

The Silent Watchman

Part 6: Legitimacy

Special to the Euro Press Syndicate

Lucrative Training Contracts Going To
PMF Training Camps in Central America

By Marcello Barcqe and Ariana Lentz

(PANAMA CITY) In the wake of displays of military-style tactics by drug cartel street soldiers, authorities are investigating a provider of private security and military forces training operating somewhere in the mountains and forests of Central America. Taught by former members of Latin American and other elite police and military special operations units, the courses offered are thought to be as sophisticated as those provided by many of the world's top-ranked SWAT and military units, including weapons, communications, and small unit intelligence and operations. The worldwide need for private security and military forces (PS&MF) is believed to have gained legitimacy because of increasing violence and threats to property and personnel in unsettled regions of Africa and Southern Asia. Governments, non-profits, and businesses are competing for the services of the best, even as they deplore the growth of the industry. Investigators are said to be particularly interested in allegations of connections between the training camps and the illicit narcotics industries of Latin America and South East Asia.

Previously

Terrence Ambrose McCrory smiled as he walked out of the dockside warehouse in the free-trade zone of Colon. He had just landed an A&E contract to renovate a small pharmaceutical plant in Bilboa, complete with research laboratories for level 4 containment (and, surprisingly, explosives). And he had been invited to return tomorrow to discuss development of a private military and security force training camp somewhere in Central America. The professional fees for these projects were expected to be two percent more than premium for industrial design. With generous reimburseables and project administration during construction, the value of these contracts was considerable. For a firm the size of T. A. McCrory Associates, the jobs were a bit of a stretch; but with quality and time as the drivers and costs expected to match the need, he could augment

his very competent staff with specialists to guide them. It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and the risks seemed manageable.

The Consortium was pleased with the results of the meeting: Acquisition of a design development firm known within a tightly controlled circle for its quality and discretion. With Simon Stoddard handling the international contracts and finances, the legitimacy of the projects was unassailable. Some might complain about the training camp, but the need for private security, military, and intelligence services was generally accepted in economic, political, and humanitarian enterprise as necessary to manage risk and ensure profitability in an increasingly confusing and violent world. The opportunities for those with vision and money were endless.

On a rainy fall day in a suburb of Washington, D.C., Devon Xander sat comfortably across the ornate desk from Simon Stoddard. Simon had asked Devon to visit him to discuss an opportunity that appeared designed for Xander. After coffee and a bit of small talk, Stoddard turned to the matter at hand:

“Devon, four countries in Central America, with the full support of the United States, are preparing to build a joint anti-terrorism center somewhere within the four nations. The center will train counter-terrorism specialists and units from the four nations, and plan and execute direct action operations against drug traffickers and insurgents across the region. The center’s activities will span the divide between civil law enforcement and military missions to interdict the overland drug transit routes and maintain stable governments on the isthmus north of the canal. Canal officials are interested in cooperating with the project, but they are not ready to openly support an activity that will reinsert the United States into their internal matters. This project has the attention of the highest levels of governance and prominent private military and corporate intelligence enterprise in the US of A. Malcolm wants you as the deputy director of the project, and he has convinced our authorities that your military and law enforcement experience are right for the position.

“At the same time, rumors suggest that the Mexican drug consortium that relocated its executive activities to Colon’s free-trade zone is developing a training center somewhere in the region to train PMF personnel for private and government security

contracts and, at the heart of Garfield's concern, for paramilitary operations against national anti-drug activities in the region between Panama and the Rio Grande. We know that Terry McCrory has a contract with an apparently legitimate firm doing business in Spain and Latin America to construct the facilities and renovate a pharmaceutical plant in northern Spain."

"I know something of McCrory's work," interjected Xander, "because of the renovations to Rosada's building."

"Our development of the four-nations facility is expected to be straight forward and overt. Your involvement will fit nicely into your open-source resumé. The Consortium's project, however, will be part of our package. Under your cover as deputy director of our project, Malcolm wants you to covertly locate and monitor developments related to McCrory's contract. McCrory's work is legitimate ... Garfield has no problem with his involvement. But, Malcolm is very interested in the Consortium's facilities and who comes and goes around them."

"As usual, Simon, you set a full table."

"No doubt, Devon, but we are playing in a high stakes game, and we cannot afford to be short sighted."

"I'm glad you brought up the topic of 'short sight.' The scale and scope of the two projects together is too much for one person in the field. Working for Garfield is in line with my training, but getting into and out of the mountains and jungles of Central America is the kind of mission I've worked on only a couple of times with Amos. That part of the job, especially if it includes watching over the pharmaceutical plant in Spain, requires its own focus and skill set. And traveling back and forth between Central America and Spain would expose us to more airport security checks. I imagine you know where I'm going with this."

"I do, and I am prepared to go to extraordinary lengths to entice him to reengage."

"Simon, I am interested in working for Malcolm on the four-nations project. But I want to know more before I commit to the full range of his concerns. I'm not saying that I won't take the project without Amos to lead on the Consortium side, but I think that we should proceed cautiously. Without Amos, the risks rise precipitously. And that is a matter that should concern all of us."

After a brief pause, Stoddard said, “All right, Devon. You go do your homework, and be alert for my call. Awakening the watchman may take some doing.”

Nodding assent, Devon Xander rose, turned, and left Simon Stoddard’s sanctum. He felt a surge of excitement at the prospect of working again with Amos Sanson.

Simon turned toward and sat for a while staring into his exquisite *Deus Ex Machina*.

“The agenda I propose for today includes three topics.” With this, the Consortium operations chief, Jefe Gabriell, opened the regular meeting of the principals of the three cartels. He was new to the job, having risen in prominence after the execution of Joaquin Pretemo, and hoped to set the correct aire of sedate confidence and keen grasp of the facts that would solidify his ascendance. “The topics are as follows: First, update of our information regarding military assistance by los Estados Unidos in countering narcotics operations on the Isthmus; second, update of our projects with Senor McCrory; and third, a brief presentation of co-opetition, a business model that builds upon our successful alternative to past cycles of destructive competition. Of course, our discussion is not limited to the agenda that I have set before you.”

“Please proceed,” the Sinoran said softly after glancing briefly at his two colleagues. “We will, of course, interrupt you if it suits us.” The chief of the north border cartel was not the least bit reluctant to display his authority as host of the meeting occurring within the safety of the warehouse in Panama’s FTZ.

Gabriell picked up with a succinct summary of current US efforts to strengthen the Central American assets aimed at preventing the processing and flow of illicit narcotics from East Asia and Latin America into the United States and Europe. “US resources are bolstering local military and law enforcement operations; but, as usual, they come with strings, or rather heavy hawsers, tying local efforts to the Norte Americano command and control structure. Our associates in local law enforcement resent the demands made upon them and the heavy-handed presence of American personnel in their strategic planning and tactical operations. The gringos control the resources, including the vetting and selection of officers to be trained at Fort Benning, and our informants tell us that local politicians fear reestablishment of the School of the Americas and

reassertion of historic imperialistic hegemony over Central America. So far, foreign interests have not yet achieved the level of control they appear to be seeking, and they do not appear to be willing to invest unreservedly in our countries' command structures."

Interrupting Gabriell, the Sinoran asked, "Do you see opportunities for us to leverage local politicians and military and police officials in such a way as to build a bridge to the American resources while frustrating their control over our political and law enforcement decision makers and operational commands? If we can control their activities, trading a few trinkets for access to their largess, we might be able to harness their horses to our wagons."

The other cartel representatives nodded. To capitalize upon the American investments to further the Consortium's interests was an intriguing thought for these men who had, with cautious optimism, rolled the dice at Nogales. The works of Machiavelli were well known to them, and they were willing to risk being surrounded with brilliant, modern, almost philosophical minds. They were innovators searching constantly for ways to blend into the landscape, and confident enough to believe they could shake hands with the Devil himself.

"But, that is a topic for another day. Continue, por favor."

And Gabriell did, first with a review of McCrory's progress in Spain and Central America, then with a power-point presentation regarding the game of business.

"In Spain, the project is progressing on time and on budget. No challenges that cannot be managed have occurred. Our hand in the project has not emerged. The structure of the organization is intact. Our risks remain those of any business enterprise investing in its future. For us, the future remains positive.

"The project in Central America is being pushed to the limit. At the strategic staff level, we believe we are in a race with the United States effort to dominate the market for government military and law enforcement training in Latin America. Reports from our associates in Washington tell us that the Americans are interested in what is happening in the private military and security field, but are not openly competing for that market segment. Therefore, we are pressing McCrory to bring the first-stage training facilities on-line as soon as practicable, and to commence in parallel with development of the more advanced specialties. We want trainees in the pipelines at all levels before the

bureaucrats can get their act together. We hope to introduce our services to our governments before the diplomatic tigers are caged, and in so doing, to show that we in Central America can fulfill our international obligations with our 'home-grown' services, services our governments can purchase if the US government provides financial aid. We want to declare NAFTA to be alive and well, and we can hold up our end of the bargain."

Jefe Gabriell initiated the third item on the agenda with a quote from a book published by two gentlemen from the ivy-covered halls of the Harvard Business School and the Yale School of Management:

Business is different from other games because it allows more than one winner. And it is different in another fundamental way: All the elements in the game of business are constantly changing; nothing is fixed, there are no ultimate ruling bodies such as The International Soccer or Chess Federations. We are free to change the game of business to our own benefit.

"We wish to strengthen our business model, capitalizing upon cooperation at the corporate level while permitting competition at the street level."

"Jefe, let's take a break for lunch. You have provided much for us to process. Let us take a while to digest it. Return at five o'clock this afternoon to continue the discussion from this point."

Consortium to Jefe Gabriell: "Jefe, you needn't return this afternoon. Please check with Simon Stoddard through our London solicitors to find out where the US and the four countries stand. We need to know how much time we have until their program becomes operational. We may have to increase the pace of our project, but we don't want to reveal our hands in this. Discretion is paramount. Let us seek to be on-line with our services first so that we can demonstrate to our Latino friends our capacities to satisfy their needs, all the while suggesting to them that they may not want to let the Americans too far into their affairs lest they become pawns to American imperialism. Let us set up to keep the training in-house so to speak, and seek through our Washington associates a greater focus on limiting US participation to financial aid for the four countries to pay for their training and changes to their command and control infrastructure."

Ariana Lentz was pleased. Her feature on Marcello Barcque had been accepted with very little editing and was to appear in newspapers throughout Europe within days. US papers, most notably the New York Times, the Washington Post, and the Los Angeles Times, were negotiating with the Euro Press Syndicate for rights to publish the article in their Sunday editions. Marcello (they now were quite comfortable in their professional association) had been very open on background, sharing a great deal of information about his relationships with prominent politicians, industrialists, law enforcement authorities, and high-ranking military commands. Some sources, the names of individuals and his contacts with illegal drug trafficking for example, he withheld; but he and she were discussing serious collaborations that could catapult them into the first rank of international investigative journalism. Discussions for the Nexus article coupled with their separate research and experiences had illuminated two major activities having international impact: private military force development and training, and high-potency narcotics, both legal and illicit. Furthermore, Central America was living-up to its name. It was not only bridging between North and South America; it had acquired the status of cross roads among the Americas, Europe, Asia, and Africa, for certain lucrative enterprises. And the Free Trade Zone of Colon was its epicenter.

Rumors circulating within an exclusive coterie of highly connected Latin American journalists—Marcello Barcque as a notable member and, now, Ariana Lentz as his “protégé”—suggested that a “well-financed group” was pursuing political pathways in Washington, DC, where money speaks loudly, to influence decisions concerning the counter terrorism/drug interdiction training center. Apparently, the argument was for US financial aid to the four countries so that they can purchase training from PMF training contractors and facilities rather than participate in a “US financed and controlled center” in Central America. The suggestion that American imperialism still accompanies its physical presence continues to weigh heavily among those Latino decision makers who prefer to control their own destinies and hold the keys to the countries through which drugs flow into North America. From Washington to Bogota, the policy clash was furtive and intense, and followed closely by interested parties in Pan-America, Southern Asia, and Europe. Marcello and Ariana believed that fruitful opportunities for enterprising writers connected closely to the principals lay within their grasp. So, fresh

from relevant successes, they were determined to exploit this dramatic issue as collaborative reporters and novelists; both ways, they held winning hands.

Or so they thought.

Devon Zander and Rosada Angel Jesus sat in the coffee shop inside her bookstore discussing both past and future.

“I think he really wanted simply to settle down with his books. He seemed so content when his concerns revolved around searching for rare editions. I wondered at such times what kept him in the game.” Rosada sat quietly for a moment, then rose to refresh her tea and Zander’s coffee.

Devon waited until she returned to the conversation. “I really didn’t know much about him personally. You two had your books, but he and I had only our projects. I did know him well enough to know he’ll be hard to replace.”

“Where do we go from here?”

“Simon suggests that I work closely with Malcolm Garfield, and that you and I continue to work together. You have solid contacts, I can work with Garfield on a number of fronts, and Simon may want to send us on special operations occasionally. I think that we won’t recruit a new watchman, at least for now, though Simon may want us to work with someone else on special assignments.”

“Our world is changing.”

“Yes.”

“But we can still do what we do as well as ever we could.”

“Yes.”

“So, what is our next step?”

After a momentary pause, Zander replied, “If it’s OK with you, I’ll talk with Simon about the three of us getting together. After that, we’ll see.”

The next day, Zander walked into the bookstore and directly to Rosada’s I-pod jukebox, currently featuring the alternating sounds of Irish step dancing and IRA ballads, motioning for her to follow. In a voice barely above a whisper, he said, “We’re having lunch with Simon in Charlottesville on the 24th, and *he* will be there.”

The small hole just in front of the right ear was barely visible, but the scorched, skeletal right hand holding a PPK with one round missing from the magazine suggested a grisly story. At autopsy, the medical examiner found projectile splinters and remnants of the mercury that had bounced inside his skull. In that merciful instant, his writhing body trapped inside the burning interior of his armored Mercedes, Jefe Gabriell had ceased to exist. Local authorities were amazed that the intense heat and flames had barely affected the exterior of the car and had posed no danger to its surroundings, and they appeared unconcerned by the expensive watch on the corpse's right wrist.

Almost immediately, an internecine battle for control of the Northwest Mexico drug cartel erupted. The competitive plazas and streets were invalidating the cooperative boardroom, and the collateral damage was threatening both sides of the border.

Malcolm Garfield watched the oversized monitor in his Washington war room as pictures on the organizational chart of the Sonoran drug cartel were replaced with the simple word, "Vacant." Something big, and totally unexpected, was happening in the Northwest Mexico cartel.

Later, after a semblance of order had returned to the streets of Sonora, a feature article published under the byline "Marcello Barcqe and Arianna Lentz" compared the weeks that followed the assassination of Jefe Gabriell with the collapse of Yugoslavia after the death of Marshal Tito. Beginning with the natural death of the Sonoran kingpin, and following upon the aborted attempt of Gabriell to assume the mantel of control in hopes of a relatively peaceful transition, the quiescent empire split violently into the fiefdoms that had been held together by the strength and charisma of the leader known simply as, "The Sonoran." Barcqe and Lentz suggested that the shudder passing through the three-legged foundation of a growing enterprise headquartered in the Colon FTZ and deeply invested in development of a PMF training facility in Central America and renovation of a pharmaceutical manufacturing complex in northern Spain was in some way related to the collapse of the Sonoran cartel. They finished their piece with a question: Could the enterprise retain stability with only two of the three legs intact?

Others having fewer legitimate press credentials and less reputation to risk speculated that the chain of events leading to violence in northwestern Mexico had been orchestrated by clandestine forces from north of the border to provide just enough pressure at a critical juncture to produce a natural collapse within the always fragile structure of such organizations; a delicate and risky undertaking, but one calculated to produce desirable benefits. Collateral damage resulting from the Mexican street battles among factions of the splintered cartel was said to be of little concern to these “unknown forces.” Such viewpoints were not uncommon among “imperialist conspiracy” devotees on both sides of the border. Only Malcolm Garfield and the local cops seemed to be concerned with the up-tick in violence north of the Rio Grande. Was it an indication of things to come?

Garfield was seated behind his steel battleship-gray desk in his typically nondescript civil service office in a suburb of Washington, DC, when Devon Xander entered for one of their periodic meetings to review progress, or the lack of it, in the four-countries project. Immediately, he was up and around the desk with hand extended to greet his agent, and confidant: “Devon, it’s good to see you, even though your information may be no more positive than mine.” Garfield was immersed in the complexities of dealing with differences and indecision among competing players, both within the US government and among the sovereign states “cooperatively” developing the Central American training facility, and he suspected that Xander was no less frustrated dealing with his counterparts on the isthmus. Only moments into their discussion, Garfield’s expectations were born out.

“Malcolm, not only is there no progress to report, but the level of mistrust and reluctance among the Latinos to accept our leadership on the project is pushing us further apart. Their reasoning seems simple, but it’s difficult to track. They seem to be parroting a directed script, and display no intent to either argue their points or listen to ours. Basically, their line is to cooperate with us if we finance development of their counter-terrorism and drug interdiction resources, but let them purchase services and resources from their own providers. They are wide open to the concepts of interoperability-compatible communications, equipment, weapons, and tactics, for example—but insist

upon operating within their own policy making and command and control systems. They appear to be adamantly against constructing an international training camp under US command, largely because, so far as I can see, they see it as an attempt to reestablish the School of the Americas with their compliance, ‘Subservience’ is the word one of my counterparts used and it was not contradicted formally or informally. I still have Latino friends, including both military and law enforcement, but they say nothing different on- or off-duty. The line seems unlikely to change. Even if they trust me, they don’t trust our government, or theirs either. The mistrust is in-bred, a matter of culture as Rosada would say.”

“I’m not surprised, Devon. At my level, and at the levels I advise from time to time, the chasm between supporters and opponents of the four-country training facility is wide and increasing. The arguments flying back and forth are similar in public and even more distressing, in private. A number of our most prominent legislators and a scattering of opinions in the administration and among my fellow civil servants share the vision of ‘Yankee imperialism’ and don’t want to risk really sharing command and control. However, they insist that we interdict the flow of drugs and stop foreign terrorists before they reach our borders. They seem to want us to exercise our authority south of the border, but they seem more intent upon our not appearing to impose it. Our intelligence is tracking money originating offshore and passing through lobbyists and international corporations, but we have nothing near evidence that will stand up in court, even if we were allowed to present it behind closed doors. Every once in a while, I wish we could send something south other than surveillance satellites and unarmed drones, like we do in Yemen and Pakistan, because I think some of these south-of-the-border Dons and organizations are as much of a threat to the homeland as those targets in Asia.”

Xander chuckled and interjected, “Sounds like something a tired and wired civil servant said to me some time back in Arizona.”

“And I was as right then as I am now! But I’ve been a career bureaucrat as far back as I can remember, so same ole, same ole, with guys like us doing the best we can to keep our world safe for democracy.”

“A little cynical, Malcolm, but I hear you. We’re cops, and soldiers; we swore the oaths. What do you want me to do?”

“Stay with it, and let me know immediately if you sense a crack in their solid front, even if it isn’t much, because I can still channel some information through ‘deep throat’ to selected recipients. Right now, though, I see no change in our ability to control US demand for drugs; in fact, I expect our resources to be stretched tighter, maybe to the breaking point, as states legalize marijuana, and more potent prescription painkillers go mainstream. But, as someone once said, ‘Don’t let what you can’t do get in the way of what you can do.’ In the meantime, we’ll try to turn some of our can’t do’s into can do’s.”

Later, in Rosada’s bookstore, Xander briefed her on the meeting with Garfield. Concluding, he said he might try to contact Amos Sanson and offer to assist because his mission was not taking all his time and he was getting a bit restless. Though patient during operations in the field, Xander did not relish sitting around waiting for policy makers to make up their minds. But Rosada countered with advice to stay away from Amos. She would let Sanson know of Xander’s offer, but his security might be jeopardized if he and Xander were detected while trying to get together. If Amos wanted help, Rosada advised, he’d ask for it and suitable arrangements would be made.

To fulfill his part, Sanson had carved out two operations, separating the assignment into a Northern Spain phase and a Central America phase. He reasoned that movement between Latin America and Iberia would expose him to detection and not allow him to maintain constant surveillance on the training camp in Central America. To implement the activity in Spain, Sanson, after informing Simon Stoddard and gaining his concurrence, approached Jonathon Cotswald Kavanaugh and Lillian de Vizcaya. “Irish Jack” and “Lil agreed to keep eyes on developments at the pharmaceutical plant through their own devices, and communicate within the loop maintained by Rosada Angel Jesus. Amos would take on the Central America phase.

Early reports from Spain showed little more than routine renovation of a legitimate pharmaceutical works. However, Kavanaugh and de Vizcaya, with their penchant for thoroughness and special talents with explosives, noticed that at one point in the progress of construction, heavily reinforced structures reminiscent of research blast chambers appeared and were accorded special attention by observers appearing only at

that point. A brief inquiry among their friends led them to the identities of three engineers who specialized in explosive blast chambers and were believed to be active in the development and testing of conventional military mines, special operations explosive devices, and IED's. The information was passed into the communications loop maintained by Rosada and onto the steel battleship-gray desk in a DC suburb.

Sanson's second project was a bit more complicated.

Before BMNT (beginning morning nautical twilight), Amos Sanson was in position. Shrouded in a ghillie suit and deeply concealed, he observed the main encampment of the private military/security training center deep in the mountains and jungles of Central America. He had been on station long enough to locate the central facility and a number of specialized training sites, and to observe training in progress. Now he was set to photograph the trainers, trainees, and visitors.

The training program was familiar, including abbreviated basic and advanced combat courses and various specialties. Small unit offensive and defensive tactics observed in the advanced course were similar to the US Army unit Recondo course he had experienced in Viet Nam, and the specialties included explosives and communications. Training in the urban settings was more like that for SWAT teams. The individual activities were geared to a wide literacy range and presented professionally and competently. And nothing appeared to be hidden from satellite or aerial surveillance.

Sanson saw nothing that was not available to militia and other groups in the rural United States. However, the quality of the training appeared to be much higher.

After noting the training, Sanson concentrated on photographing the staffs and trainees. He could not see everything, so after observing and verifying the camp routine and courses, he focused on the trainees in the advanced courses. He intended to provide a record to be matched against mug shots and other photographic evidence in criminal and special operations files maintained by Malcolm Garfield and his colleagues. If the PMF camp was training soldiers for the drug trade or other illegal activities, such matches would be important.

So far, the operation appeared legitimate. But, there was one facility that was kept under wraps.

Sanson observed an area of approximately an acre, a square a little more than 200 feet on each side on which a two-level pole building was being constructed. After the sides of the building were erected, the interior was not visible. Whatever was going on inside the building was a mystery, but the building's importance was suggested by the security surrounding it. The personnel were recognizable as among the best of the trainees advancing through the training regimen, and access was tightly controlled and limited to several people who appeared to be in charge of the camp. Because security around the whole training center was tight, Sanson's observation was limited to face and behavioral recognition as people entered and left the building. No one in the camp saluted, but deferential behavior was noted in his report. He was determined to get a closer look.

Knowing the importance and vulnerabilities of pre-op surveillance, Sanson was especially careful in preparing for the closer look. He knew where the fixed security positions were located and he tracked the movement of foot and vehicular patrols around the building hour by hour for several days. He plotted routes to and from the building. He was ready to move, but he patiently waited for a dark, rainy night. Finally, the weather report he was hoping for came from Rosada. The forecast indicated a torrential storm expected to last two or three days. He knew the camp's inclement training practices usually sent trainees out into the jungle and mountains for foul-weather operations and survival exercises, but security in the camp buttoned down to ride out the storm. He planned to move and investigate the facility during two nights of stormy weather, and to wait-out the time between in the target area. After infiltrating the camp, he intended to clear out of the area for a bit of rest and meetings with Xander and Irish Jack to review progress, refine plans for continuation of the project, and write a comprehensive report.

Sanson got his gear together, moved into position to begin the long crawl, and waited for the rain.

First, the darkening sky, then the wind, and just after noon the rain, a few large drops that splattered the landscape soon followed by a torrential downpour. By 1600,

visibility was reduced to very short range. But before Sanson's view was shrouded, the trainees were out of their barracks and classrooms and scattered into the jungles and mountains into which the camp was nestled. Concealment, movement, adaptation—the students were learning valuable lessons about using the weather and protecting themselves and their equipment from its vagaries. Later, Sanson's report would praise the camp's leaders for using the weather to advantage, to harden and prepare the trainees for conditions they could not control.

Sanson began his approach after activity in the camp had settled indoors. He moved carefully, leaving no trail, but rapidly because the sound and beating rain masked his movements and kept the camp buttoned-up. By midnight, he was along-side the building and able to peer into its interior through constructed openings in the walls.

Dim lights inside the structure revealed a model urban environment, and spaces that appeared to be streets, rooms, stair-cases, doorways, and other stations for teaching breaching and tactical maneuvers, ambushes and raids. The structural members of the building appeared to be blast and fire resistant, and darkened markings on some of the temporary walls showed the effects of small explosions and fires: these fit well with the muffled sounds and puffs of smoke he had observed from his hides around the camp. Sanson thought the area inside the building was an excellent space for training and preparing for and rehearsing urban tactical operations. And its roof and walls concealed activity inside from outside observation.

By dawn's light, arrested somewhat by the unabated storm, Sanson had seen enough to verify his long-range observations and assessments. He settled into his close hide to wait out the daylight hours, observing little because he wished to be invisible. Sounds were his main allies, though they were muffled by the storm. He knew that the foul-weather regimen followed when most of the trainees were in the field kept the staff indoors. Still, he lay within their security ring; he could not sleep, but his years of self-discipline and quieting meditation had prepared him well for such exposures. The Silent Watchman silently waited.

The storm raged throughout the day. Sanson was soaked through and through, cold, and uncomfortable. After dark and following the routine rounds of the close-in security force, he began the long, tense crawl out of the compound, and withdrawal

through the training patrols. As the forecast had predicted, the weather held. By BMNT, he was out of immediate danger and able to move rapidly with his usual attention to high-risk surroundings. After a day's rest outside the training area, he packed, sterilized his camp, and walked out.

Four days later, Amos Sanson sat comfortably on the balcony of the Meridor Café, a light red wine of local vintage near his gloved right hand, awaiting a call summoning him to a meeting with Zander, Kavanaugh, and de Vizcaya at which they would prepare a comprehensive report for Rosada to forward to Malcolm Garfield. When his phone rang, he listened for a moment, said only, "Yes," and after closing it turned his attention to the colorful sunset. He looked forward to comparing notes with his colleagues and writing the report.

Later, Sanson would write a second report for Simon Stoddard's eyes only.

All the while Devon Xander's team had been in Spain and Central America, Marcelo Barcqe and Ariana Lentz had been engaged in an investigation of their own. Their handiwork paralleled the information that was informing Malcolm Garfield's changing Mexican drug cartels organization chart, and they were less constrained by the rules of evidence and privacy that occasionally inhibited Garfield's investigations. Barcqe and Lentz did not intend to indict and try criminals in courts; they were free to interview, intimate, suggest, opine—observing the journalistic conventions for verifying "facts," but required to test their expert opinions only before editorial boards (and occasionally, their legal advisors).

The Consortium was crumbling from inside. The charisma and strength of the Sonoran had kept the executives together, but pressure from within their cartels was becoming irrepressible. The Sonoran's cartel was in shambles; Gabriell's transition plan had proved to be a naïve fantasy. Barqe's contacts were unequivocal in their assessments of Gabriell's inadequacies and the dysfunctional internal organization of the northern cartel. Ariana Lentz agreed that the cartel lacked the cohesion of the established transnational terrorist groups. Apparently money was not sufficient to cement the loyalties that characterized the ideological centering (and no less brutal response to disloyalty) of the much more disciplined terrorist organizations.

For the two investigative reporters, the collapsing Consortium was an irresistible opportunity. Their respective news outlets were clamoring for articles, and they intended to write books, both nonfiction and fiction, comparing and contrasting the management and operations of narcotics organizations and terrorists: Barcqe's *Nexus* with some organizational and psychological theory, some political and economic speculation, and a lot of salacious detail. They could ride this roller coaster for years ... provided they did not anger too many of the wrong people.

"Legitimacy!" Ariana's sudden exclamation broke the silence in Marcello Barcqe's study where they had been stumped momentarily in their search for a lead into the crumbling Consortium. "Lamborn wrote that the primary cause for an insurgency is the perceived illegitimacy of the rulers. Gabriell's assumption of power after the Sonoran's death was not legitimate in the minds of the principal cartel commanders in the streets. Insurgency from within the ranks of the cartels is always bubbling beneath the surface, and as the Sonoran appeared to distance himself from their territory when he moved to Colon, he could not keep his hands on their throats. The move may have been a good decision for a Consortium executive, but it took him too far from his troops in the field. When the Sonoran died, the field commanders got their chance and they took what they thought was rightfully theirs: they broke ranks, assumed full control of their own contingents, and sought control of the Sonoran's empire. Without his charisma, though, no one of them could command the respect and loyalty of the others, the Sonoran Cartel fragmented, crumbled from within."

"So, we treat the problems of the Consortium as a struggle for power, as a battle among tribes bunkered in their plazas, protecting their borders, defending their turf, trying to seize territory from their natural enemies," mused Marcello.

"It's a different way of looking at the problem. It gives us a way to frame events and people. If the model doesn't fit perfectly, we'll tug and tuck here and there until the message is coherent and plausible."

"And, if all the facts don't bear out the premise, we'll offer our informed opinions and conclusions. I like it, Ariana. We never have all the facts anyway. We're always assembling a puzzle with a few missing pieces. But most pictures can be seen even with

gaps here and there. As long as the missing parts aren't critical and don't exceed our expert opinions and journalistic license, we're in play all the way."

"I think the Euro Press Syndicate will go along with it. Shall I float it past Joselyn Prescott?"

"Let's flesh it out a bit first. Reports about a PMF training camp in the Four Countries region and a pharmaceutical plant in northern Spain that may be linked with the Consortium keep filtering in. And, I'm intrigued by the increase in military tactics and possible influence of military and law enforcement special operations veterans who are joining the cartels. Does this suggest, for example, that rumors that some of the trainees in the Four Countries project are heading for the cartels as well as the legitimate PMFs? Or that cartel street armies are acquiring a greater degree of discipline and operational sophistication? I want to check with some of my acquaintances north and south of the Rio Grande to see just how far this whole thing extends. Are these all pieces of the same puzzle, a system of systems so they say, or are they really separate puzzles? We may have one big tiger by the tail, or we may be dealing with rabid tabbies on their home grounds. I think we are in position to put together information from a number of sources that the authorities have stove-piped. They tend to have lots of good information, but they don't share well and they often have trust problems when they try to operate outside their portfolios."

"While you are up north, I'll check with a few discrete colleagues in London and on the Continent. I don't want to tip our hand; but if our investigations bear fruit and Joselyn shows interest, and we think we can trust her, I'll sound her out on the insurgency angle, not too much detail but enough to help her assess the possibilities within EPS. If it looks like a 'go,' we'll have to move quickly to stay on the crest of the wave."

"Lots of 'ifs,' Ariana, but I'm betting that the 'thens' will be worth the journey. At the very least we will have plenty of material for a realist novel, and I think we'll have the right stuff for legitimate investigative reporting. I agree that we should proceed judiciously. These people can read enough from the questions to get a pretty good fix on where we're going."

"I'll call you nightly at 0001 GMT, Marcello. If you can't talk then, just mumble something about the time, ring-off abruptly, and call me before 0500 GMT. If I haven't

heard from you by then, I'll try again the next night. If either of us thinks we should break off the inquiries, we'll say something about SCUBA diving in Roatan, and meet there two days later."

"Sounds intriguing, Ariana. We should tread lightly, and be prepared to bail out if we're squeezed."

"Some of the toes we may tread on won't hesitate to let us know how they feel. Your *Nexus* is alive, well nourished, and possessed of a twisted sense of humor. Add a few black-ops-oriented government wonks and international 'one-tenth of one percenters' and the future can get stormy in a hurry."

Three days later, Ariana Lentz received a brief text message: "Missing you. Day after tomorrow on Roatan for a bit of SCUBA?" Two days later, they were suiting up on the gazebo at Fantasy Island.

Later, over a quiet dinner, they discussed at length the reactions of Marcello's most intimate sources to his inquiries, reactions that were succinct and to the point: "Don't probe too deeply. The United States is providing special operations training and assistance to Mexico's new president in hunting down and eliminating the cartel strongmen along the border. That pressure along with the insurgency against the weakened leadership of the Sonoran's crumbling empire has made everyone nervous. People with whom I've dealt comfortably in the past will not talk with me for the time being. They are afraid because the situation is changing rapidly and unpredictably, and bullets and bombs are popping all over. They believe that an increasing number of well-trained recruits has improved the quality of the forces engaged on both sides, and has added to the uncertainties. They are lying low and advise me to do the same until the dust settles."

"The Europeans are also taking a wait-and-see approach, but they are interested in keeping themselves informed. We will have outlets for our reporting, so we can roam around the perimeters and report and comment on what we see. The training being provided by the United States has been described to me as based on their success in bringing down terrorist leaders, so we can build upon your *Nexus* from two directions: the cartels are employing insurgency tactics in their internal power struggles and battles

with local authorities, and the governments are employing counterinsurgency tactics to combat the cartels and support local law enforcement. It isn't perfect, but it is concrete and plausible.

“One other interesting tidbit: A rumor circulating among London's corporate finance leaders suggests that a highly respected American financial counselor may assume an equity position in a Spanish pharmaceutical company that is in the closing stages of reorganization and renovation of its R&D facilities near Bilbao. Apparently, no one knows who the American is, but a well-placed government official speaking on background opined that he is the senior partner in a Washington firm that specializes in international business arrangements. Did you hear anything about this in Washington?”

“A tidbit, as you say, Ariana, but from a source not known to be privy to such matters. The source is reliable, generally, but not in this realm. If we decide that this is germane to our inquiries, I will follow-up next time I go north.

“Three dives today, and the shark dive tomorrow: I think it's time to turn-in.”

Zander was first to arrive, followed momentarily by Jack Kavanaugh and Lillian de Viscaya who sat opposite each other, each glancing casually from the interior of the Meridor Café to the street below, together mounting a 360-degree security watch. At precisely sunset minus 15 minutes, or so it seemed, Amos Samson appeared beside them. Neither Irish Jack nor Lillian had seen him approach, but they showed no surprise because they expected the Silent Watchman to simply be there, or not. Four tourists they seemed: a lady and three male companions, seated on the balcony of the Meridor, watching the golden sun descend into a sea of blue and yellow.

Their conversation was quiet as they sipped their drinks: coffee for one, Sangria for the lady and the gentleman seated across from her, and a light red wine of local vintage for the quiet one facing the western sea. Their accents were unique: a southwestern US drawl, the Spanish of northern Spain mixed with the lilt of Ireland, and a non-descript formality from ... who can say. The conversation, after a period of quiet intensity, had become light and occasionally punctuated by the lady's lilting laughter. Four tourists enjoying the sunset on the balcony of the Meridor Café in Casco Viejo.

Following a brief pause in the conversation, Devon Zander addressed the others in quiet tones. It was, after all, his project, and they were met with the express purpose of reviewing their recent activities and preparing an interim report for Rosada Angel Jesus to forward to Malcolm Garfield, blind copy to Simon Stoddard, for their first impressions. Zander asked each in turn for a brief synopsis of their observations and tentative conclusions. They knew the conversation was being recorded; Zander wanted no hesitations while they waited for his hurried scribbling. He wanted a free flow, facts followed by analysis and conclusions without interruption. Later they would discuss; for now, however, they would simply report.

A formal after-action debriefing as a policeman and soldier might conduct.

Kavanaugh and de Viscaya were faintly amused at the formality of the process; but being the professionals they were, they respectfully and thoroughly summarized the salient factors they had observed and the conclusions they had drawn.

Irish Jack began: “Summarizing: The situation in northern Spain has surfaced little more than we reported earlier. The project is progressing nicely, and the facilities of concern are nearly complete. They fit into a plan for such activities, especially when R&D is included. McCrory should come out of the enterprise very well positioned for the future. The most serious difficulty is the ownership/management structure. Our resources could penetrate the maze only to a limited extent. The architectural plans, with their emphasis on compartmentalization and redundancies, suggest that money laundering and illicit productions in parallel with legitimate business operations is possible, and, based upon the ownership structure we have been able to uncover, more than moderately likely.

“Our recommendations are based on our direct observations, public records, and occasional interchanges with confidential sources capable of looking beneath the surface without causing ripples; but, based on a these sightings, we believe there is more than meets the eye that could cause tsunami-sized ripples. We recommend that the organizational and financial structures be examined by authorities having the means to investigate international business arrangements of an arcane and convoluted nature. And we suggest that the examination proceed along official and unofficial channels simultaneously. Sometimes well-placed inquiries will initiate movement within the

subject that leads to a greater understanding of their underlying relationships and transactions. Lillian ...“

“The security, physical and otherwise, surrounding the project is of the highest order. Penetrating the organization is not possible without proper authorities. Even then, the subjects may be able to control the process in such a way as to delay, perhaps prevent, investigation into some of the more interesting operations and transactions. Proprietorship, property and knowledge rights, R&D confidences, these are only a few of the most obvious means for preventing investigations into activities that will not be patented or otherwise subjected to public disclosure until well into the future, if ever. Furthermore, it is apparent that the project is well financed, and money speaks fluently in many languages.”

Kavanaugh nodded toward Xander. Without a word, Xander turned toward Amos Sanson.

“Generally,” began Sanson, “the operation in Central America appears to be well managed and financed, to offer very high-quality skill-development opportunities, and to support the militaristic aspirations of a broad clientele. Camp personnel wore nondescript field uniforms with organizational markings but not name tags. Trainees wore standard US jungle issue, but displayed no organizational or rank markings. The web gear was US Army issue, but the weapons and other equipment used in the training were varied; for example, the rifles and radios varied from those currently issued to the omnipresent AK-47, US PRC-25’s, and satellite phones. The basic trainees appeared to be self-disciplined and highly motivated; they eagerly participated in all the activities I was able to observe. The advanced trainees were, for the most part, very competent intermediate operatives who advanced through their courses with alacrity and intelligence, achieving relatively high proficiency in skills expected of military non-commissioned and junior commissioned officers. Their leadership performance was, for the most part, effective; though their ‘troops’ were their peers and the basic trainees who consistently demonstrated their willingness to be led. In a sense, they were performing in an artificial atmosphere and had much to gain by cooperation with the program; but they appeared to recognize the opportunities and to be intent upon making the most of them.

The very few who did not succeed technically or attitudinally simply disappeared without observable commentary or ceremony.

“I observed visitors who were treated by the camp leaders and trainers with respect, some with clear deference. The visitors included men in uniform and in civilian clothing. The uniforms were those of identifiable military and police organizations, some I recognized, some I did not. Spanish was the camp language, and all visitors either spoke Spanish or were accompanied by interpreters; but, when groups of visitors spoke among themselves, the languages varied widely. I saw no over-night visitors except those who appeared to be with the camp’s administrative hierarchy.

“As much as possible was recorded audio-visually. I was able to obtain samples of nearly all of the camp activities, including much of the administration and logistics. The operation is well provisioned and managed.

“The security was very good; it was integrated into the training regimen. There was little that was not open to occasional satellite or aerial surveillance. The operation was, for the most part, conducted as it would be at Benning or Bragg, some in the open, some in buildings, some during the day, some at night; some during inclement weather, some in the blazing sun. Periods of darkness and low visibility were used extensively.

“The training is legitimate for military and security operations conducted by governmental and private military-style organizations, and is of high quality.”

Finally, Zander delivered his report:

“The positions in Washington and among my friends in Central America have changed very little. Garfield wants more authority for intervention to interdict the flow of drugs through Latin America; Latinos want help, but they don’t want ham-handed Norte Americanos pushing them into direct confrontations with increasingly combative drug lords. The politicians are also divided over US desire for results in Latin America and Latin American concern for US infiltration into their sovereignty.

“The roots of the conflict are deep and lasting. Mexico and other Central American leaders differ a bit: The Mexicans have a greater degree of direct association with the United States, including a history of conflict and war, but the four countries further south still remember the US as an imperialistic overlord. Recent pressures, including US military drug interdiction missions, pour salt into that wound. The

countries want help, even cooperation, but not policy and process dictation. The US wants results, and occasionally appears impatient with the pace and progress of diplomacy and operations; but, the Central Americans do not like US tendencies to manage the situation even as they publicly talk about bilateral cooperation and control.

“The result is little or no diplomatic progress, though US and Central American field operations folks work together pretty well: lots of little successes, but little or no strategic progress. The cartels take their licking but they keep on ticking. Latinos think the demand is driving the supply, and wonder why the US wants to control their countries instead of controlling its own people. The US wants to carry the ‘war on drugs’ to the source, to engage the enemy before they get into the homeland; the Latin Americans want the US to put its own house in order before it plays hardball in their countries.

“Despite these and other differences, the Latinos want to cooperate. The cartels are internal problems for them; they threaten the peace and prosperity of their societies. They want training and technical assistance, both military and law enforcement. They admit that corruption is wide spread, that their ability to govern in their own countrysides is hampered. They want to improve their chances to develop legitimate enterprise. They also want the four-country training camp, but they want it under their control, not under the control of the United States. And, they are skeptical of US promises to manage the operation cooperatively; they claim a history of US domination in so-called ‘cooperation.’

“I wish I had something more optimistic to report. You guys have done a lot of good stuff. The best I can say about my part is that my association with Malcolm Garfield appears stronger than ever. Malcolm is impressed with the reports from your work, so my position has been strengthened. He is a good friend, but he is being worn down by continuous wrangling with the politics. He can retire with full benefits whenever he wants, and take up whatever he wants, and do it without losing his strong links with key civil service and political policy-makers; and he is seriously considering it. If he does, we’ll lose a good friend in the ‘belly of the beast.’ On the other hand, we could gain a capable colleague: something you might want to think about.

“Open discussion ...”

An hour after they began the discussion, they had an assembled puzzle before them. A few questions, and a few additional pieces to be filled in, but they were generally satisfied with the first information dump that Xander, with editorial assistance by Rosada, would fashion into an executive summary, later, perhaps, to be augmented with more detailed appendices and annexes.

Then Amos Samson spoke with a quiet authority: “Devon, deliver the first report orally, nothing in writing but displaying readiness to respond to questions: Facts when possible and opinions only when asked for. Let them come to you for more, and pose to you direct questions. If you have more, give it up in such a way that you provide no or very little information of your ways and means. We may learn much about their interests from their questions.” Kavanaugh and de Viscaya nodded agreement.

Glancing toward the entrance into the café, Lillian said quietly to her companions, “Company.” Their heads turned, then they sat back comfortably for they recognized the couple approaching their table.

Sanson rose and extended his hand: “Welcome Marcello, please join us. And the ever-artful Ariana: we have not met, but your work is well known to us. Forgive me for not mentioning the names of my friends, but ... well, you understand. May I presume this is not a chance encounter?”

Barcqe replied, “I believe we share a certain skepticism regarding coincidence, my friend. I see no reason for us not to trust in our mistrusts now.”

Xander and Kavanaugh brought two additional chairs to the table as Sanson signaled to the waiter. Irish Jack smiled to himself at the delicate dimples at the edges of Lillian’s mouth, clear signs that the ever-vigilant Basque patriot was fully focused on the new comers and the entrances to the café.

Drinks were ordered and refreshed, and the six settled into an apparently easy reunion among friends. Marcello Barcqe opened the conversation: “Gentlemen, and lovely Lillian, we come bearing gifts, of course to exchange, without attribution, for such as you might offer in return.”

Xander deliberately glanced in turn at his four companions, and receiving ascent from all, replied, “Please continue, a bit at a time if you will.”

“Gracias, Amigo, let me know if the pace or certain boundaries are exceeded.”

And, just so, the exchange moved into a more intimate phase, to close a while later with this by Marcello Barcqe:

“Summarizing, we found no mysteries while plumbing the arcane depths of the organization of the projects in Spain and Central America. The records are brilliantly orchestrated to terminate at a legitimate and defensible exposition of ownership and control. But, rumors abound, and you, Amos, are well aware of our mutual friend’s thoughts concerning the importance of rumors in the fog.

“Among those rumors are, of course, the realities of ownership and control of the two projects, and the intentions of any who might be producing, directing, or standing in the wings, waiting to fulfill their roles or move to center stage at the appropriate cue.

“Toward the close of my inquiries, however, a trusted friend intimated to me that two of his generally A-1 clients suggested to him that our paths were uncomfortably close to their toes. While three may be a crowd, in my profession two independent sources constitute very good company. Thus, SCUBA on Fantasy Island followed by relaxing drinks at sunset in this place in which we find peace and tranquility in a tumultuous world.

“I leave you, fair friends, with this conundrum: If everything were as it appeared, that is, complex but legitimate in international business affairs, why would Ariana and I be warned away? We make our living more by what we know than by what we do.”

Ariana: “And, of course, by whom we know.”

Irish Jack: “You do, occasionally, make lives, others’ and ours as well, a bit more difficult when you report what you know.”

Lillian: “But in doing so, you inform us and make us better at what we do because we must constantly improve our proficiency in negotiating this dancing landscape.”

Sanson: “It is a game, really, played expertly by determined professionals intent upon their own best interests, played for very high stakes by unforgiving forces, occasionally with fateful collateral, or directed, damage to well-intentioned on-lookers.”

Marcello: “Do you think Ariana and I are in danger?”

Sanson: “Being highly valued members of the Fourth Estate may have less protective power than good Kevlar vests. We may not be fully aware of whose tentacles reach how far into our daily lives.”

Marcello: “My dear Ariana, perhaps we should live quietly for a while, work on a book perhaps.”

Ariana: “The better part of valor?”

Marcello: “One might think so.”

Ariana, looking around the table: “How is it that you know so much about our inquiries?”

Sanson: As you know, my dear, the questions contain valuable information concerning the information that is of value to the authors of the questions and the authors themselves. And, of course, there are the six degrees of separation. All of us like to think we are independent operatives in control of our lives. Within our more narrowly circumscribed professions, however, we are inextricably linked through myriad pathways that intersect in ways we too often learn of only after the haunting. But, don’t be alarmed; simply don’t be surprised. Always be aware of the messages you transmit into your surroundings, including those lying beyond the range of your personal senses. What you don’t see or hear may prove annoying, but what you don’t realize can prove deadly.”

As Ariana and Marcello took their leave, Marcello paused to allow Ariana to walk out of earshot, turned and said to Devon: “By the way, rumor has it that Simon Stoddard, in addition to acting as agent for the group seeking to acquire the PMF camp and pharmaceutical plant in the north of Spain, will take an equity position, perhaps the managing interest, in the acquisition.” That said, he hurried to catch up with Ariana.

Seated across from each other at the coffee table in the front window of the bookstore on the corner across from the police station, Devon Xander updated Rosada Angel Jesus on the discussions in Casco Viejo. As dusk gathered, they slipped into a relaxed conversation, the kind old friends have after the serious business is finished.

Rosada spoke deliberately: “Devon you are leading different lives now, and you appear to have adopted different voices to match them: strict formality with Amos, a little less so when you speak of Simon, the jargon and banter of professional colleagues in exchanges with Malcolm, and, after the business is discussed, the ease and informality of a neighbor with me. It is a bit like actors adapting to different roles as they move from one project to another. Are you aware of these changes, if they are as I have observed?”

“Rosada, sometimes I feel as if I *am* a different person with each of you. Amos has always been formal, as if he intends to keep his businesses in separate compartments behind a blank front; and, maybe, because there’s something in his mind that he has to keep out the way when we’re in the field. Simon wants to maintain control so he wants to impress you with his knowledge while wanting you to feel like his associate. Malcolm, well he and I are part of a close-knit fraternity; we are cops, buddies, partners, as they say on the mean streets. With you, I feel completely at ease. I knew you, or thought I did, before it all began; I knew the comfort and enjoyed the conversation around this table before it all began. When I’m on the street, you and Amos and Malcolm have my back. It’s all games, as Amos says, but the three of you won’t let me down. Simon is a player; I don’t think he’s lied to me, but I’m sure he hasn’t laid all his cards on the table. He keeps a supply of aces up his sleeves. With me, you and Malcolm and Amos have played the hands as dealt and on the table where I could see them.”

“So you play the game accordingly?”

“So I play the game accordingly, as best I can. Amos has been a great mentor, and I believe he is satisfied with my progress. And ... I think he likes having me around.”

“Devon, don’t ever forget, not even for a moment, that these games are played in the fog on quicksand with rules made up by each player to suit the time and place.”

Laughing easily, Xander replied, “So I’d better be Sherlock on the moor?”

“Ever mindful of the hound.”

“Simon, Amos and I are concerned you may be sucked into a black hole that will leave you stranded on the other side.”

Xander had just explained to Simon Stoddard that well-sourced but uncorroborated information suggested that the collapse of the Consortium has opened the door to an international conglomerate advised, some thought led, by an unidentified Washington lawyer to acquire the apparently legitimate pharmaceutical plant in northern Spain and Central American PMF training facility, both unsuccessfully linked, as yet, to the Consortium. Authorities were thought to be following-up leads that the Consortium had been laundering money through the two legal enterprises, and perhaps using them for

more nefarious purposes. The PMF camp had several lucrative contracts and the support of local authorities that did not wish to fall back under the influence of los Estados Unidos, and the plant near Bilbao was coming along nicely.

“Ah, a stellar metaphor, Devon, another universe so to speak,” mused Simon, who paused for a moment, then continued, “however, no matter the universe, it is only business.”