold from the beginning, and John was informed it was his top priority. Two years from a full retirement, Demotte suspected his superiors had tossed him a bone to gnaw on just to keep him out of the way of current cases. Perhaps refusing to take a woman partner had something to do with this impossible assignment. Being the pragmatic sort, Demotte tossed the file in his cold case box and went to lunch.

Sitting at a counter in a local diner, John thought about the file he'd just read. The percentages weren't right. Every fed agency focused on the victims, their companies, and the effect on their industry. The slick ghost that screwed the system and ruined their companies was just a name; albeit an Arab sounding name. No FBI profile, no photos, fingerprints or even a country of origin; nothing. It stuck in Demotte's craw. Prone to indigestion due to his diet, John wolfed down a Philly sandwich and returned to his desk.

Twenty-eight years on the force, and Demotte was still in the 'bullpen' with every other junior grade, wannabe, and smart ass detective. Two thirds of them weren't born when he joined the force, and half of them were women. Demotte burped and started to sit down.

Someone had removed the file from the cold case box and placed it in his chair. A sticky note was attached; ...read the latest novel by Ray Novak, it will help you connect the dots.

The handwriting on the note was that of a woman; a junior detective Demotte had refused to take on as a partner.

"...just read the book. My brother says it will help," the woman said.

"And just who is your brother?" Demotte asked.

"My brother works at Langley as a quasi analyst; he was tasked to find an agent that went missing about the same time as Capps, Woods, et al," Bette Fielding replied. "He's been reassigned to that Columbian ponzi scheme artist, Marcos Glosser. He escaped from prison. Did you read about that?"

William Fielding boarded a flight from Miami to Panama City, Panama; his assigned seat

was in the cattle car section of the plane because he didn't have the pay grade to fly first class. The fact that he'd probably be sitting beside some tourist was galling. William had just celebrated his seventh anniversary with the company and was finally assigned to a field case; his first. As an analyst, William knew to do most of the leg work from his desk in Langley; they had the resources he needed to locate the whereabouts of Marcos Glosser. William surmised Marcos Glosser wasn't in Panama, but part of Glosser's old crew was still in the country along with millions of dollars the Ponzi artist stole from unsuspecting common folks in Central and South America. His trip to Panama was twofold. He had an open file on missing agent, Joe Brock and the cohorts of Glosser. He expected to make headway on both cases.

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