



REVOLUTION
OF
FOOLS

ROBERT HATTING

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BY

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This is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to persons living or dead is strictly coincidental. My references to Hugo Chavez, Ricardo Martinelli, Juan Santos, or Rafael Correa, the Presidents of Venezuela, Panama, Colombia, and Ecuador are strictly fictional. They're all politicians and public domain. I have no idea how they think, what they would say or how they would react. My imagination allows me to make them good guys or bad guys. I've never met any of them. Nor do I plan to.

Since this is a sequel to Murder in Panama, many of the same characters appear; several from other of my novels and screenplays as well.

A SPECIAL THANKS TO; Melissa Gray, my editor and Steve Caresser for formatting. A posthumous thanks to my father, Wayne W. Hatting, for bringing me to Panama in January of 1951.

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ON STAGE WITH LOWELL DOWNS

Hi, I'm Lowell Downs. I'm often referred to as Lowdown. I'm not offended by that nickname because it's used as a term of endearment by my friends. A few acquaintances use that moniker as well. But I'm not here to talk about my nickname or my ex-career as a song writer or being a dropout from Oxford or even my days as a sailor/dock bum. I want to explain my relationship with some extraordinary people.

When Hatting introduced me in his novel, MURDER IN PANAMA, you learned that I'm a big man. I stand six foot six and weigh two hundred and fifty pounds. You also learned that Jimmy Hart is my best friend. Now I have to say after all that has happened Jimmy is by best MALE friend. My overall best friend is my wife-to-be Sue Packer. We're scheduled to be married in a couple of months in a double ceremony with Jimmy and Coreen. Sue was also introduced in the first book. She didn't receive a lot of attention except in the beginning. You learned she was also tall, and that we became a couple right away. Most of the romantic focus was on Jimmy Hart and Coreen Lewis. Their relationship was fraught with all manners of uncertainty and danger. Sue and I slid along and developed an interesting relationship through all that happened with the assassin Borden Hughes and his employers. During that time, Sue was mostly in the Carmaca with the Peace Corp. However, when her boss, Marilyn was suddenly posted to somewhere in east Africa, Sue was appointed the interim supervisor for this district of Panama and was posted in David. That temporary assignment shaved four months off her contract with the Peace Corp and allowed us to spend a lot more time together. My involvement with the disappearance of the five corrupt corporate gangsters plus the Chinese official earned me a full share of the bounty when the companies were dismantled by Conner Light, Miguel Arias, and Ben Reed. I sold my sailboat and moved into Sue's apartment in David. If the truth were known, since Sue was released from her Peace Corp contract we spend a lot of time in Jimmy's guest house. We love being with Jimmy and Coreen. Currently Sue and I are looking for a house to buy. We even looked at several in Boquete. It only took a couple of nights in the alpine climate to cancel those aspirations. We've agreed we need to be near the Ocean; specifically the Pacific. Jimmy and Coreen have the perfect set-up but we've found nothing similar available; at least not in our price range.

I still interact with the gringo communities in and around Chiriquí. Between my private detective network of local contacts and Jimmy, Conner, Harding and Danny's international networks, there isn't much that gets past us. We have to keep our ear to the ground. What we did several months ago may have been right in the moral sense but it wasn't legal. We've got to keep looking over our shoulders. Jimmy has strong feelings about the Chinese as the ones to fear. Personally, I don't have an opinion or hunch so I'll follow his lead. After all, he is the warrior of our group; a decorated Sergeant Major in the Marines and later the leader of a SEAL team. One doesn't get more warrior than that.

In spite of his military background, Hart has proven to be a gentle and generous man. And, of course his genius has made him wealthy. I used to envy his relationship with Coreen. Now I don't because my relationship with Sue is on par with theirs.

Ben Reed and his wife Meg are headed to Panama sometime, soon. I haven't seen or spoken to them since the conclusion of our mission nine months ago. I know Jimmy has been in touch with Ben from time to time and they even had some tense moments when Jimmy learned of the information Reed passed on to that writer, Ray Novak, in Alaska. Novak published a novel that was quite transparent. It related in fiction form a lot of the details concerning how we killed the assassin Borden Hughes and his employers. I read the book and can't see how it could lead the authorities to us but Jimmy disagrees. He thinks someone could pressure Novak to divulge his sources and we'd all be suspects. I disagree but I need to follow the lead of my partner, Jimmy. I've even begun carrying a pistol, just like Hart. I've had a license to carry for years but never felt the need to use it. Hart insisted, so I'm packing a Glock 9mm automatic pistol. The funny thing is – Sue agrees with him. So does Coreen. Both women have become weapons freaks and Jimmy has trained all of us at the firing range he built near his upper lake.

Well I need to close this off shortly; we're all going fishing.

I bought my friend, Dan's boat a while back. It is identical to Jimmy's but is two feet shorter. It's been a pleasure to travel these islands on the Pacific coast of Panama. Sometimes I miss the quiet of my old sailboat but it was too small for Sue and me. I kept the inflatable and outboard so we could make the visits to Jimmy and Coreen via the river. However, now that I have Dan's Sport Fisher, the Avon doesn't get used. Maybe I'll sell it after the honeymoon/wedding. That's right. Honeymoon first, wedding second. We're all headed to the Galapagos Islands on Reed's old *Ancient Mariner*; refurbished. Then we're coming back and having the wedding ceremony on Jimmy's island. Doesn't sound normal? Well, by now you should know that normal doesn't describe any of us or what we do here in Panama.

Hasta Luego,

Lowell

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PROLOGUE

New York Police detective, John Demotte opened the very elaborate and hefty 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, or 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 female partner had something to do with this assignment of the impossible. 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; an attractive junior detective Demotte had refused to take on as his partner. John had serious women issues. He hated that they were on the force and if they were attractive he despised them. His theory being that they used their sexual wiles rather than their brains.

"...just read the book. My brother says it will help," the young 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 Colombian Ponzi scheme artist that 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 knew 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; the open file on missing agent, Joe Brock, and the cohorts of Glosser. He expected to make headway on both cases because agent Brock, was last assignment was in Panama, monitoring the PANAMAX games.

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BOCA CHICA, PANAMA, 2012

CHAPTER 1

Two sport fishing boats circled the schooner as the big three master dropped anchor and backed away from the anchor, letting out scope.

“That’s enough, hold right there,” Jimmy instructed by VHF radio. “Trust me; the water is deep right up to the entrance to my cove but after that it becomes shallow.”

“Roger, Skipper,” Ben Reed replied over his loud hailer. “Why don’t you folks come aboard, and we’ll celebrate our arrival.”

Hart was shocked at the transformation of the *Ancient Mariner*. The first time he’d been aboard was nine months prior off the coast of Saipan in the Marianas Islands. Back then it had been a workboat with the pilot house located above the galley and salon. All that had been removed. The quarters had been moved below decks, antique portholes had been installed, and the masts and schooner rigging had been added. The pilot house was aft and slightly raised for the helmsman. Otherwise most of the deck was uncluttered; no more winches, hatches, or high bulwarks. The forecastle hatch was still intact, just aft of the anchor winch.

Meg Reed appeared amidships and tossed over the boarding ladder. Their big dog Ebony looked over and watched Coreen climb the ladder, Jimmy held it steady.

“What a difference!” Coreen exclaimed as she petted Ebony. “It’s beautiful.”

Jimmy helped Lowdown side tie his boat to Jimmy’s vessel. Sue and Lowell came across Hart’s deck and climbed aboard the *Ancient Mariner*.

Jimmy hesitated, remembering the last time he used this same boarding ladder. Nine months earlier he and Lowdown had parachuted out of a doomed DC-3 and drifted in an inflatable raft until picked up by Meg and Coreen in Max Rigby’s launch. The parent vessel, the *Ancient Mariner*, rigged for tuna fishing, was owned by Rigby but captained by Ben Reed for the mission at the time. Rigby, recovering from a serious heart attack put the *Ancient Mariner* into a shipyard in the Philippines and ordered them to convert the old boat back into a sailing schooner. A third of the way into the restoration project, Max decided to marry his private nurse and return to San Diego. Rigby sold the boat back to Ben Reed who in turn placed a timeline on the restoration. Many craftsmen were contracted to finish the old boat.

This was the third voyage for the old girl since her restoration. The first was from the Philippines to Alaska where Ben picked up a crew of friends and family, and then sailed the Pacific coast to Costa Rica. Ben and Meg had brought the boat down alone from Golfito, Costa Rica to Boca Chica, Panama.

Jimmy shook his remembrances and climbed aboard. The transformation of just the deck was amazing in itself. What once was a fir plank platform for all manner of fishing gear and fish totes was now a finely crafted tongue and groove teak deck. Removing the high steel bulwarks and replacing them with stainless steel uprights and thin stainless cable offered the illusion of a very beamy boat.

Jimmy was impressed.

“She’s a beauty, isn’t she?” Ben Reed stated as he stepped out of the pilot house to greet Jimmy.

Hart hadn't seen Ben since their last mission. They spoke often by phone and e-mailed each other several times a month, but this was the first face to face since they'd parted on Guam, nine months prior.

"I'll bet your friends in Alaska were surprised at the do-over," Jimmy guessed.

"Yep, all but the Coast Guard. I wasn't twenty miles into Alaskan waters when I was ordered to heave-to and be boarded," Ben said with a hint of anger in his voice.

"Still having to fight old battles, eh?"

"Only when I'm in my home state. Once we left Seattle, we weren't bothered by anyone until we made Golfito, Costa Rica; then it was just Customs.

Ben led Jimmy into the pilot house. Jimmy scanned the state-of-the-art electronics and then the array of hydraulic handles mounted on the starboard wall of the pilot house.

"I assume you have this boat tricked out to sail almost unmanned," Jimmy speculated.

"One would think so but it actually takes six people to get underway and reach full sail and three people on watch at all times. It's a lot more complicated than it appears," Ben explained. "You'll see what I mean once we leave Amador and head out towards the Galapagos."

Ben led the way down the stairway into the below decks to join Lowdown and the ladies. Ebony had curled up in a large padded basket just inside the pilot house when Ben and Jimmy were conversing. When they went below, he emitted a sigh and returned to his sleep.

"I'm always in awe of Ebony. What a well behaved dog," Jimmy said as they stepped into the salon.

"He's behaved now because he's tired and we're on the hook. When we're underway, he's a pill," Meg announced.

Jimmy was surprised at the layout of the salon, galley, and dinette; a half wall separated the galley dining area from the salon; fore to aft.

"Doesn't Ebony travel well?" Coreen asked.

"He used to, but he doesn't like this boat. When it's under sail and heeled over, Ebony goes nuts," Ben explained. "Sometimes I do, too."

"You're not happy with the boat?" Lowdown asked.

"Nope, this was Max Rigby's dream all along. I liked her better when we were packing fish in Alaska. I guess I don't appreciate owning a sailboat. This will be our last trip, and then she goes up for sale."

"It sure is beautiful," Coreen remarked. "Too bad."

Jimmy could sense the sadness in Ben's comportment. He wondered if Meg felt the same way. He glanced her way and didn't have to ask.

"We'll be better off without this boat," Meg said. "It has a lot of good memories for us but now it's just a toy; an expensive toy that isn't fun to play with anymore."

"What exactly is wrong with the way she sails?" Lowdown asked.

Lowell had taken the question away from Jimmy. He'd never been a fan of sailboats. He liked the quiet and the idea of a worldwide range, but he preferred moving quickly in a straight line. Sue was quiet, just looking at the details of the vessel; waiting for Ben to answer.

"Once the topside gear, the excess weight of the main engine, and refrigeration system, were removed, the boat that used to have a fourteen foot draft became nine. With the masts and full sails, it was too top heavy. That's when Max redesigned the interior and had them put in a dagger board," he explained as he pointed to the half wall between the salon and galley. "That partition conceals a nine foot dagger board. When it's released, we have an eighteen foot keel."

"That should add some stability," Lowdown speculated.

"One would think so but it scares the crap out of me when it heels over with just a light breeze; Ebony, too," Reed related. "I'm just not a sailor."

“Wasn’t the boat originally a sailboat?” Downs asked.

“Yeah, it was a Halibut schooner, built in nineteen fourteen,” Meg replied. “I did some research on the vessel before Ben bought it the second time.”

“I won’t miss her that much after I sell her this time,” Reed said. “I shouldn’t have bought into another man’s dream; it was a mistake that may cost us three or four hundred grand.”

“That’s enough money to buy a fancy house in Boquete,” Sue estimated.

“We’d never live in that shit-hole!” Meg exclaimed.

“Oops, sorry about the language,” she giggled. “Jimmy has the perfect set-up; a sweet island base and a cool boat,” she added.

Hart grinned at the compliment. If truth be known, he was pleased that the *Ancient Mariner* would soon go away. It was the ‘get-away’ craft in their successful mission to take down several multi-national drug corporations, a health insurance company, and a medical drug and equipment distribution firm. The owners were deep sixed, their businesses all but destroyed, and several hundred million dollars were made by Conner Light and Ben Reed by short selling their public stock. Once the cost of the operation was reimbursed, anyone remotely connected to the mission received an equal share of half the profits. The other half was set up in a foundation to support the families of victims of the Diethylene Glycol poisoning. Lowdown and Sue were searching for a house to buy with Lowell’s share. Jimmy, Ben, Coreen, and Conner had invested their portions in the Mexican company that manufactured the Ozone generators touted and used by Doctor Adamson’s manuscript and followers. An international manufacturing facility was being created in the Free Trade Zone located at the old Fort Howard facility, near Panama City. The efficiencies of scale were already making the medical units more affordable. Their goal was to reduce the prices even more and to keep the manufacturing of any component out of the hands of the Chinese. In concert with these efforts, an international public relations firm had been employed specifically to dissuade anyone from buying food, medicine and, instrumentation from China; citing the Diethylene Glycol poisoning in Panama as an example of their quality control and total disregard for human lives.

Hart knew their mission, as successful and covert as it was, wasn’t without danger. Nine months had elapsed, and no one involved had been questioned, but that didn’t mean the authorities had given up. Jimmy knew there was someone on their trail; there had to be. Taking out five high profile executives, a high level Chinese businessman, a senior CIA agent, and his confidential informant was certainly a cause to place the most experienced detectives from various agencies on the case; perhaps even an international task force.

Jimmy tuned out the conversations concerning the weddings and their scheduled trip to the Galapagos Islands. Hart was mentally speculating as to who might be looking down their back trail. He wasn’t overly concerned with the FBI, CIA, or INTERPOL. The Chinese, however, posed a different threat. Mister Woo Li was directly responsible for making the poison that killed all the Panamanians. They knew where to look for motive and had a substantial population of Chinese in Panama. Their presence was evident in most of the small convenience stores in the country; especially the rural provinces, like Chiriquí. Sooner or later someone would discover the sizable trust fund set up for the victims, and then they would start investigating.

“...isn’t that right, Jimmy, darling?” Coreen asked as she giggled.

Hart looked at his fiancé and grinned. Coreen just asked the question in the form of a statement. She did that a lot more these days; her little game to keep him grounded in the present tense.

“Anything you say, dear,” he replied as he scanned the faces of his friends. Lowdown was stifling a laugh. Jimmy shot him a steely eyed glare and then laughed aloud.

“Sorry guys, I spend too much time in my head. It’s hard to be sociable when this boat brings back so many memories.”

“A lot has happened since then,” Reed said sensing a more somber mood. “I think what happened changed us all.”

“It’s amazing what’s happening in the medical industry because of what you men did,” Meg interjected. “Mostly for the better, I might add.”

Hart agreed but he knew there was another element they’d given license; those that operated just outside the medical profession; the charlatans that preyed on the unsuspecting and desperately ill. Dismantling the drug companies, taking the greed out of the medical industry was a good thing, but it opened a lot of doors for the hocus pocus people to operate with impunity.

Jimmy was still thinking of his version of the changes when he saw Coreen leave her chair and walk toward him.

“If you’re going to sit and think, you may as well take us home,” Coreen said as she held out her hand.

Hart took Coreen’s hand and pulled her into his lap. “I’m sorry I’m such a dud tonight. I keep thinking about our last mission and the jeopardy we may be facing.”

Coreen scanned the faces of the small group. Meg showed the most alarm. “Jimmy has convinced me we are not out of danger,” Coreen said to her friends. “At first I thought he was paranoid but then as time went by and we received more information from Jimmy’s elaborate network, I’m convinced. You all should listen to him,” she suggested in a serious tone.

Jimmy was chagrined by the mood he’d doused on his friends. He could see the inner concerns mounting. Ben rose from the settee and took a few steps toward the galley and then turned to Jimmy. “I thought we’d covered out tracks quite well. Where do you perceive the threat coming from? The Feds?”

While Ben proceeded to the refrigerator to get a soda, Jimmy mentally composed an answer; he could see Meg, Lowdown, and Sue waiting for his reply.

“We always have to consider the feds but they usually play by the rules. I believe the cartel hired another shooter and he’s out there looking for us; bewildered but still out there with a contract in his pocket even though we eliminated his bosses. My biggest concern, however, is the Chinese. They don’t play by the rules, and their methods for finding the truth are barbaric.”

Lowell squirmed in his seat before he asked, “Why would those CEO’s hire another shooter? They had Borden Hughes on the payroll.”

“I often wondered about that,” Reed commented. Those CEO’s had extremely deep pockets. They could have hired a squad of assassins to eliminate the Adamson manuscript from ever being published. Why just Borden Hughes?”

“We’ve thought about that, too,” Coreen interjected. “If Doctor Adamson and all those publishers were murdered in a short span of time, it would have raised a lot of red flags. Jimmy thinks the low key approach with Hughes was the original plan. They may have contracted another assassin after the manuscript began surfacing.”

“The Chinese, folks...the Chinese,” Jimmy uttered. “They should be our focus.”

All eyes turned to him as he interrupted their train of thinking. Jimmy was somewhat reluctant to expound on his fears, but he knew his friends needed to hear some truths, and his theories based on facts he’d received.

“The Chinese have a very solid custom; it dates back centuries. They can only save face by apprehending or eliminating those that made their high level executive disappear. They’re not stupid,

they have already determined the motive and are already looking in Panama. As to the other assassin? I can't rule that out, but it's based on strategic supposition."

"Isn't your Chinese scenario just a theory, too?" Ben asked.

Jimmy paused before he answered. "One of Danny's men, a mid-grade officer in his security business, is Panamanian-Chinese. He discovered a copy of the poster that is circulating around the country; it has a photo and description of Mister Woo Li. The Chinese community in Panama is being queried as well as the families of the Diethylene Glycol victims."

"Explain to me what Panamanian-Chinese means," Sue stated.

"Like me...a half-breed. I'm Panamanian-American. My father was a US military officer and my mother was Panamanian. Dual citizenship and bi-lingual."

Sue nodded her understanding as the large salon became quiet. Coreen nuzzled Jimmy's neck and left the small divan. Hart watched her walk toward the galley. "Does anyone want anything while I'm up?" she asked in general.

"Ben, do you mind if I take a closer look at the *Ancient Mariner*?" asked Lowdown.

"Sure, I'll give you the tour."

Without a word, Sue joined Ben and Lowell as Reed took them aft thru the engine room to the master stateroom. Meg looked at Jimmy, and then at Coreen in the galley. "I think you spooked Ben. Are you certain your warning is timely?"

"Danny, Harding, and I have discussed this at length. We all believe I will be the primary target; no one else," Hart related. "Although, if there is another shooter looking for us, that writer in Alaska Ray Novak, could be in danger."

Meg watched Coreen in the galley for a moment and then turned back to Jimmy. "Is it because you had all those e-mails regarding the Adamson Manuscript sent to you?" She asked.

Jimmy shook his head no. "It's because I was very proactive when Coreen was poisoned with that crap. I made it known to the doctors, hospital staff, and government officials that someone needed to be held accountable, and it wouldn't take much detective work to discover my warrior past," Hart answered nonchalantly. "It won't be long before something happens."

Coreen delivered glasses of iced tea to Meg and herself. Seated back on the divan, she looked at her lover and then to Meg. "Our Island has become a fortress; land mines, booby traps, alarm systems, numerous heavy weapons, and even a fall-back bunker. Jimmy thinks we'll be ready for any kind of assault the Chinese throw at us. Provided we're not out and about when it happens," Coreen stated.

Jimmy squirmed in his seat as Coreen went on to describe the steps that had been taken to protect them from any invader. Listening to her describe the details, it sounded extremely paranoid. *Was he paranoid? Was this all in his head?* Jimmy answered his own doubts by reviewing his past; the life before retirement; the life of a wounded warrior. He knew; deep inside. He was being hunted; probably from two fronts or more.

"We're still somewhat vulnerable from the back side of the island," Jimmy stated to the two women.

"I think I can solve that problem," said Lowdown in his deep resinous voice.

Jimmy and the women looked up as Ben led Lowell and Sue back into the salon. Lowell's height and bulk seemed to fill the room. "Ben just made a deal with me on this boat," Lowdown stated.

"It's going to be our new home!" Sue exclaimed with a giggle. Lowdown was all grins, Sue was giddy, Ben seemed relieved, and Meg looked shocked.

"Would you care to share some details? How is this transaction help secure the back of my island?" Jimmy asked.

"Simple, that's where we'll anchor the *Ancient Mariner*," Lowell replied. "Begging your permission, sire," he added in a thick cockney accent.

Jimmy laughed at Lowell's antics. He looked at the boat with a different eye; it would make a fine home for Lowell and Sue.

"Doesn't it bother you that this is not a good sailing vessel?" Meg asked.

"Nope. Sorry folks, this boat ain't going to the Galapagos. We'll have to have the honeymoon somewhere else. Jimmy, will you help me set up a mooring system on the other side of your island?"

Jimmy nodded his assent. "She's good right where she sets. Perhaps during the next couple of squalls the wind will take out some of the mangroves. With two select trees gone, it will create a nice sheltered little bite."

Ben laughed at their thinly disguised plan. "To do what you're planning back in the States would require four or five agencies and untold penalties if you did something wrong."

"I believe that's why they live in Panama," Meg stated with a giggle.

Hart felt the schooner swing on the anchor chain toward the mouth of his cove. The tide had changed. They were close enough to hear his waterfalls. Although Jimmy appreciated the craftsmanship of the schooner, he was still a landlubber. He appreciated his island; the paradise he'd created. He was fortunate he'd found a woman who appreciated it as well.

* * * * *

It was a plus tide, and Sue was guiding the *Ancient Mariner* into the slot of mangroves. Coreen was on the bow fending off some of the overhanging limbs and vines. Lowell, up to his waist in water and mangrove mud, was winching a hawser line around the trunk of a large tree. Jimmy was using his sport fisher like a tug; pushing the big schooner toward the shore while fighting the ebbing tide and current. Once Lowell secured the bow line, he made his way up the bank and through the trees to gather in the stern line. Alex, standing on the port stern had pitched a light line high into a bush. Lowell was reaching for the rope when he felt the explosions. A moment later he heard them. Two back to back, and then a third. Jimmy heard them too and gunned his vessel toward the bank.

"Jimmy, some of our land mines just went off!" Coreen shouted.

"Lowdown, stay with your boat and the women. Alex you're with me!" Hart ordered.

By the time Jimmy and Alex rounded the head-wall to his private cove; two Chinese men were loading a third wounded man into a ponga with dual outboards. They sped away before his boat could enter the lagoon. Jimmy had his pistol out, but they were too fast and too far away for him to make a decent shot. As they approached the dock, Hart saw a large pool of blood near the base of the stairs and another at the end of the pier. It appeared that the wounded man was bleeding out—he wouldn't make it.

The sites of the three explosions were evident on the side of the high bank. As Jimmy and Alex moored the boat they could hear his peacocks kicking up a fuss. Marcella descended the stairs and stopped halfway when she saw a man's leg on the stairway. She began to scream. Jimmy was the first up the stairs, and he took her in his arms as the young housekeeper continued to wail. Jimmy transferred her to her brother's arms and continued up the stairs to his front yard. No one was evident. He searched all the buildings, and then took the stairs to the upper lake. He didn't see any sign of intruders so he assumed the strike force was just the five men.

Hart knew the bouncing Betty's had saved Marcella's life. She was shaken by the violence and gore but she was unharmed and alive. Had the protection not been in place he was certain that his peacocks would have been shot and his housekeeper raped, killed or both.

Jimmy inspected the remains of the two men who'd been blown over a wide area. Their heads were mostly intact but they weren't attached to their torsos. Hart began piling body parts in a heap.

"Alex, help me clean up this mess. Grab a couple of fish totes for all the body parts. I want this done before Lowdown and the women get here."

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Chapter 2

The United States Embassy in Panama is located in what was once Fort Clayton, on the Pacific coast near the Panama Canal and the old train depot. The Embassy campus is relatively new and encompasses sixty acres. The facility is also five times larger than required for the needs of normal daily business; issuance of visa's and consular services to US citizens. The complex was super-sized to accommodate the sizable personnel and technical equipment of the CIA. It was once stated that Panama has more spies per capita than any other country in the world; including war zones like the Middle East. Information flows like the local rum between allies and enemies alike.

The guard at the gate was quite nonchalant about inspecting William Fielding's credentials. William was in no hurry to meet the honchos at the embassy. He knew them to be mostly appointed bureaucrats; none save one having any field experience. Fielding sought him out because according to his notes, the files indicated at one time Mister Preslee had worked for Joe Brock.

George Preslee had a small office just off the consular services section of the second floor. There was no name or title on the door; just a small plaque that said PRIVATE. Fielding knocked twice and waited.

"Identify yourself!" demanded a voice through the door. "Senior Analyst, William Fielding, Mister Preslee."

"The door's open, come in," Preslee said.

William was surprised at the man who had the history of being a field agent. Preslee looked like a librarian from some hick town in the Midwest. He had dark circles under his eyes, thick glasses, and a day's growth of beard. His clothes were rumpled expat attire; chinos, sandals and a print shirt.

"What can I do for you?" Preslee asked as he closed his laptop.

Fielding was uncomfortable. The room was small, without windows, and every chair had piles of files occupying the seats. William was forced to stand.

"I'm down here on two assignments; one is about Marcos Glosser, and the other has to do with senior agent, Joe Brock. I understand you used to work with Brock."

"I never worked WITH that son-of-a-bitch. I worked for him. I did all the work while he loafed about and took the credit unless something went wrong. Then he was damned quick at pointing out a fault," Preslee grouched. "He belittled me all the time and made me the goat on that Gavioto case. I heard he'd retired, but he showed up here last year all pomp and polished. He was supposed to turn in a report on the PANAMAX GAMES, but instead he took off for the interior and has never returned. He's probably boinking one of those rich Boquete babes."

Fielding could see the ire building in Preslee. Now was the time to get the information he needed.

"So no one has heard from him since then?"

"Hell, I don't know. He was always a rogue. I'll bet he went over to the other side."

"The Communists or Taliban?" Fielding asked in surprise.

"No, the private sector, mister analyst," Preslee snickered. "He always had something going on the side. Even when we were working the Gavioto case he would distract me and go afield and do his

sideline business. There was a rumor floating around the farm that he was the handler for Borden Hughes, the assassin. Just a rumor,” Preslee added.

Fielding recalled reading about Borden Hughes in Ray Novak’s book. He kept the information he’d gleaned quiet, as Novak’s book was a work of fiction. He made a note, however to trace Brock’s past, and see if there was any connection to the infamous yet ghostlike persona of Borden Hughes.

“So my coming here about Brock is a dead end?”

“Yup. A dead end as far as Glosser is concerned, too,” Preslee predicted. “You’ll never find him or his millions. He’s deep into some South American country. My bet is Bolivia. That’s where his estranged wife lives. Eventually he’ll go back to Columbia.”

“Why would he risk going to Columbia? He’s been tried and convicted already. He faces thirty years in prison,” William stated.

“Why don’t you take a seat, and I’ll tell you a story. It will help in your windmill tilting,” George offered.

Fielding looked at all the files on the chairs and selected the one with the shortest stack; he placed the folders on the floor and took a seat.

“Marcos Glosser is like Robin Hood. Everyone loves him except rich people and governments. He could walk down the streets of any small town in Columbia and be swarmed by admirers.”

“I don’t understand. Didn’t he bilk and defraud those people out of millions of dollars? Why would they honor him?”

“I guess you need a lesson in the Latin mentality. Glosser set up a Ponzi scheme patterned exactly like the USA’s Social Security system. It had a couple of genius twists. When a person signed up for the Glosser deal, somewhere in the contract fine print was a clause that the signatory agreed to the Glosser Group becoming the beneficiary of a life insurance policy that took effect the minute the contract was signed. These members were issued ID cards that when presented to certain retailers entitled them to discounts. They made their payments to someone representing the Glosser Group in their region. This person was their guardian angel,” Preslee explained. “As long as a member remained current with their small contribution every two weeks, any problems they encountered were solved in some way by the local Glosser representative – like the movie, *Godfather*. Once they started drawing benefits from either disability or just retirement, they seldom lived long full lives; they died. When that happened, the families, who never knew about the life insurance policies, received a personal letter or visit from Marco Glosser and a check for several thousand pesos. He was having them killed, and the families worship him for his generosity. Shit, Glosser’s group must have purchased *thallium sulfate* in 55 gallon drums,” Preslee speculated.

Fielding let the salient points of Glosser’s diabolical scheme take a couple of laps around his brain before he spoke. “Wouldn’t these people who paid into his scheme be pissed because it was stopped?” William asked.

“Who told you it stopped? The only difference is the discounts from retailers. Glosser was shaking them down...citing billable events every time the card was presented. They agreed to the terms in the beginning but had no idea the breadth of his organization. It was the rich businessmen that turned on Glosser, not the common folks. Members are still making payments, receiving benefits and dying an early death. Not much has changed. And most high level politicians in Latin America are aware of the scheme.”

Since the Marcos Glosser case was preeminent on his agenda, Fielding continued to prod Preslee. Joe Brock could wait.

“If you know these facts to be true, one would assume the Government of Columbia would know them as well. Why haven’t they closed this diabolical scheme down and prosecuted the culprits?”

“When people get old they become a burden. Governments have to pay their pensions, pay their health benefits, and in some cases pay disability benefits for decades. Glosser’s premeditated extermination program eliminates these government expenses and saves those government departments millions,” Preslee explained.

William considered Preslee’s opinion. He probably wasn’t far off the mark. Even in the US there seemed to be a constant movement to deny veterans benefits, freeze COLA to social security recipients, and to increase government health insurance fees. William decided he had a lot to learn.

“I know all the details regarding his fraud trial and the money laundering. What I don’t understand is why the Colombian government allows his scheme to continue? What about the insurance companies? Surely they have sent investigators.”

Preslee laughed at the innocence of Fielding. He could relate. He’d been the same way when he was first posted to Panama.

“Twenty miles up the road in one of any small village here in Panama, if an old man or woman dies the police summon the Persona which is the local ombudsman, they take a look at the body, and if no evidence of foul play can be seen, he or she starts the death certificate process. The corpse is taken to the designated mortuary, and the body is either embalmed or cremated within 24 hours. Tropics make for very ripe corpses. Autopsies are done only in suspicious cases. That’s true everywhere in Central and South America,” Preslee elaborated. “Now to your question about insurance companies. Who do you think owns the life and health insurance companies in Venezuela, Columbia, and Ecuador?”

“I don’t know. My guess would be Europeans.”

“BBBZZZZZ! Wrong. The drug cartels are the money behind the insurance companies. Glosser has deals to kick back a portion of each settlement; there’s never an investigation. Can you think of a better way to launder money?” Preslee gloated.

“That’s not in any of the files and records I have pertaining to his conviction and incarceration for money laundering,” Fielding stated.

“Of course not! What convicted Glosser was politics. Ask yourself. Why are you assigned to this case? You are an analyst - agent of the CIA. The jailbreak was in Florida; it’s an FBI and State of Florida problem. Not a CIA mission.”

Preslee echoed Fielding’s thoughts when he was first handed the case by his superior. Why was the CIA involved? They weren’t cops they were an intelligence gathering organization.

“Do you have a theory?”

“Glosser is a genius. Ask yourself. Wouldn’t Marcos make a great asset for the company?”

Fielding’s heart took a leap. He’d never considered he may be involved in a “cover yon ass” as they called it in the backrooms of the Company. Perhaps he was assigned because Glosser knew too much. Just like the Noriega take-down. William looked at Preslee with a different view. This scabby fellow was actually a very astute agent - analyst.

“Why are you relegated to, to... what looks like a file closet? Why aren’t you in the field?” Fielding asked.

“The last two Ambassadors to Panama have been women. The Secretary of State is a woman. The current Ambassador is a man but still a pussy.”

“So? What does that have to do with your posting? You should be answering to Langley not the local glad-hander.”

“Langley is influenced by reports from Ambassadors...go figure. I was supposedly the one who wrote a very anti ‘women-in power-joke’ and posted it on the Embassy website. Since then I have been stuck in this closet working cases that are shit!”

“Two questions. Are you guilty, and what is the shit case you’re working on?”

“I’m guilty of telling the joke to a couple of guys. Brock is the one who posted it on the website using my computer. It came back and bit me in the ass after he’d supposedly retired.”

“What are you working on?”

“Another Ponzi scheme. One with a bunch of gringos in league with a cooperativo, that’s akin to a Credit Union in the states.”

Fielding feigned interest and decided to change the subject. “Any ideas of where to start looking for Brock?”

“Hey, you can help me and look into Brock at the same time. If you look at expense reports you’ll find a paper trail for Brock. He abused the expense account system like none other.”

“I did that while in Langley,” William replied. “How can I help?”

“Once you’re in David, go on the local chat rooms and gringo hang-outs, and ask where you can get the best rates for your savings. You’ll be contacted by a half a dozen people. Meet with them and get their proposals. Once you have them, fax or e-mail them to me.”

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Chapter 3

Hart was disgusted with himself. He'd let down his guard on the unscheduled trip to the old Spanish fort, and now he was in a gun battle with what appeared to be the remainder of the gang that had attacked his island.

Presently he was hunkered behind the rusty barrel of a sixteenth century cannon, once the firepower of the old Fort San Lorenzo. Twice bullets had ricocheted off the rusty ancient metal, stinging his face and the scar tissues of his neck with chips of corrosion. His partner in the gun battle, Lowell, had taken one in the leg and was currently behind the crumbled ramparts of the old Spanish Fort. Once in a while he fired his Glock in the general direction of their assailants.

This second encounter with the Chinese gang that was bent on killing him, and anyone associated with him was beginning to piss him off. Only two weeks had elapsed since their attack on his island that two members of the five man hit squad had been killed by strategically placed Bouncing Betty's and currently resided in sunken fish traps near Jimmy's island in Boca Chica.

Jimmy had assumed the battle was over; they'd lost. Two dead and a third wounded? And yet here they were; two clowns that made one lucky shot and were now pinned down in a relic of stone masonry that ricocheted every round fired by Lowell or himself. Sooner or later they would be hit unless the police happened to arrive. Jimmy doubted that would happen until the shooting was over. He was curious what motivated the dopes they had pinned down. It had to be either one of three things; big money, pride, or the fear of whomever had hired them. It was obvious the goons had followed them from Albrook because their trip across the isthmus was spur of the moment; not even Coreen, Sue, or the Folgers knew about their sashay to San Lorenzo. Jimmy knew the shooters to be amateurs, but that didn't keep a bullet from hitting his best friend.

"Are you still okay?" Jimmy hollered.

"Yeah, I'm just grazed," Lowdown replied. "Give me some cover fire, and I'll come out to the cannons. Maybe we can rush these guys and put a stop to this!"

Jimmy considered Lowell's proposal. It was risky. They could occasionally fire into the stone hut and hope that the two Chinese gang bangers would run out of ammo. Besides, he knew help was on the way. Mid-day sun beat down on the pair, but a slight breeze off the ocean kept them comfortable.

"Negative, stay where you are. Just fire a round into the hut once in a while. Aim high so there's a chance of ricochets," Hart ordered. "Time is our ally."

"Not if you're shot in the leg and bleeding," Lowdown replied.

Jimmy processed the new information.

"I thought you said it was just a scratch?"

"I said it was just a graze. It still bleeds and hurts like the dickens," Downs replied.

Jimmy fired two rounds into the stone hut and made a dash for the old rampart located behind him. He expected to be fired upon as he leaped over the burm, exposing himself. He wasn't. Lowell was only a few feet away; a large grin on his face as he saw Jimmy. "Ahh, Hart to the rescue again," he said in jest as Jimmy looked at his wound. It wasn't a graze but a through and through. It was bleeding but

not from a large vein or artery. Lowell released pressure on the wound so Hart could examine the damage.

“This is more than a graze, Lowell. We need to get you some medical attention.”

“Did you call the cavalry?” Lowell asked as he stretched out his wounded leg.

“Yeah, I called Danny about a half hour ago; when these thugs first started shooting at us.”

It was quiet for a moment, and then Lowell fired a shot at the open door of the stone shack.

“We’re stuck for another hour. It’s a long drive from Albrook,” Lowdown speculated.

“I’m pretty sure we’ll be seeing a whirlybird, big guy. It should be here soon.”

Almost on cue, the sound of rotors could be heard in the distance. Jimmy punched the speed dial on his satellite phone and was immediately connected to Danny Folger. “We’re almost there. Where are the bad guys?” Danny asked.

“There are two bogies in the small stone hut. We’re located behind the ramparts – on the ocean side. Set down between us if you have firepower,” Jimmy instructed.

Folger laughed over the phone. “Bogies? I forget what a warrior you are. Yeah, we have firepower, Jimmy. What should we do with it?”

“Send some short bursts and a tear gas canister into that stone shack. We haven’t seen any return fire for almost ten minutes. They may be down or just out of ammo.”

“Roger, anything else?” Danny asked.

“Yeah, Lowdown took one in the thigh. Do you have a medic aboard?”

“Negative, but we can sure get him to one quickly. Be prepared to come aboard while we’re hosing the hut. It looks like a police parade at the entrance to the park. What do you plan to do about them?”

“Have your men contain and load those miscreants onto the chopper. We’ll wave at the cops as we fly over,” Jimmy answered.

When the helicopter was a few feet from touchdown, and as the gunner sprayed rounds into the hut, Jimmy assisted Lowell over the burm. Once in the cargo bay of the chopper, Jimmy watched the assault team toss a tear gas grenade into the shack. All that came out was a cloud of gas. After waiting a minute, the three assault members in gas masks entered the building. A moment later they pulled two men from the hut and loaded them into the chopper; they appeared to be dead. Hart was tending Lowdown’s wound but he inched closer to the gang members to ascertain their condition. “Get us outta here!” Danny ordered the pilot as he moved into the cargo bay to see his friends.

“How ya doin’ big guy? Danny asked as they shook hands.

“Havin’ a swell time with my buddy, Jimmy Hart. And you?” Lowell said sarcastically.

While Danny inspected Lowell’s wound, Jimmy took a closer look at the two Chinese gangsters. They were both alive, and all he could see was superficial wounds. “These guys are playing possum!” Jimmy reported as the chopper passed over the covey of cops below at the entrance to the park.

Two of Danny’s men promptly secured the gangsters’ hands and legs with plastic ties. Once fully trussed they gave up their act. Their eyes opened, but they didn’t respond to questions put to them in Spanish, English, and Mandarin.

“Tell the pilot to make a short detour over the landfill. I’ll dump these two pukes into the garbage. They’ll fit right in,” Jimmy instructed as he watched the eyes of the older thug.

Jimmy watched the eyes of the men and discerned the older of the two men understood English. The younger one, barely out of his teens was clueless about his immediate future. Jimmy knew it wouldn’t end with killing these goons. He had to find out who was orchestrating the attacks in Panama, and then find the top dog in China.

Looking directly into the face of the older gang member, Jimmy said very slowly, “I saw you when you attempted to kill me at my island. The two men you left behind are at the bottom of the ocean,

being eaten by crabs, shrimp and other fish. I assume the other man is also dead. You have five minutes to tell me who gives your orders here in Panama. Who is your employer?"

"Let me toss him out. I like throwing Chinamen outta planes," Lowell interrupted.

Jimmy waited and watched the eyes of the mid-twenties thug. He could see defiance but also a mild weakening. This guy was not a programmed kamikaze.

"Heave the other worthless one out!" Jimmy ordered. "I'll take this one."

Lowdown struggled to his knees and grabbed the Chinese teen. He finally had the leverage on the youth and lifted him off the deck of the chopper.

"Wait another minute and we'll be right over the flames," Danny instructed.

Jimmy yanked his prisoner toward the open hatch so he could see out. Smoke from the garbage fire wafted through the cabin as the chopper circled and gained altitude. Danny's four men grinned as the two gringos lifted the Chinese gangsters off the deck.

"Last chance, Clyde. Who paid you to kill me?"

The prisoner turned and looked at Jimmy with defiance in his eyes. Hart didn't hesitate. He nodded to Lowdown who immediately pitched his charge through the open hatch. Jimmy and his prisoner watched as the teen fell into the large pile of flaming rubbish. Jimmy tugged the thug forward. "Haun! I get paid by Haun."

"Haun Limited? The company that has the port contracts?" Danny asked.

"A man who is high in the company hired us," the prisoner related. "Name, numb-nuts. I need a name!" Jimmy demanded.

The prisoner shook his head no and looked toward the open hatch. Panic struck him like a sledge as the chopper was thrown sideways by the blast of heat rising from the dump. The prisoner toppled through the open hatch, about to follow his partner to certain death. Jimmy grabbed him just as he left the aircraft. Hart had him caught by the plastic tie that secured his feet. One of Danny's men assisted Jimmy in pulling the gangster back into the cargo bay. Danny closed the hatch.

"Was that accidental or was he trying to commit suicide?" Danny asked.

"Accidental. He's not the kamikaze type. I believe this guy is going to be our guest for a while," Hart speculated. "Your company has a lock-up, right?"

Danny nodded and spoke to Lowell. "We'll set down at Albrook. Conner owns a private clinic right there on the tarmac. I'm sure you'll get fixed up right away. I'll have the pilot call ahead."

"Thanks, Danny. It looks like we're less than twenty minutes out. I'll be fine. Jimmy needs some care, too. He was out in the sun too long. His scar tissue is really ripe."

Jimmy touched the scars on his neck and felt searing pain course through his body. He knew it would take days to heal, and he looked at the Chinese thug with resentment. "You're going to take me to the man who hired you!" Hart exclaimed. "This has got to stop."

"You can't torture me. I know the rules," the thug retorted.

Lowell began laughing. "You ignorant goon! We don't play by the rules. We make the rules when it comes to the likes of you. Remember your partner? The guy frying in the garbage dump? We do what we want. We'll torture you for a month if that's what it takes, so you may as well tell Mister Hart everything you know right now!"

Jimmy watched the man's eyes. He saw the weakness again.

"Lowdown, I believe this guy is a citizen of Panama. He's not a foreigner," Jimmy speculated. He watched the man closely while making the remark.

"If that's true, we have a family we can torture and kill, too," Lowdown stated. "It won't be hard to establish once he's fingerprinted."

Hart knew he was correct in his assessment when the young man flexed his fingers on both hands and the look of defeat permeated every small movement.

“Here’s the run-down on our bad boy. You were right, Jimmy. He’s a citizen,” Folger related as he handed Hart the fax.

Jimmy read the fax and accompanying notes. He handed the papers to Lowell whose thigh had just been stitched and bandaged by the medic.

“What’s an estibador?” Lowell asked.

“It means Stevedore. This guy works for Haun LTD. I’ll bet on it. This mystery won’t be hard to solve,” Jimmy surmised.

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Chapter 4

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