

ROACKASEEN VALLEY

A Futuristic Tale of Nuclear Terror

By Vorana

Washington

The White House briefing room was silent; 30 men and a handful of women facing front theatre style. The plaque covering the podium on the left read ELTON BULLOCK, DIRECTOR, NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE.

The scowl from the medium-heavy, baggy-cheeked man is wavy black hair, underscored the seriousness.

“This briefing will highlight dire threats to American national security. I will detail threat number one, and General Martin Andrews, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff will discuss threat number two,” Director Bullock said in his Alabama drawl. The seasoned, lanky, blonde-haired General Andrews occupied the right side podium; his uniform ablaze with shiny medals and epaulets.

Bullock continued, “Seated at the table in front of me are Terry Fowler, Senior Advisor to the President”—a young reedy Black man with brown suit and thick lighter-brown hair—“and Senior Advisor to the President Syed Mohammed”—a short, middle aged olive-skinned man with round face and matted hair.

“These advisors will evaluate our presentations and recommend to President Velasquez which of the two threats is the most serious. First, let me introduce Bosley Taylor, CIA Senior Analyst and on an extended Special Assignment to the White House.”

A burly White guy with black suit and crew cut took the center podium. A large map of

the world appeared on a drop-down screen. Taylor aimed a laser pointer at the map.

“Now in the sixth year of President Velasquez’s leadership, well into the 21st Century, we have entered a period of relative stability, given the normal twins of danger and chaos in this world,” came Taylor’s monotonic, rat-tat Marine voice. “The President’s peace through strength program has kept us out of ground wars or active conflicts. Forging overseas democracies has been a Presidential--.”

“Good heavens, can you tell us something we don’t know already?” Bullock barked. “Do you have some breaking news maybe? We are not idiots in here.”

“Sir, I--I’ll adjust my notes.” He took a pen from his shirt pocket and slammed it on the podium.

“Officer Taylor, Director Bullock is absolutely right,” General Andrews said in a measured voice. “Maybe there is only one idiot here.”

“Excuse me, Mr. Taylor,” Mohammed interjected. “Those talking points were all your idea?”

“No, actually Mr. Mohammed helped me prepare this briefing. My apologies to you, sir.”

“And Bosley, don’t forget President Velsquez’s commitment to religious liberty,” Terry Fowler said, ignoring Bullock’s rebuke and subsequent dialogue. “That’s all faiths, right, Syed?”

“Yes, that is, until we establish the Great American Caliphate,” Mohammed said gravely.

A deadly silence gripped the room—until Terry Fowler’s laughs gave others permission to laugh a little.

“Of course I was joking,” Mohammed continued, “But timely, because Director Bullock assumes that I’m a closet Caliphate mole, and that my American credentials can never be assumed.”

Bullock, face reddening, responded, “Don’t you think because you have an office in the White House, you can talk that way to the Director of National Intelligence, son.”

“Thank you all for your commitment to unity,” Fowler deadpanned. “Director Bullock, please share your assessment about the number one national security danger.”

“The Caliphate with its blurred borders and International reach is the most imminent threat.

“That brings us to that big island in the Pacific that 10 years ago became the Polynesian National Republic, or PNR.” Bullock kept hard dark eyes aimed at Mohammed. “It’s a misnomer, because immigrants from Europe and Australia took over that nation when that goldmine of oil and valuable minerals were discovered.

“As we know, those carpetbagger political leaders, though democratically elected, were found to be so gol-danged corrupt from the wealth of that economic boom—that the PNR populace welcomed the military coup engineered by General Gough Sydenham. Then Sydenham began jailing innocent leaders. When Sydenham tried to arrest the popular Education Minister Julio Carreon, popular tide really turned against him. Carreon then took a portion of the leadership and escaped

to New Zealand to set up a government in exile—the only PNR government that the US recognizes.

“Sydenham responded to dissent by setting up a historical North Korean-style gulag. He is selling Polynesian women to International traffickers for the sex trade, and men into forced labor.”

Bullock took two steps toward Mohammed and yelled, “What’s all this got to do with the Caliphate, some may ask? Right before his military coup, Sydenham struck a devil’s bargain with Caliphate leaders. The Caliphate used proceeds from their immense black markets to help Sydenham overthrow the PNR leadership. In return, Sydenham agreed to let the Caliphate use a portion of his controlled land to build an underground bunker for the construction of nuclear weapons.”

Bullock walked to the center podium, and advanced the screen to show a map of the PNR.

“The western-most city is St. Augustine, and the eastern-most city is Tyrene. These cities didn’t exist 10 years ago; they were products of the economic miracle. In St. Augustine there are struggling industries, with have-nots contending for economic left-overs. Tyrene, the sight of the economic miracle, close to the energy deposits, has a per capita income of one million US dollars.”

Bullock eyed everyone to dramatize his clincher: “Within weeks the Caliphate may possess nuclear weapons.” Bullock nodded at Andrews. “Top that, General.”

General Andrews started, “Caliphate has become common vernacular. Now we have Aztlan. Historically, that is a mythical Indian nation in

Latin America. It became popular way back in the 1960's by Chicano activists in the US, who envisioned a massive nation embodying Native and Latino cultural traditions. Civil Rights movement successes took the steam out of the Aztlan movement. So how did we get to this point: a populist nation called Aztlan stretching from what used to be Colombia, and encompassing all Central American nations except Belize?"

General Andrews took his turn with the screen. There appeared a man in his late thirties with black beret, black hair perfectly cut to the eyebrows and earlobes, and a very sculptured, handsome face with some hue.

"His name is Valentino Davalillo, architect of Aztlan." Andrews had a gentle, soft-spoken manner about him. "Che Guevara goes to Bolivia, tries to start a local revolt, but gets his butt blown away. Davalillo starts a revolution, and takes over more nations I can count on my hands."

"How did this Davalillo pull it off?" Mohammed asked.

"Genius. He tapped into citizen alienation about pockets of political corruption, narcotics gangs, economic injustices.

"We've tracked Davalillo about six years back to the country then called Nicaragua, where he started a Sandinista-style guerilla movement called the Vanguardia Sindicalismo. He embraced early American labor movement philosophies about direct workplace democracy in response to perceived powerlessness against Latino oligarchies. The second peg of Davalillo's revolutionary strategy is Liberation Theology that teaches that the Christian Gospel is all about freeing the oppressed. Nezahualcoytl or Chicomoztoc,

anyone? Ask Davalillo. He's a vocal encyclopedia on Inca and Mayan references."

"How is Aztlan structured?" Mohammed asked eagerly.

"They do practice a form of direct democracy in work units they call syndicates. Syndicate elected representatives then get to vote for the functioning parliament called the Aztlan Indigenous Assembly, which elects a figurehead president. Ultimate power rests with the massive Aztlan Citizens Army, controlled by Davalillo and his Vanguardia Sindicalismo."

"Davalillo is a cult hero on some US college campuses," Fowler said. "Just how much of a threat is he to basic American interests?"

"He's exporting his revolution. He's declared war on the American economic system. And his next target is Mexico. His vision of Aztlan includes the US States of California, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado and Nevada."

After pause, Fowler said, "First rebuttal is yours, Director Bullock."

Bullock snickered for several seconds. "You insult the Latino race by even mentioning the Southwest US as an Aztlan possibility. In these so-called Aztlan States, we have 4 Latino governors who have denounced the Aztlan idea. I'm sure over 95% of American Latinos would fight to keep Aztlan out. As for Davalillo, we've been intercepting communiqués, and he is a big NFL football fan! There's been not one documented attack by Davalillo on an American. Davalillo is trouble, but is no cotton pickin' raghead, and to equate Aztlan with the Caliphate is an insult to every Latino."

Andrews stepped toward Bullock. “Let’s talk about your sophisticated surveillance toys. How many Caliphate members were ever spotted in the PNR city of Tyrene? ZERO. How many satellite or Renland GPS images of anything resembling nuclear material were ever spotted in the PNR? ZERO. You’ve got no case.”

“Don’t come any closer General,” Bullock shouted while stepping toward Andrews.

“PNR Dictator Sydenham has been running his human trafficking operation for two years. What have your agents done during that time to disrupt that pathetic network, Mr. Bullock?”

Andrews’ words stopped at the presence of Bullock’s flying fist. Andrews ducked and they locked arms and rolled to the floor. The two national leaders continued to flop like beached whales, flailing each other haphazardly. Fowler, Mohammed and Taylor grabbed the two men and separated them. The combatants retreated to opposite ends of the room like winded boxers.

Fowler clapped his hands together. “Attention please. President Velasquez has made his position clear. If Mexico City ever falls to Davalillo, there will be a firm US military response. Now, this briefing is over, pending later instructions to you.”

The Director and the General had to nod and wave before people left: protocol.”

Bullock, Andrews, Fowler, Mohammed and Taylor remained.

Bullock said to Fowler, “Please don’t tell President Velasquez about my altercation.”

“Two geezers with powder puff punches,” Fowler said. “The President has more pressing matters than to attend a wussfest.”

“Thank you,” Andrews answered instead.

“President Velasquez has authorized me to divulge his secret weapon—for your eyes only.” Fowler handed everyone a one page sheet.

“A person?” Mohammed inquired, surprised. “Who is Jude Viruet?”

“The most accomplished secret American agent in our nation’s history.”

“Viruet!” Bullock shrieked sourly.

“Yes, Jude Viruet,” Andrews nodded with a Cheshire cat demeanor.

Fowler stepped in front of Bullock, face to face. “Does the name Ted Marcy mean anything to you?” The Director looked away. “That was Viruet’s alias when his team destroyed the nukes in Vietnam a month before they became operable. How about the name William Reski?” Bullock closed his eyes. “That was Viruet’s alias when his team successfully engineered the destruction of that militia group in unified Korea that was terrorizing the exploding Christian population there. Do you want more heroic anecdotes?”

“Okay, okay.”

“Ultimate master of human networks AND the most advanced technology.”

Taylor picked up on Mohammed’s wide-eyes: “Syed, Viruet is a Langley legend. He immigrated to Sarasota from Ecuador with his parents. When he was sixteen, he got a so-called Godly vision-kinda like the Apostle Paul--giving him his lifelong calling-track down International bad guys. After that, it was like dominoes falling—Air

Force Academy, Military Intelligence, the Agency. Being an only child helped him adopt several aliases, minimizing risk of exposure.”

“This Manila heat, a killer, but nothing like the Julys in Washington. You all surviving okay?”—Came a booming voice over a hidden intercom. Like the Wizard of Oz.

“Mr. President?” Bullock asked. Everyone in the room exchanged glances, to say, who had advanced knowledge of this?

“Do you have visual on us, sir?” Andrews asked.

“Now General, if I have access to all of your fancy toys, why wouldn’t I play with them? I like candid camera scenes once in a while. Very entertaining, I must say.”

Bullock covered his face.

“Mr. Bullock! Are you tired?” The President boomed.

“No sir.”

“Advice: Next time you want to mix it up, don’t start with a punch. Go for a takedown; you score two points.”

“Yes sir.”

“I’ve made my decision on how to use our secret weapon Jude Viruet,” the President said over the intercom. “We still have no verifiable intel on a nuclear-armed Caliphate. Your recent analysis on that corrupt Middle Eastern dictator was flawed. On the other side, there is still an undercurrent of racist yahoos who will always call me a Cubano wetback, and assume I have a secret wish that Davalillo succeed. That will never happen on my watch. I want Viruet to track Davalillo, and then put such a squeeze on that

rascal that he'll have to relearn how to breathe—and do it without economically harming the civilian population down there.

“Mr. Bullock, you are responsible for taking care of the details. If you can show me verifiable intel on a Caliphate nuclear bunker in that Pacific nation, I will immediately reassign Viruet.”

“Mr. President, your plan has one contingency,” Bullock said. “Jude Viruet retired from the Agency a year ago.”

“You think I don’t know that already? You assume me to be an absentee leader?”

“If I may, Mr. President,” Taylor volunteered, “Our records place Jude Viruet in a church in Kissimmee Florida as Pastor. Viruet quietly got his Masters of Divinity degree while performing his Agency under the name he is currently using: Victor Gonzalez.”

“Viruet’s retirement was an answer to bureaucratic BS,” Fowler said.

“Don’t go there, Terry.” Bullock whispered, but Fowler shook him off:

“Mr. Bullock supervised Viruet for a year, when he was named Acting CIA Director—and disciplined Viruet because Jude refused to give up leadership of a Bible study.”

“I can explain that, Mr. President. My brother said give to God what is God’s and give to Caesar what is Caesar’s. This was a Caesar thing. Viruet was reading the Bible on government time, and I needed to send a message that religion not interfere with Federal duties. But at the next International crisis, I re-energized Viruet.”

“When you are in Viruet’s position, all 24 hours of every day is government time,” the President responded. “Mr. Bullock, do you remember the exact day last year I appointed you as Director of National Intelligence?”

“That would be June 16th, sir.”

“And what was the date of Viruet’s retirement?”

There was hesitation until Taylor answered, “June 3rd.”

“The day after Mr. Bullock’s future appointment was announced,” President Velasquez added.

Taylor said, “As a hero’s reward, Agency brass gave Jude a special retirement: well into the six digits, and early out at age 43.”

“Mr. Bullock, do you think Jude Viruet is earning his six figure government check by sitting in a Kissimmee church?”

“No sir?” Bullock sort of asked.

“What’s that rock song from last century? You can check out but you can never leave? Jude Viruet thinks he has checked out. But in this business he never leaves. It’s your job to convince him of that, Mr. Bullock.”

“Gladly, sir.”

“I don’t want to have to send General Andrews to Kissimmee to reel Viruet in.”

Kissimmee

The church had a sterile look and fresh smell; flashy colors on stained glass-adorned walls-a brightness of positive energy; a budding mega-

church. The modern spacious sanctuary contained rows of padded chairs.

This was not Bullock’s grandmother’s church. His dark government suit clashed with the casual attire of the multi-ethnic attendees; median age about 30.

Viruet was white-collared man stirring behind the pulpit. Silver and brown hair flowed over the ears and down to the collar. He had slightly high cheekbones with square warrior face, now with traces of crevices. The cotton clothes and clerical collar did not disguise the wiry action-ready body from Agency heydays.

Viruet stood in a wet tub with a young Asian American woman. “Edith, do you proclaim Jesus Christ as your personal savior, and that he died for all of your sins, and was resurrected so that you may have eternal life by believing in Him?”

Bullock recognized that energetic, slightly-tenor voice.

“I do,” came the firm response.

“Then I baptize you in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” Viruet dunked the woman in the tub, pulled her back up, and the whole church stood and cheered.

Bullock was approached by three smiling greeters of different ethnicities, all saying, “Welcome to Kissimmee Grace Community Church.” Bullock smiled and took one of the back seats.

He checked his watch: about 40 minutes to go. So he fell asleep. The only other sound besides Viruet’s pulsating sermon was Bullock’s snoring.

Bullock woke up just as Viruet’s sermon was concluding: “I’ll say it one more time: a dead church is just a dead church, empty of God’s power to turn a culture of secularism and Godlessness into a civilization of love. So, as James said, if you claim faith but there are no fruits of Gospel-sharing, loving everyone, serving people in need, and confronting injustices in the Name of Jesus, then is there real faith there? Or just a charade of convenience? Let’s pray—“

Bullock sat through the final long hymn and benediction—and several more minutes of people lined up to talk to their beloved Reverend Victor Gonzalez. Finally, with the church almost empty, Bullock charged forward.

Viruet flinched for a second, then extended his hand and a smile. “Please call me Reverend Vic. Is this your first time to our nice friendly Kissimmee church?”

“Viruet, we need to talk.”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t catch your name.”

“Viruet!”

“Villette? It’s a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Villette. Please stop by our welcoming room, open until 2:00.”

“Viruet, this is important.”

“Enjoyed the talk, Mr. Villette Important. Please excuse me”—and he turned to leave.

“Dear Pastor, what commandment does adultery violate?” Bullock’s voice was loud enough for the few stragglers to take notice.

Viruet froze, then turned back around. “Jesus does indeed love everyone. But this is sacred ground. Let’s go outside.”

The parking lot was steamy; blinding rays reflected from cars. “Congratulations, Viruet, on almost making your abstinence goal. In your pious profession and basketball, almost doesn’t count, does it? Her name was Lula. The sexual encounter occurred exactly nine months and 29 days ago. How will your flock react to news of Reverend Victor Gonzalez banging a 23 year old college student?”

“Nothing’s changed, has it?”

“We never know when we’ll need this kind of intel.”

“What do you want?”

“We need you back to work, Viruet. This is a national security emergency--Look, I don’t mean to be so cotton-pickin’ hard-nosed. But President Velasquez can be very adamant.”

Viruet put his finger in Bullock’s face. “Don’t blame your sick tricks on President Velasquez. All this man did was come in as a fresh Independent to defeat sleazy big-money politicians. What was his last margin? 59% of the vote and 39 States?”

Viruet put his nose a hair away from Bullock’s. “Meet me in my office tomorrow at 5:00. We’ll talk then.”

Bullock arrived at the office on schedule, and found a desk and shelves filled with Bibles and Christian books. Viruet was seated behind the desk, when in walked a thirtyish woman with long black hair and long red-flowery dress. She set some tea on Viruet’s desk.

“Gotta run, Reverend Vic,” she said fondly.

**“Tamales, the big O downtown, at seven?”
Viruet said as she reached the door.**

**“Mwah!” Came a gregarious arm-wave
kiss. Viruet remained silent until he heard the
outside door slam. Then he locked his office door.**

**“Sit down, Bullock. Her name is Milagros-
-miracles in English. Translation: it’s a miracle
you still have a job. Save your intel: No sex
between us; just the beginnings of a low-keyed God
honoring relationship. Now, do you see how
terrified I am at your blackmail attempt?”**

**Viruet produced a nine month old
newspaper clipping. At the bottom of the page was
a caption, LOCAL PASTOR ADMITS AFFAIR.**

**“Yeah, that picture is me. I tearfully
confessed my failing and my sin in front of the
whole church. It was a rare night of too much
alcohol and impaired capacity. Still no excuse. So
I put myself in a men’s accountability group. My
flock has forgiven me. And I’ve been on my best
behavior sexually since. Bullock, as usual your
intel is faulty.”**

**“Viruet, we are talking about the
Caliphate, Aztlan and multiple nuclear
compounds,” Bullock lied.**

**Viruet eyed him, his mind in brief prayer.
“If I go back, it will be because of President
Velasquez’s request, not yours.”**

“What do you need from me?”

**“The old network activated, and at least
three loyalty simulation events. We can’t have one
compromised, or I could be dead after this long
layoff.”**

Bullock nodded and then stood to leave.

Viruet erupted, “You think that’s all Bullock? You have no idea how much this will cost you. Your dragging me back brings instant collateral damage. Back in that crazy world I can’t possibly subject someone to a relationship. So I will have to very very tenderly tell Milagros it’s over. That sweet little Mujer may shed tears for Lord knows how long. Then there’s transition of church leadership. Kissimmee is affluent, but has a lot of struggling people. You will be parting with a good chunk of Agency contingency funds for—call it the Kissimmee Benevolent Fund. None in my pocket.”

Later, Viruet recalled Biblical passages especially in 2 Samuel, where David committed adultery with Bathsheba and repented for his sin to Nathan and God. Yet there were consequences for David’s sin, and one was God’s pronouncement that the sword will never leave David’s house. Likewise, Viruet committed adultery and repented—and now the sword was not to leave his house, as he was called back into government service to war against the bad guys.

Viruet received his first encrypted instruction from Bullock:

“You are to take Davalillo out.”

Viruet hesitated. “Is that President Velasquez’s decision? Or yours?”

“I’ll ask the questions, Viruet.”

Southeast Mexico, Near Merida

20 steep steps led to basement of the compound. An advanced, gas-free generator provided energy for the lighting and a small refrigerator. Opaque walls closed in Viruet and his close colleague, Manuel Rojas, a very large man, bald, but with a thick beard. Both men wore khaki green.

Viruet's eyes were locked on the large camera-like device in front of him, while Rojas retrieved locally-grown mangos from the fridge. Viruet took a bite.

“Okay, it's official, Manny. We are now in Aztlan-occupied territory. They've taken 35% of the Yucatan. Very little resistance--given the months of advanced preparation and Davalillo propaganda.”

“How do you stop lava flowing down a mountain?” Rojas asked; his voice soft, a far cry from his hard physique.

“Mexican Parliament in emergency session, and that won't stop crap.”

“What's the update from the Renland GPS about Davalillo's forces, Jude?”

“At least 70,000 regulars, and 1,000 Vanguardia. But Mexican military forces are not yet fully deployed. At this rate the Aztlan lava flow will reach the Rio Grande in 49 days.”

“I'm assuming that number of days will grow, brother, once the Mexican Army gives more resistance,” Rojas said.

“Oh, the Mexicans will slow Aztlan alright. The question is, can they stop it? All the encrypted networks, unbelievable surveillance capabilities, and other features of this Renland GPS haven't

given us even a nibble on Davalillo's location. I am rusty."

"If you're rusty, Jude, that puts the rest of us in the junkyard," Rojas said. Viruet playfully punched Rojas's shoulder.

"Okay, Manny, the Renland says there are no people within two miles of this compound. We're clear for now. Let's get some air."

They scaled a burlap ladder, pushed open a hatch, and were greeted by a blazing reddish sun. They beheld a fresh panorama of green scrub, with some high-grass fields. Dirt roads criss-crossed the landscape, including one leading to the compound through a closed gate. Weather equipment dotted the ground beneath them to indicate the main purpose of this facility.

Viruet and Rojas lifted powerful binoculars to their eyes, to locate some of the distant action. Occasionally low rumbling sounds reached their ears.

"Hey Manny, want to see another amazing feature of this Renland GPS? It can pinpoint the exact locations of current military engagements and conflicts in a designated geographical area—see, we pull up the Yucatan and—"The screen displayed 12 bright numbered flashing blinks, with exact coordinates on the bottom of the screen for each number.

"The closest action is about 20 Km away—and check out this village, just 2 miles down the road." The Renland photo zeroed in on a western-style town. Men were milling around in the street, mostly armed with rifles or automatic NARM weapons. The maroon Aztlan flag was

prominently displayed, along with the black and red Vanguardia Sindicalismo flag.

“I probably shouldn’t say this, brother,” said Rojas. “But I don’t have a grasp of the Renland GPS like you do, Jude. You seem to have this—almost mindreading ability on encryption navigation though this galaxy of networks, contacts and visual imaging.”

“Manny, I chose you, knowing that they did not train you adequately on Renland capabilities. Your loyalty, competence and integrity more than make up for it. Don’t worry, Manny. We’ll get Davalillo.”

“Thanks, brother.”

“You were with me on that self-directed team that developed this Renland technology back when. Why you weren’t one of the first agents to be licensed is mind-boggling to me.”

Rojas said, “I remember someone on that team saying that the Renland GPS is so devastatingly effective on surveillance, that it is the closest thing to branding 666 on everyone’s forehead.”

“Who in the world said that to you?”

“That was you, Jude.” They shared a laugh.

Day three: Just more Renland monitoring and fruits from the fridge. Viruet cited the only significant news of the day: “Davalillo’s forces are within 10 Km of Merida.”

Day four, it all broke loose. The Renland reflected total urban warfare in Merida between Mexican regulars and Davalillo’s Aztlan army. Viruet desperately tried to get Renland intel on Davalillo, while sporadically going to the roof at

night during safe times. From there he beheld in the distance all the booms, the multiple flashing lights; like the Washington Mall on July 4th in perpetuity.

Day five: Viruet needed only five minutes on the Renland GPS to relay the news: “Merida just fell to Davalillo and the Aztlan forces. My, my.” Viruet pondered for a minute. “A heavy duty Mexican army caravan is barreling south down the highway from Mexico City. I betcha anything Davalillo is in Merida. Let’s make a run for it, while have this window.”

Motorbikes carrying Viruet and Rojas, with sacks tied to the back, roared out of the compound, and on to a dirt road. The Renland GPS navigated them to the most safe and inconspicuous back roads into Merida.

Finally, with the fringes of the Merida metro area within eyesight, Viruet, stopping, called to Rojas: “Sector six, contact 89....okay encryption, now screen.....we got him! Exact coordinates on Davalillo. Let’s go.”

“Woo-who!” Rojas couldn’t contain himself.

They passed farms and occasional small subdivisions. The dirt road came to a paved thoroughfare. And the world changed. There were modest little stores and cars everywhere. Up ahead were Aztlan soldiers and a checkpoint.

Every vehicle was being checked, but it seemed be smooth; the Aztlan forces seemed confident about their control. Reaching Aztlan green-attired guerilla soldiers with maroon patches,

Viruet and Rojas took a deep breath and presented their Mexican credentials. And passed through.

They made their way to the extension of Plaza Grande, a straight shot into downtown, where Davalillo was fortified. The whole scene had the feel of a bazaar. This was southern Merida, mostly Chicano neighborhoods. Multi-colored and multi-shaped homes sat on top of each other. Along the boulevard were endless retail stores and restaurants. The aroma of street food vendors was everywhere, giving Viruet the image of a tortilla factory; he was suddenly very hungry. This surreal scene was like a militarized Times Square, with Aztlán soldiers everywhere, cars turning everywhere, roving bands of bandana-clad pedestrians chanting Viva La Revolucion!--and related slogans. Blood stains on the street provided sober evidence of recent battles. Crowds of people were just going about their business, making sure they could provide for their families from two jobs sometimes. Dusty children waved red and black Vanguardia Sindicalismo flags. People poured in and out of crowded subdivisions. Mounted soldiers were barely moving, with hard eyes and Uzis pointing toward the sky. Some soldiers ran, pushing their way through the crowds, to respond to residual skirmishes. Street vendors in wooden movable shacks sold Native items, from hand-made clothing to bracelets, photos, paintings, history books, and carvings. Many pedestrians carried statues of historical Mayan tribal leaders.

As Viruet and Rojas came closer to downtown, the Plaza Grande became wider, with more large commercial buildings, offices, hotels, and white stone everywhere. Giant highrises were being constructed. The palm trees were more noticeable, and the downtown area had more of a neon feel.

With fewer pedestrians, but guerilla soldiers in jeeps lurking at every intersection, Viruet thought it wise to pull over. They parked their motorbikes in the lot of an upscale hotel, and went in the lobby. More than 50 people were milling around, many with drinks from the fancy bar, but others clearly from the street, just merry-making. There were brisk, happy voices embodying the revolutionary euphoria.

Viruet and Rojas found a public restroom. They waited until the last person left, and then Viruet went into a stall to consult the Renland.

“We’re a kilometer away,” Viruet told Rojas excitedly. “The tight security ring around Davalillo extends two blocks. Nothing can get in. Our best alternative is a highrise three blocks from the school where Davalillo has set up his temporary command post. The highrise is not yet completed and is unoccupied.”

Viruet and Rojas followed the most pedestrian-friendly streets, where people ignored the rows of stern guerilla soldiers and went into fancy restaurants. Hearts racing, the twosome came to the vacant highrise. The door to the main lobby was locked, so Rojas took the honors of jimmying the lock with his Agency-issued sensory lockbreaker.

All was quiet inside the lobby. The elevators were not operable, so they walked up a stairwell ten floors. From there, they found a deserted wood-paneled office where the window faced the concrete school.

“Showtime,” Viruet said, aiming the Renland.

Its photo capabilities could penetrate any solid object, so the images of soldiers and civilians

were as clear as if they were three feet away. Viruet kept searching and searching, until: Bingo! Davalillo occupied a large office on the left of the building. He was unmistakable, wearing his black beret just like in the media, with a black and red Vanguardia stripe across his uniform, and an M-18 slung across his shoulder. He was studying a map.

Viruet handed the Renland to Rojas for a look. “Remind me, Jude, what are the capabilities of the Renland for the hit?”

“It’s got a laser that can penetrate any object, just like the camera. All we do is put the crosshairs on Davalillo’s heart, and push the orange button. Just like that, we decapitate Aztlan.”

Viruet added, “We are now in maximum blackout, summoning Washington.”

“What’s the status, Viruet?” Came Bullock’s voice.

“Bullock, voice activation not a good idea, despite the blackout. We have Davalillo lined up. Merida,” Viruet said.

“Congratulations, Viruet,” came Bullock’s voice over the device.

Viruet said, “With civilians on the compound, I advise against the use of a drone.

“This is Special Ops, Viruet. Nothing more. I know you are about saving souls now. Must be hard.”

“My profile on Davalillo shows no evidence that he is targeting military actions against innocent civilians, nor is he committing human rights abuses against his Aztlan people. He doesn’t fit the neat composite of a terrorist.”

“Then let Manny take the shot.”

“I’m not finished, Bullock. Davalillo has effectively declared war on the United States with his territorial claims, so his personal integrity is irrelevant. If Davalillo is not stopped, it will mean military conflict for the United States, and casualties and deaths of Americans. This hit is morally justified, so I will take the shot.”

“Give me confirmation when the deed is done.”

“Two minutes, that’s all.”

There was scuffling, and suddenly two men charged into the office. The blasts, the flashes from assault weapons made Viruet flip instinctively and draw the NARM pistol from his ankle holster and fire back at the two dodging assailants. His racing mind saw his bullets hit his marks, but he also felt the stinging in his thigh and shoulder from bullet wounds. Suddenly, he could hear his breath when the bullets from the assailants stilled. Two men lay a few feet before him, in pools of blood. His adrenaline roared from a scuffling sound from the other side of the door. He aimed his NARM pistol steadily at the door.

The third assailant jumped in, and Viruet delivered a barrage of bullets before the man could barely get off a shot. This third assailant dropped immediately.

Viruet carefully approached the door, for other possible assailants. Finally, he saw a clear hallway.

He inspected the fronts of the bloodied men for Aztlan or Vanguardia insignias. But he found none. He reached inside one of the pockets—and was shocked to find a US passport and an American journalism press pass.

Then he remembered Manny, and saw his compadre doubled over. “Manny! We’ve been set up for a hit. Those dead guys are Agency, not Aztlan.” He moved closer, and saw the blood pouring from Rojas’s abdomen. Manny breathed hard, and was trying to speak. Finally, he collapsed to his death.

Viruet was briefly distracted with grief and tears. Then he noticed another soldier standing at the doorway. This one had a black and red Vanguardia stripe across his uniform, and an M-18 pointed at Viruet. The soldier drew closer, and Viruet carefully raised his hands.

“Americanos,” Viruet said, nodding toward the dead men.

The soldier inspected the dead men and found the IDs. His smile grew. “Si, Americanos!”

Viruet raised a clenched fist to shoulder level. “Viva Aztlan!”

Other Aztlan regular soldiers appeared. And at the command of the Vanguardia soldier, they hoisted Viruet up. Viruet felt the pain. Then he passed out.

Later, images floated in and out of his mind. Finally, he focused, and beheld a Latino nun bending over him. She had already bandaged his arm and leg wounds. Viruet felt very groggy and hot, both from the temperature and a low-grade fever.

Viruet was in some kind of huge open warehouse. There were dozens of wounded men like him, many also being attended to by Mother Teresa types. Aztlan soldiers were milling about, talking in friendly tones to the wounded. These were comrades in this room, not enemy combatants. He about gagged on the stench and alcohol smell.

Viruet lurched as the nun stuck a needle in his veins. He had no idea what was going into his body. But within a half hour he was feeling stronger. Suddenly he remembered the Renland GPS. He looked around, and saw his duffle bag next to his floor cot. The Renland was nestled inside. The guerilla soldiers had been nice enough to retrieve his belongings.

He saw a trap door opening. Two soldiers crawled out. One he recognized as the soldier who had rescued him. Suddenly Davalillo emerged, with the black beret and rifle--up from underground to continually dodge surveillance, Viruet reasoned. With a fascination, Viruet watched Davalillo do rounds with the wounded warriors, patting their shoulders, sometimes talking with them.

Then the rescuing soldier and Davalillo walked right up to Viruet.

“Este hombre disparo tres Americanos!” The soldier said.

“Excelente,” Davalillo nodded. “America en buen Americano. En Aztlan muy malo.”

“Perros,” Viruet said.

Davalillo took Viruet’s ID from him pocket. “Diego Flores, Guadalajara—ah, un dirigente syndical!”

Viruet nodded, “Finalmente aplastar a los opresors!” Viruet raised his fist to his shoulder. “Viva Aztlan.”

Davalillo raised his fist also to his shoulder. “Viva Vanguardia Sindicalismo!”

The rescuing soldier retrieved the Renland GPS from Viruet’s bag. “Fotografia!”

Davalillo sat down beside Viruet to get in the picture. He waved a victory sign in front of Viruet’s

face. The soldier fumbled with the machine—he didn't know how to snap the picture.

Viruet said, “El boton plateado.”

“Oh, si.” He snapped the picture. Then he searched how to print it. Viruet beckoned to him, pushed the green button, and a color photo of he and Davalillo came out.

Davalillo took it. “Perfecto. Gloria a Dios.” He waved and walked away.

When Davalillo left, Viruet wondered when he would ever see him again.

Viruet had to get out of there somehow. He watched the exits. Some of the wounded walked around freely. This was not a prison camp; these were all true believers, and escape management was not a priority for these soldiers.

Viruet grabbed the Renland and boldly began to walk toward the exit. He felt the pain in his right leg from the bullet still there. He walked behind another wounded warrior and made it to the street.

There was a church across the street next to a park. Soldiers were everywhere, mostly talking among themselves; some alert at intersections. Viruet crossed the street and entered the open church and found a sanctuary. He lifted his hands up to heaven and prayed for wisdom.

This was the time to ditch Bullock. He had General Andrews' encrypted coordinates. Next the thumbs went to work on the secure e-mail section of the Renland GPS. “Lord, please in your mercy deliver this briefing to General Andrews ASAP.”

A few minutes later, the Renland made a snapping sound. Viruet read the message from Andrews. “Thank you Jude for all you could do

under trying circumstances. It's worse than you could imagine. Cab to Pablo's dock, by 16:30, coordinates below. Agent will find you, drive you to air strip. Pilot has proprietary cover re: disaster relief. Will fly you to Mexico City, navigating around the Aztlan lava line. They only know you as Flores."

Sherburne, New York

Viruet stirred from a long sleep. He found himself in a bed, fully clothed, but unshaved. His wounds were bandaged. General Andrews, in full uniform as always, sat in the chair next to Viruet's bed. With a gentle doctor's manner, he said, "Are you feeling okay? These drugs that sedated you are safe. You've had plenty of IV fluids, and you're healing fine. What's the last thing you remember, Jude?"

Viruet tried to clear his head. "Mexico City, the doctors did a great job taking out the bullets. The nurses and food were better. Then at Dulles Airport, I remember a cab came up quickly—and that's the last thing I remember."

"We had to take extreme measures to snatch and hide you, Jude. We sedated you right there, and whisked you off very privately to this underground New York compound. Four days now."

Andrews continued, "The diabolical wrecking ball of a person who tried to have you killed in Merida also blew your cover. They exposed your real name, Jude Viruet, to every news organization in the world." Andrews took newspaper clippings out of his briefcase. "Your name is in all of these. Here is an example: 'Jude Viruet, a highly decorated CIA agent, was reportedly

shot in Merida, Mexico while monitoring the recent incursions of Aztlan on Mexican territory.”

“So, since they could not kill me, they did the next best thing, by exposing me, so I could not continue with Operation Davalillo.”

“Correct, Jude.”

“Any clues who or why?”

“Not yet. But hiding you in the shadows, gives us some leverage as we try to unmask this maniac.”

“Whoever this is, they are operating independently, because I was face to face with Davalillo--who didn't have a clue what had just come down.”

“Murderous creep protecting Davalillo to the risk of a US-Aztlan war.”

“Let's start with the basics,” Viruet said. “Give me all of the names of persons who knew me by name, and knew I was sent to neutralize Davalillo.”

“President Velasquez, Manny Rojas, Elton Bullock, Terry Fowler, Syed Mohammed, Bosley Taylor and myself,” Andrews answered.

“Manny is dead, President Velasquez doesn't have loose lips, and obviously you helped me and I trust you. That leaves Bullock, Fowler, Mohammed and Taylor—then again, Bullock wouldn't try to kill me when he's the one who ordered me to kill Davalillo.”

“Makes sense. But with Bullock, anything is possible.”

Viruet responded, “You said it, not me.”

“The President wasn't envisioning an assassination of Davalillo,” Andrews said. “In

Bullock's twisted mind, getting rid of Davalillo quick would haste having you reassigned to his Caliphate project. The good news, I persuaded President Velasquez to assign me as your permanent upline."

"Thanks. Whatever I do from here on, you cannot inform any of those four people."

"Not that simple. Bullock is technically over all US intelligence operations. So I have to brief him. But I can tell this...or that."

"Where do I go from here?"

"Since Operation Davalillo is gone, the President wants you on the next big issue: You will be going to the Polynesian National Republic to hunt down any possible Caliphate nuclear connections. Bullock got his wish. We are going to extremes."

"How extreme? My face is now on every printed venue, and even my church sees that Reverend Vic Gonzalez is Jude Viruet. I'm a total orphan."

"Precisely why, at 9:45 this morning, your death certificate was signed."

"What!"

Andrews opened his laptop and searched for a recent newscast recording. Finally, he found a Black woman newscaster on a national cable station. He replayed the broadcast from earlier in the day: "Last week we reported that Jude Viruet, a decorated CIA Officer, had been ambushed in Mexico while trying to halt the spread of Aztlan in that nation. Today, we learned that Jude Viruet is dead. Federal authorities confirmed that his private airplane crashed in the mountains of Idaho with him on board."

Andrews switched off the recording. "We had to actually crash an old plane and use a cadaver,

and plant some dental records. Of course, I needed to involve several trusted subordinates to pull this off. They are totally removed from our Four Musketeer suspects.”

Viruet tried to smile, “If I’m dead, why don’t I feel like I’m in heaven?”

Andrews tossed him a folder. “Rene Miyaro, your next alias. Miyaro is real person! He died of a heart attack two days ago while hiking in Bolivia. He has no family, so the only persons who knew he died were the Bolivian authorities. Renland technology got my agent down there to claim the body before any of his US colleagues could be notified. Then we hacked into his e-mail account, and sent e-mails to all his friends that he was going on an extended Latin American sabbatical, for solitude and writing, so they would not worry about him.

“A perfect transition, Jude. The best part is, he resembles you in appearance. But we will need to do some plastic surgery on you.”

Viruet shrugged, “Okay, let’s see. Rene Miyaro. Harvard Professor. Specializes in peace, human rights and democracy building. U.S. Government consultant on crisis intervention teams. He’s 45, close enough. And he’s a Christian. I like him already.”

“Good.”

“If Rene Miyaro is Internationally known, as soon as I show up on that island, I’ll meet someone else who knows him, and I’ll be outed as a fraud.”

“His focus has been on Latin America and Africa. He’s never been to the Pacific islands, so key parties will have heard of him—but never met him.”

“And what about that sicko wrecking ball as you called him, who destroyed Operation Davalillo?”

“I’ll work with my trusted subordinates on ferreting out that scum. When we need you for a surprising cameo, Jude, we’ll bring you back in spectacular style.”

Four weeks later. Andrews came in to see how his Agency-vetted surgeon had completed her masterpiece on Viruet. He opened the door, and found Viruet reading a current events magazine.

“Unrecognizable! No trace of Jude Viruet!” The face was made to look thinner. The hair had shorter bangs, but was allowed to grow longer on the sides and back, like the real Rene Miyaro.

“Here is some good news,” Andrews continued. **“Mexico has done a full military deployment and stopped the Aztlan advance.”**

“One last concern, General: If General Sydenham is this horrible dictator, and I’m flying in as outspoken human rights crusader, won’t he kill me as soon as I step off the plane?”

Andrews smiled. **“Sydenham is looking for credibility among the community of nations. He’ll charm Rene Miyaro with smoke and mirrors, so you can help him say to the world, human rights abuses are all a lie! Sydenham will Tokyo Rose you to the max.”**

“What do you think about the Caliphate nuclear bunker theory?” Viruet asked.

“Garbage. So pack your bags and enjoy paradise, and wait for the opportunity to bring down that traitor in our midst.”

Polynesian National Republic

The St. Augustine Airport was modern but small. Viruet, alias Miyaro, stepped out into the vehicle pickup area with great anticipation. He had just two carry-on bags. There was a warm breeze, and a smoky tinge to the air.

A silver Mercedes pulled up. The woman driver with pixie blonde hair beckoned him inside. She had her own Renland, and she hit the scramble button before driving off.

“Okay, our conversation is safe. I’m Belinda Lansford, Civilian Department of Defense Intelligence Analyst, reporting directly to General Martin Andrews. I’m your official PNR liaison.” Lansford was a slight woman with tan pants suit and ample necklace jewelry, including a cross. Her fair facial features made her appear 35, although she was 50.

The car hit a wide avenue, and passed industrial parks. The residential areas were mostly rowhouses with cheap metal. Viruet couldn’t get the sooty air out of his mind.

Lansford said, “My cover is I’m an art dealer. I double in journalism. My visits to museums in both St. Augustine and Tyrene give me good travel and good access to officials. I’ve got two proud college graduate daughters in California, and a husband in the Foreign Service, stationed in Indonesia. He visits frequently. That’s all you need to know about me, Mr. Viruet.”

“Thank you for the upfront boundaries; that keeps the right focus on this mission.” Viruet noted her steady green eyes and cool, confident demeanor.

They came to a checkpoint. Sydenham soldiers wore blue uniforms and blue helmets; always ready for battle. Lansford flashed papers and breezed through the checkpoint.

Inside the checkpoint area was a different world than the cramped residential areas they'd just passed through. Here, all the streets were wide, and all buildings were tall and well maintained. Upscale restaurants straddled upscale stores.

Lansford parked at a gorgeous hotel with fountains in front. Viruet followed her into the lobby, and she checked him in without prior discussion, then handed him his room key. They sat in a silky lobby sofa.

"This is just until you find your permanent location," she said. "Now, Mr. Viruet, welcome to Roackaseen Valley."

"Ah, who?"

"Roackaseen Valley is the unofficial name for the Polynesian National Republic, especially among the Native population. Emile Roackaseen is a prominent Native landowner who first discovered all the oil and minerals in Tyrene, prompting the economic miracle. His recorded ancestry goes back to Captain Cook, and his interesting last name is a compilation of different ethnic influences, though he is pure-blood Polynesian. Given the power of wealthy White immigrants, it's ironic that Emile Roackaseen is the richest man in the PNR. His home city Tyrene is the richest city in the world."

"Thanks for the update, Ms. Lansford. In my spirit I feel we will work well together. Let me add a boundary: From now on I am Rene Miyaro. The name Jude Viruet is never to be used."

“Okay. My role is to be of service to you in mission actions. I will not be a fly in your ear, or inquiring about Professor Miyaro activities. But if there is ever anything you need, I am on call 24-7 for you. Here is contact information for my residences in both St. Augustine and Tyrene.” She handed him two cards.

“There is one thing,” Miyaro said, verifying the scrambler on his Renland GPS. “I would like all your HUMINT and tech feedback on alleged nuclear weapon activities on this island.”

“Sure. Anonymous. Nothing verified.”

Miyaro spent the next few days reading some of his old speeches, and researching related publications of his Harvard and International Affairs colleagues.

By the fourth night, Miyaro decided to forego the expensive restaurants lining the downtown park—including one where a bowing Native waiter spoke perfect French—and walk outside the military ring around downtown, and visit places where the ordinary people lived.

The advancing darkness produced dim window lights inside towering highrises packed with people. Doors, windows and overhanging balconies often were in disrepair. These reminded him of the crowded immigrant highrises in London. Children and teenagers ran through the narrow streets, some with soccer balls. The population was a mix of Native, White, and multi-ethnic immigrants from other countries. The restaurants were older, and there were long lines. Miyaro could not escape the ethnic food aromas.

The soldiers in blue especially caught his attention. Unlike his hotel neighborhood, these

soldiers were stern and ready for action. While Aztlan soldiers in Merida pointed their weapons up, Sydenham's soldiers pointed their weapons straight.

Miyaro steered clear of the gaudy nightclubs with the wooden face carvings, the loud aggressive music and occasional whore with skirt so high that Miyaro had to force himself not to look. At about 9:00 PM, there was a disturbance down the street from one of the clubs. Hundreds of people were in the street, and there was loud chanting. Dozens of blue-uniformed soldiers lurked ominously. Mounted photos of a middle-aged man with thick black hair and vivid black moustache dotted the rally.

Miyaro produced his Renland GPS, and looked for that photo. It looked familiar from PNR briefings. Then—bingo—a match. The text on the screen read, “Julio Carreon, President of the Polynesian National Republic government in exile, and former Education Minister.”

There were staggered chants: “Liberty! Liberty! or Julio! Julio!” The chants got louder, then came stirring in the soldier ranks.

Miyaro saw it coming, so he backed away—just as the soldiers charged, batons flailing. There were screams, chaos, crashing sounds. Miyaro activated the videocam function of the Renland for discreet footage.

When he saw bodies lying on the street, he had seen enough. He turned away.

Right in front of him a verbally aggressive man carrying a Carreon photo confronted about five soldiers, their weapons aimed low. Miyaro recalled the famous decades-old image of the lone Tiananmen Square Chinese protester confronting a tank. This

man in St. Augustine shouted in an indigenous language.

The shot came before Miyaro could blink. The protester lay still on the street. The soldier with the warm barrel casually strolled up over the fallen man, and pumped two more bullets in his back.

Late next morning, Lansford drove Miyaro to a large pond in the center of town. In the middle sat a large island and a huge, white stone castle of a building. Gated and guarded black bridges connected the street to the white building. Several soldiers guarded the front of the edifice.

“That used to be the Parliament building for the PNR,” Lansford explained. “Now it’s the official PNR capital, where Sydenham and his top military leaders make decisions. One third of that compound is the personal residence of Gough Sydenham.”

Miyaro displayed on his Renland the video of last night’s brutal crackdown on peaceful dissenters. “Renland GPS can send these videos to thousands of media outlets—and the e-mails can only be traced to anonymous names.”

A trace of a smile from Lansford. “Professor Miyaro is making a powerful statement about human rights. Good.”

“God would be very mad if I suppressed that scene last night. I felt so helpless.”

There came a low-grade rumbling beneath them for a second. “That’s not an earthquake,” Lansford said. They both looked at the left horizon, and saw distant flashes. Bangs were distant echos. Flairs and meteors streaked the sky, followed by a whistling sound and a louder explosion. Miyaro beheld what at first seemed to be storm clouds.

Lansford said, “Recently Julio Carreon’s government in exile started an armed insurrection against the Sydenham regime, relying on extensive Native contacts in the countryside and International supporters. Carreon’s backwoods guerilla army has obviously found kerosene.”

Miyaro consulted the conflict ID app on the Renland. On the screen, a half moon of pulsating flashes surrounded St. Augustine to the east. Some were within 10 Km.

Lansford added, “Carreon’s exile government can stir up dust in the hinterlands, and maybe even St. Augustine suburbs. But Julio Carreon will never set foot in their princess city of Tyrene--too much firepower.”

Wordlessly, she drove her Mercedes to the hotel, and deposited Miyaro. He entered the lobby, and out of the corner of his eye a well-dressed man put down a newspaper and walked briskly toward him.

“Doctor Rene Miyaro, I presume.” Miyaro nodded, and the man offered a wide smile and handshake. “David Roebuck is the name. What an honor it is to have you in the PNR. I’ve been dispatched to extend to you an invitation.”

Miyaro beheld this totally polished man, late thirties, and short brown hair except for a forehead flip. His face seemed a little crooked, and his accent was British.

“Yes, I’m Rene Miyaro.”

“I am business manager for a substantial Tyrene commercial enterprise. We were delighted to be told by immigration of your arrival. We are all impressed by your wisdom and expertise in

International Relations, and would be honored to show you around. Expense on us, of course.”

“When do you have in mind, Mr. Roebuck?”

“I was thinking right about now. We can help you pack.”

“We?”

“All Americans receive automatically a six month visa. Are you planning an extension?”

“Depends on how long it takes to write my memoirs. That’s why I came to paradise,” Miyaro said.

“Stay as long as you will, Professor. We love that you’re here.”

Miyaro breathed deeply when two blue-uniformed soldiers appeared with Roebuck.

“They will escort us,” Roebuck said. “We got some criminals and terrorists in spots out there. We need to leg it.”

Miyaro started to ask if this invitation was voluntary, then thought better of it.

Miyaro sat in the back of a limo with Roebuck; a neatly-dressed chauffeur taking the wheel. Military jeeps flanked the limo. They found the heavily guarded, six lane Augustine-Tyrene Expressway.

The scenery was spectacular. The huge sheep and cattle ranches stretched on and on. A range of tall mountains lined the left horizon. In the distance, a dense pine forest kissed the mountains. An occasional fruit orchard near the highway conjured recent memories of Mexico.

Roebuck briefly lifted his eyes from business transactions on his advanced phone. “Tyrene is a

closed city, with income restrictions. The low-paid workers who serve the businesses and facilities need special day passes to pass Tyrene checkpoints. Everything runs smoothly.”

Yes, like 1930s Italian trains, Miyaro thought.

They approached a long stretch of traditional Native villages mixed in with prefab housing subdivisions and industrial parks. Finally, they came to three different checkpoints, and cruised through. Then the sign:

**WELCOME TO TYRENE—THE
WORLD’S MOST BEAUTIFUL CITY**

Miyaro beheld wide streets everywhere; indoor and outdoor malls; mounted signs with bathing-suit clad models of different ethnicities; fancy restaurants of every conceivable food taste. Residential neighborhoods were often stone palaces girded with iron gates and fences. There were a few quaint cabins with ample yards, and parks. Large energy-related structures stood as testimony to the economic miracle. There were polished, late-model and high-graded cars. The palm trees danced gently. Roebuck lowered the windows to allow in a heavenly, 80 degree Tyrene breeze.

The Augustine-Tyrene Expressway curved leftward between a hospital and stately country club. The Tyrene skyline, a forest of shiny highrises, came into view. The Expressway elevated briefly to give everyone a breathtaking view of the aqua sea, and bright white beaches kissing it.

Downtown, virtually everything was new and shiny: craft shops, restaurants, new churches with flowered glass exteriors, hotels adorned like museums, Native cultural centers, surf shops, office

buildings and shopping centers with gilded walkways. Water shot up everywhere. Patches of green added an additional touch. Very few people were dressed up. Most had open shirts, casual skirts, Native attire or beach attire.

The limo curved left past an inlet containing a seemingly-endless marina containing boats of different types. The limo made another left into the driveway of TYRENE INTERNATIONAL HOTEL, a glowing ten story hotel with marble statues in front.

“Let’s give this chap a deserved rest,” Roebuck said to the soldier escorts. “This place is ace, eh, Professor? The tour starts tomorrow.”

Then they left. Miyaro exhaled; he was a free man. Sort of.

Inside the lobby, a tall big-eyed Native woman with long flowing hair gave him a hardy Welcome to Tyrene greeting, and never stopped smiling.

In his room everything was spacious and soft. From his window he could see the ocean. He spent the rest of the day with an indoor pool, jacuzzi and room-service seafood. Outside, he tried to ignore the beautiful, brightly-dressed women passing him constantly, some with nice smiles.

Finally, Miyaro opened up his Bible to passages about false gods—because the Princess City of Tyrene already had a dangerously seductive nature.

The next heaven-sent day, with low broken clouds, featured a tour by Roebuck of Tyrene University, a half-mile down the beach. Out of deference to Miyaro’s profession, Roebuck took him into the various buildings, student centers, libraries,

and the School of International Affairs. Roebuck knew some IA professors and introduced them. Fortunately, none had met the real Miyaro face to face.

Tyrene University was huge, with students embodying every nation and nationality. The atmosphere on campus was very informal and fun--frisbies, skateboards, soccer balls, baseballs, and students taking surfboards to the beach.

Before departing at about 2:00 that afternoon, Roebuck said to Miyaro, "I hope sir, that your memoirs reflect the peace, fun, racial harmony, and near-perfection of our wonderful Princess City Tyrene."

Miyaro spent the rest of daylight on the beach, flirting a little with some young, multi-ethnic, bikini-clad women, and spending ample time in the 80 degree ocean, catching eight foot swells on a boogie board.

This idyllic second day in Tyrene was only a setup for the shocker on day three.

Naiad

The next morning Miyaro sent a message over his Renland, with full encryption: "In Tyrene now, General. I will be activating maximum network band and video fields, for inspection for possible nuclear bunkers."

In spite of the time difference, Miyaro got a response from Andrews in ten minutes: "Exactly per President Velasquez's expectations."

Roebuck arrived at 11:00 AM, as promised. This time he brought four jeeps full of army escorts.

“Please pack your bags, Dr. Miyaro. You have been cleared for a very special event.”

The limo cruised fast-paced outside downtown Tyrene. After a right turn, they were surrounded by open fields with high grass, with gated roads cutting in occasionally. In the distance stood vague steel structures.

Roebuck explained, “Tyrene municipal borders include the energy fields and massive private estates—all inside the military protective wall.”

Miyaro took out his pocket Renland GPS, and aimed the lens.

“Let me warn you, Mr. Roebuck. I am a darn good amateur photographer.”

Roebuck smiled for the “camera”, and then took a copy of the photo.

“Take as many pictures as you want, Professor. I’m sure you’ll find them all good.”

The limousine stopped at a huge steel gate flanked on both sides by a ten-foot-high steel wall. The driver pushed a button, and steel gate swung open from the inside, revealing a narrow road paving a path between two fields of lilies. They came upon a three-story blue mansion, guarded by several blue soldiers with automatic rifles. Miyaro’s escorts led him up marble steps and inside with precision, and into a portrait-lined hallway.

At the end of the hall was a large conference room lit by sparkling chandeliers, and about 50 people inside. Tables formed a rectangle, and to the left there were about 30 trays of every kind of food imaginable.

A bald, heavy-set man with an imposing head, sagging cheeks and thick eyebrows pointing to the nose greeted Miyaro with a handshake. “We are

honored by your presence, Dr. Miyaro, and on behalf of the PNR I extend to you the warmest welcome,” came a gravelly voice. The blue uniform dazzled with medals. “I am General Gough Sydenham.”

Miyaro, stunned, could manage only nod and smile.

The row of chairs to the left were the Supreme Military Commanders of the PNR--all White males. The intersecting table to right contained Ministers. There were two White women and two Native males in this group. One Native was a goliath of a man with rushmore head, brown skin, dark eyes and wavy grey hair. Miyaro could not miss the name tag on the table: EMILE ROACKASEEN – MINISTER OF COMMERCE.

Roebuck gently took Miyaro by the sleeve. “Mr. Roackaseen, I want you to meet the esteemed Rene Miyaro. Neither one of you need any more formal introductions.” Roackaseen gave a quick handshake and half smile, then sat down.

The other two tables were for family members and special guests. Roebuck seated Miyaro, who had his table name tag, as did everyone else.

Roebuck took his own seat—right next to Emile Roackaseen.

While the guests waited, professionals set up television camera equipment.

“Before we enjoy the food,” Sydenham announced, “A special thank you goes to Commerce Minister Emile Roackaseen for providing us this grand facility--part of his spectacular Naiad.” Everyone applauded. “And may the Minister of Security, Eumir Liccardi, please rise.”

Miyaro took in this very rugged man, pre-middle aged, stone-like, war-weary face, and dirty blonde hair flowing to the shoulders. When Liccardi smiled, Miyaro imaged a 100-tooth crocodile.

Sydenham said, “As Special Adjudicator, Eumir Liccardi did not have one traitor or spy escape this month. We have efficiently expunged the garbage, and our wonderful system of peace through order is safe from known threats.” People applauded again—Liccardi smugly spread his arms like an eagle before sitting down.

Miyaro briefly chatted with Weimar, the blonde, suit-clad German-American entrepreneur to his right, while the guests lined up for food. He noticed that the chair to his left was vacant. He picked up the name tag. It read, VONDA ROACKASEEN.

While people ate, Liccardi approached the microphone. His crocodile smile returned. “Please look at the screen as we give tribute to a wonderful, kind and giving woman.” The lights dimmed, and a middle-aged Korean woman, smiling, appeared on the screen. “Today is the third year anniversary of the passing of Mee-Hye Roackaseen, Emile Roackaseen’s wife, from lymphoma. Please join me, as we give warm tribute to her kindness, charity and love. A moment of silence, please.”

During the silence, a tall, slender woman in her late twenties, approached the front. Her thick brown hair curled mildly beneath her shoulders. Her complexion was tan, and she wore a brilliant emerald necklace over her long green gown. Brown eyes very prominent and Asian. Her fair face and rich lips made a rose wilt by comparison.

Liccardi gave her a hug. “Vonda Roackaseen is the daughter of Emile and Mee-Hye, for those who don’t know.” Vonda shed some tears.

The lights came back on, and Vonda took a stone Native carving from near the wall, and returned to her seat. Friendly eyes and a big Polynesian smile greeted Miyaro immediately. “Dr. Miyaro, my name is Vonda Roackaseen, and I wish to present you with a gift on behalf of the Polynesian National Republic. Please accept this, and experience peace for eternity.” Vonda spoke in a soft mezzo-soprano voice.

“Thank you so much.” Miyaro stood to get in the food line, but Vonda gently pushed him back.

“Please, what can I get for you? You are our special guest. Please, I insist.”

She brought back a plate of the best delicacies. “Dr. Miyaro, I read your book about your reconciliation work with the two African tribes, and the crossing the Rubicon moment as you called it, when all the death and violence from misunderstanding transformed to economic cooperation and lifting villagers out of poverty. I love your book!” Miyaro remembered it vaguely from the briefings. “I teach American Studies at Tyrene University, and I actually use your book, and some of your Harvard articles, in my class. And, wow, here you are sitting right next to me!”

Vonda went on and on, citing minutia from Miyaro’s teachings. He tried to get in a semi-wise comment once in a while, but she insisted on talking, wide-eyed. Miyaro loved every minute of it, like he was sitting on air.

“May I get you some dessert now?” Vonda offered.

Liccardi again approached the front. “Cameras are ready; it’s showtime.”

After further prep, General Sydenham faced the camera: Bright spotlights, and then one, two, three—

“Good afternoon good citizens of the Polynesian National Republic and visitors. It’s been another great week for our nation. Our Gross Domestic Product increased another 7% as we help meet the energy needs of many nations. As a tradition with these broadcasts, we cite at least one truism to disprove the vicious slander that we are an outlaw nation. Here’s one. The crime statistics for Tyrene were just released. The Tyrene crime rate is only 2% of that of New York City. So how can we stand heads above the United States of America on key indicators connected to safety, and still be considered the black sheep in the International family? We are fair and just as a nation. Last year I appointed Eumir Liccardi as our Special Adjudicator for crimes against the State. Every person that he sentenced to a prison camp in our nation was found to have committed a crime, treason, or disloyalty against our nation. Over 99% of our citizens have nothing to fear. Tyrene is remarkably free from violence or conflict, and I challenge any other of the nations, that we stand eager to be friends with, to duplicate the successes in Tyrene.”

“What is the range of this newscast?” Miyaro asked Vonda.

“To St. Augustine,” she whispered back.

“News media have exaggerated the so-called armed rebellion from Julio Carreon and his Rebel Alliance”, Sydenham continued. “Our reinforcements have pushed his Rebel Alliance

ragtag army away from St. Augustine. Carreon, with a thirst for power that is not supported by the PNR population, has recruited criminals, malcontents and stirred up hatred among some of the Native population, to bring needless violence to our great nation. Last week the PNR High Command convicted that Argentinian carpetbagger Julio Carreon of treason against the PNR. We have sent a strong letter to the government of New Zealand, which has been misguidedly protecting him, to either arrest Julio Carreon and his kangaroo cabinet, or expel them from their country.

“We have legions of supporters of our government, and we get nice letters all the time from prominent people. Today we have a special friend who is with us now--Rene Miyaro, world expert in International Relations and justice in International standards.”

The cameras blasted Miyaro, who awkwardly raised his hands, then smiled weakly. Mercifully, the camera turned away quickly.

“Now, I’ll entertain some questions,” Sydenham said.

While Sydenham bantered with a reporter calling from a remote location, Miyaro was steaming, that Sydenham would publicly use him as a human shield for his brutal regime.

So when Sydenham finished with the unseen reporter, Miyaro waved his hand and spoke up. The camera responded by lighting him up.

“I know I am not a reporter—uh, this is Rene Miyaro again—but could I extend a proper response to your generous invitation, General?”

Sydenham responded, “Doctor Miyaro has honored us to write memoirs, musings about paradise---go ahead, Professor.”

“I share a deep appreciation for the hospitality of my PNR friends, and for this invitation.” Miyaro felt the adrenaline rush, so he stood. “One of my team’s International missions was to Brazil, where Indigenous medical students and doctors had established medical research consortia, but heavy-handed actions by provincial officials interfered with that research. Once the marginalized citizens with our assistance were able to replace that oppressive government, they actually discovered a cure for lymphoma. That cure was two years ago. Had our team been able to intervene two years earlier, perhaps those Brazilian researchers could have saved the life of Mee-Hye Roackaseen. My deepest condolences go the Roackaseen family for that loss.”

People in the room applauded.

“And Mr. Roackaseen, it is an inspiration to see what you have accomplished for what we Americans often call cowboy capitalism. The common reference to Roackaseen Valley inspires me to suggest to my beloved USA that we rename it George Washington Valley.” That drew laughter. “And Mr. Roackaseen, you can be proud as a father. Your daughter Vonda has been so kind and generous to me. I can see where you get the reference to Tyrene, Princess City. Vonda is that Princess!” Vonda covered a smile with her hands. “Maybe we can give her a new title—Queen of Tyrene. The crowns are often not up here. They’re in the heart.”

“Aw!” The women Ministers commented.

“I’ll close with this: One of our latest International intervention teams went into an

Eastern European nation. A vicious human trafficking ring was actually kidnapping teenage girls off the street and forcing them into the sex trade. The government was protecting the traffickers, so when we helped along a transfer of power, many sex slaves were freed—“

“Thank you, Dr. Miyaro,” Sydenham interrupted. “We’ve got Geoff from St. Augustine. How’s it going out there, my friend?”

After the briefing, people were not speaking to Miyaro. Vonda gave him a wave and big smile as she left.

A few minutes later, Eumir Liccardi approached him with his crocodile smile.

“You’re a real adventurer, Dr. Miyaro, a man after my heart. Your International missions have been risky and brought some danger, I think. You have courage. I like you.” Squeezing his arm to the point of mild pain.

Miyaro considered Liccardi a barracuda. Together with the smile, he had a private nickname for him: Crococuda.

Now, he wanted to put his freedom to test. He asked Roebuck, suddenly more reserved, to drive him back to the hotel. Roebuck obliged.

Later that evening, Miyaro met Lansford privately under an isolated pier on the far side of the marina. They both carried pocket Renlands, set to scramble their conversation.

“Was my speech on TV a macho act of stupidity?” He asked.

Lansford hesitated. “There is a risk that the tape over the Net will fall into the hands of a real-life Miyaro colleague. Of course, it was vintage Miyaro.

Sydenham's people should expect that posturing from you."

"I don't care. I wasn't going to be a stooge for Fascism." He smiled, "It may be the first time in history that a General in Washington fires a Harvard Professor. If so, you are more than capable of completing this assignment."

Miyaro continued, "God has really stirred my heart about this Adjudicator, Eumir Liccardi. The Renland shows about 25 caves in the mountains 20 Km outside Tyrene. That's prison camps of those he sentences. But I am getting rusty on the Renland: there are a couple of blind spots. Or maybe I'm fine but something unthinkable is brewing."

"Liccardi's court verdict is, sneeze, you're guilty," Lansford said.

Miyaro got a cell call from Roebuck. He met him back at the hotel.

Roebuck's smile returned. "You didn't wonder, Professor, why we kept your bags in the limo?" Miyaro didn't answer. "We got you a permanent home."

"Where?"

"You are staying with us, at the Roackaseens."

The limousine followed the same scenic road, but drove farther, so the approaching mountains became more vivid green. The limo made a right turn on a paved road called Roackaseen Boulevard. Pine and palm gave way to field of lilies on both sides. They came to a black iron fence, and huge steel gate covered by a huge orange sun. With the

approaching limo, the sun separated into two equal halves.

Beyond the fence stood a huge two story gray stone mansion at least 100 yards inside the fence. A beautiful rose garden lined the front of the mansion inside the wide circular driveway. Seven white garage doors took up the left side of the mansion. Pine and palm trees partially shaded the house, and cast a shadow across the perfectly-manicured lawn.

The arrival at the Roackaseens was just as anticlimactic as television meeting was dramatic. Roebuck took Miyaro's bags inside and then disappeared. Miyaro was left to the hired help inside the mansion, including two Native maids and a Black man with rifle and dreadlocks. Emile and Vonda were in a conference downtown all night, so a maid took Miyaro to a large room with a bed made for a king, and high-grade office furnishings as well. Later that night, they brought him a Polynesian delicacy of pineapple rice with salmon.

The next day, with the Roackaseens and Roebuck gone, this multi-hall and multi-room mansion was eerily dark in places. Miyaro looked outside and saw churning sooty clouds rolling in from the mountains, producing line after line of squalls. He had no transportation; he imagined himself in a haunted castle on a deserted island. All day, the three hired staff basically left him alone, except for bringing him food, and asking if he needed anything else.

For Miyaro, it was a blessing in disguise; it gave him solitude to work his magic on the Renland GPS, to track any leads on possible nuclear facilities. By that evening he pulled up some intel that stunned him. He examined several photographs of the same

older man with large nose, clumpy gray hair and pervasive tweed suit.

He contacted Lansford: “Belinda.”

“Got your messages,” she answered. “You must truly know the meaning of the expression, ‘under my thumb’. If I were a semi-prisoner like you, I don’t know if I’d be playing with the Renland with hidden surveillance possible.”

“Ah, but the latest feature. This baby flags any surveillance immediately, and diverts the signal before I can sneeze. We’re safe.”

“Okay—who’s the creepy guy in the photos you sent me?”

“Dr. Mario Pendergrass, a Stanford-trained nuclear physicist who worked with your agency, DIA, before moving on to Yale as a tenured Professor. Question: What does it take for a tenured Ivy League Professor to get fired? Answer: The US Government revoked his top secret clearance because of contacts he had with rogue International arms merchants.”

“Oh my,” Lansford said. “Any Jihadist contacts?”

“Nada—yet.”

“Got his coordinates?”

“What a stupid question,” Miyaro said not seriously. “And his current job is Professor in the Physics Department of Tyrene University.”

That night ended Miyaro’s dalliance in paradise. Now it was war alert.

The next day at noon Roebuck stopped by. “You look cheerio today, I might say,” Roebuck commented in response to Miyaro’s laser look. After banter from Roebuck in the limousine about some of

Roackaseen's business dealings, they arrived at Tyrene U. and parked in a VIP spot. Roebuck took him to a ranch-style white stone building. They navigated through a hallway with some students sitting against the wall, and then walked into an office.

“Surprise!” Vonda called gleefully. She wore a long blue cotton dress; her feet casually propped up on a desk. “Doctor Miyaro, I just could not resist getting you a private office here at the University. Tyrene will never be the same with you here. Please use it as often as you like, and grace the students with your wisdom, only as YOUR time permits.” Vonda rose to show off the mounted cabinet with books, including three Rene Miyaro publications.

“This is fabulous, and I could not expect more from the Princess,” Miyaro said.

Roebuck said, “Remember, you are a special guest and have full access to the Roackaseen estate called the Naiad. Measured in square miles, not acres.”

“I heard every word, and there's a major omission,” came a voice from the doorway, where Eumir Liccardi appeared in a blue uniform without any insignias. “Vonda may have done the preparations. But I am paying for this room.”

Miyaro looked at Liccardi blankly, with his mind saying, Crococuda!

“Thank you—“

“No thank you needed,” Liccardi said, walking briskly toward Miyaro. “Especially when there are partners like us--on your memoirs, of course. I have some notes for you to add. First, Dave Roebuck and I every week deliver books and medical supplies to poor villages outside of Tyrene.

Second, Vonda just sent a check worth a million dollars to an International poverty relief group. Finally, a Tyrene Professor named Nora Askew was accused of sedition this past week. She came before me, and I found that the charges were false, and I found her innocent. I don't run a railroad company, where the accused are automatically condemned."

Dr. Miyaro, I am sorry," Vonda said, "could you please give me personal insights about that wonderful self-determination agreement you negotiated between the Taiwanese government and the Hakka Natives?"

"Better than that. I will come to your class and give a presentation to you and your students—and out of gratitude to the PNR, I offer that same briefing to General Sydenham."

"General Sydenham never asked you for a briefing on Taiwan," Liccardi snapped. "But you are offering it, anyway. Dr. Miyaro, you really are bold and aggressive. I like you even more." Liccardi again grabbed his arm so it hurt just a little.

That night there was a special dinner at the Roackaseen estate. The 500 square foot dining room needed five servants to bring the delicacies. At the candelabra adorned carved roundtable sat, in order, Miyaro, Vonda, Liccardi, Emile Roackaseen, the Black man with dreadlocks, Dave Roebuck, and Jing, his Chinese girlfriend from the export center. There was every kind of Polynesian treat, and meat from cooked animals on the giant outdoor skewer.

Tha Black man stood and introduced himself to Miyaro. "Angel Taveras, five year immigrant. Dominican by birth, but raised in Jamaica." His Jamaica accent verified that. "As multicultural as they come," he said with a natural smile.

“Angel supervises all of the Roackaseen hired help, including in the energy fields,” Roebuck said.

“They call me Mr. Manganese, man. And I can shoot a bullseye from half a kilometer away.”

Miyaro didn’t know how to take that comment.

“Vonda!” The voice of Emile boomed. “Didn’t I tell you to always wear a skirt for these dinner occasions? Remember who you are, young lady!”

“Sorry Papa.” She looked down at her brown pants suit. Then she gave Miyaro a discreet smile.

As they ate and discussed beach sports, Roebuck showed affection for his Chinese girlfriend—holding hands under the table, then stroking her hair.

“Roebuck!” Emile boomed again. “Can you behave yourself? You live here, too, and should know better.”

Roebuck looked at Miyaro. “I can be sort of a fool sometimes.”

After more discussion, Emile clapped his hands to get everyone’s attention. “For Mr. Miyaro’s benefit, my daughter Vonda is totally off limits for any advances.”

Vonda’s eyes were taut, aimed at her father.

“Papa, that was very rude. Please apologize to Dr. Miyaro.”

“Yes, it was a little direct, Emile,” said Liccardi, flashing teeth. “But then, Dr. Miyaro is very tough. He can take any kind of abuse without blinking.”

Emile stood. “Mr. Miyaro, would you accompany me?”

Miyaro followed him into a giant anteroom with a fifty square foot TV built into the wall. He switched on a channel. There was Julio Carreon, addressing his makeshift parliament with hand gestures in a New Zealand conference room.

Emile walked to within two feet of Miyaro. “If you and your friends are so in love with Julio Carreon, I will gladly pay for a one-way trip to Auckland.”

“Nice try. But the New Zealand palm trees suck. But I do thank you very much for your hospitality--even if you did abandon me for two days.”

Emile gave him a sideways look.

“Pardon me, Dr. Miyaro,” Vonda said, appearing. “Papa has a rule that no one is allowed unescorted in the Naiad. So I will escort you to your room.”

“Young lady!” He roared. But she stuck her tongue out at him.

Miyaro asked a burning question: “Am I free to leave, or am I in your custody?”

“Dr. Miyaro, you are a guest at the Roackaseen Naiad. You are free to use all our recreational facilities, attend all functions. Mr. Taveras! Inform all domestics that if Dr. Miyaro is mistreated in any way, they will be slapped with a three-day suspension—with broken eardrums.”

Vonda nodded at the broken eardrums comment while pointing at her ear.

Miyaro saw a stone carved chess board off to the right. “Can I challenge you to a game, Mr. Roackaseen?”

And they went at it, two type-A macho males locked in serious combat. Then Emile said to Miyaro, "Move that rook, and the game is over."

"Thank you for your grace, sir." Ten moves later, Emile won.

An hour later, Miyaro heard a knock on his door. "Come in, it's unlocked."

Vonda appeared. "Since Papa didn't apologize, let me apologize for him. So sorry, Dr. Miyaro. As we say in Polynesia, Papa has the roar of a pussycat.--I brought you a mango pie. I made it. I hope you like it."

He took it. Vonda peered down at him.

"What are you reading?" She asked.

"The Bible, and the power of prayer for those who believe. I was stirred to those passages by the wonderful tribute to your mother."

Vonda covered her face and fell immediately to her knees. Miyaro saw tears between her fingers.

"Dr. Miyaro, one of my friends told me that if we would have prayed more, God may have cured my mama's lymphoma."

"God doesn't always choose to heal, Vonda. But he can and does."

Vonda drew closer to him--close enough for him to smell her cherry breath.

"In your Bio I read you are a man of great faith. Could I please test the power of prayer with you? I have suffered with a sore wrist for two years from tennis. The pain interrupts my sleep. Could you please pray over my right wrist?"

"Prayer always works--even if there is no healing."

He prayed for her for a minute, touching her wrist. Then his voice faded.

“Don’t stop!”

So he continued. Finally, she broke away, her face reflecting contentment.

“It feels better. A lot better!”

Vonda clamped a hug on him. He disengaged---precisely because he did not want that embrace to end.

St. Augustine

A sleek 797 jet streaked through the Pacific sky. The cabin was virtually empty except for three people. Valentino Davalillo sat in a first-class seat near the cockpit. He wore his traditional black beret, green uniform and the black and red Vanguardia stripe.

His third in command, Carlos Ruiz, similarly clad, and displaying a trimmed beard, sat under a NO SMOKING sign puffing on a cigar. A Mestizo woman wearing similar attire sat behind Davalillo, prying open a box of microwaved pizza.

“First the comedy show,” Davalillo said, playing with a sophisticated radio. “Hello, St. Augustine control. We’re coming in from the Vanuatu Syndicalist Republic on a diplomatic mission, and requesting clearance for landing.” Davalillo’s brisk voice carried a mild Spanish accent.

“We have no record of you on our ledger. Identify yourself, sir.”

“Then wake up your ledger,” Davalillo said as Ruiz and the woman smiled, their mouths stuffed with pizza.

“You are an unidentified aircraft, and if you attempt to enter PNR air space, we will alert our military.”

“Please don’t shoot! Okay, we give up.” Davalillo’s comment provoked laughter from his warriors as he disconnected the radio.

Davalillo continued, **“Now the good part. Carlos, help me connect this wire. A very well placed American friend taught me this trick.”**

“Hello—who is this?” Came a nasaly voice over the radio intercom.

“General Calkins, right? This is Valentino Davalillo, military Commander of the Aztlan nation, requesting landing clearance for treaty negotiations between the PNR and Aztlan.”

“What? This is a private line. How did you get this number?”

“Three of your assistants gave it to me.” Davalillo’s subordinates laughed. **“Do you want visual? I’m sure you do. General Sydenham would not want to be surprised.”**

Davalillo stepped into the cockpit. The pilot wore a black beret, and a Vanguardia flag covered the copilot’s seat. Davalillo flashed a smile and the peace sign into the camera.

There was silence for several minutes. The woman handed Davalillo a slice of pizza.

Then the answer: **“Mr. Davalillo, you are not authorized to enter the Polynesian National Republic. Avert your aircraft immediately.”**

“We have diplomatic passes giving me and my colleagues diplomatic immunity. According to International law, you must let us land without harming us. You can then expel us if you wish.”

“Let me be clear. If your aircraft enters PNR airspace, you will be shot down.”

Davalillo chomped on his pizza. “Your pop guns,” he garbled with full mouth. Then more clearly, “have no capability of reaching our position, unless we are close enough for you to see. How would I know that? The Aztlan nation, with our dedication to peace and adhering to laws, has mitigated any criminal attempt by the PNR government to commit an act of war against Aztlan government representatives who are coming to your land for peaceful treaty purposes.

“Those mitigation steps are as follows: Several of your buildings in Tyrene are rigged with explosives. Secondly, snipers are poised to shoot several of your unnamed leaders. All that is evidence of agents sympathetic to Aztlan and the Vanguardia in your nation. If there is one scratch on me or my colleagues, your precious princess city of Tyrene will get a bloody nose, and your nation will need new leadership. Let’s stop talking about mutually assured destruction, and talk about my gestures of peace. As evidence of the Aztlan mitigation strategy, a warehouse outside the City of Tyrene will be in flames in three minutes.”

Davalillo disconnected and then waited. 15 minutes later, the response came in.

“Mr. Davalillo, you are cleared to land. We’ll turn you over to the control tower.”

“Our meeting will be private. Absolutely no news media,” Davalillo said.

A military convoy met Davalillo at the St. Augustine airport. Davalillo and accomplices were whisked into a limousine. The PNR High Command took immediate steps to clear the Capital Highway,

and the convoy sped down the road toward Sydenham's castle. Along the route were occasional damaged or burned-out buildings from artillery fire. Flashes streaked the horizon covered with thick smoke.

Two hours were needed to arrange the hurried meeting between the two national leaders. Per Davalillo's request, the meeting remained low-keyed and hush-hush, in Sydenham's personal office. There was a conference table. On one side sat General Sydenham and four blue and medal clad Generals from the High Command. On the other side sat Davalillo and his three accomplices.

Sydenham leaned forward, and said in a dire voice, "This is hardly the proper protocol for treaty discussions between our two nations."

"These are not ordinary times," Davalillo responded. "You are not the only pariah nation in this world. Bully victims like our two nations must use creative techniques sometimes. Would you have let us in through normal means?"

"Now that we have granted your requested audience, give us in good faith the locations of the Tyrene buildings targeted for bombs, and the locations of your alleged assassins."

"That would be incredibly stupid of me. The Vanguardia mitigation is an insurance policy that gives us protection. I'm sure you had to make those kinds of calls, General," Davalillo said, and Sydenham nodded. "Now, let me introduce Paco, our pilot and the Vanguardia's International Intelligence Minister. Then we have Maria Ponce, from our Order of Great Fighters. Carlos Ruiz is third in command of the Vanguardia Sindicalismo, and of the Aztlan command structure."

Ruiz lit a cigar, and two of the Generals waved hands across their faces.

Sydenham laughed, “Your group has a missing tooth. No second in command, Mr. Davalillo? He’s dead, maybe?”

“The answer is yes--for the purpose of this discussion.” The Generals exchanged glances.

Sydenham said, “Let me be blunt about what is going on here. You’ve discovered that Mexico has too big of a stick for your romantic guerilla army. You are coming to the Pacific only because you know we’ve used our economic prowess to develop some of the most advanced cyber weaponry and technology in the world. You envision that our cyber weapon systems, with their economically paralyzing features, could turn the Aztlan tide against Mexico. Mr. Davalillo, you are desperate man.”

Ruiz stood. “How dare you insult Commander Davalillo, the man who set a world record for liberation and justice movements!”

“Sit down, Carlos!” Davalillo shouted. Then he smiled. “You are a genius, General Sydenham. I concede everything you just said, except the desperation comment. Let me be equally blunt. This is not a St. Augustine holiday; those are not fireworks crashing into your suburban buildings. Julio Carreon’s Rebel Alliance may never take total control of the PNR. But with his International backers and legions of domestic sympathizers, he can keep a civil war in the PNR going indefinitely. Draining morale, dragging down your economy, damage, disease, hundreds of body bags, and an increasing restive populace to control. Some day you may be a desperate man, General.”

“Just what could you possibly offer me, Mr. Davalillo?” Sydenham said contemptuously.

“Even with our stalled liberation offensive in Mexico, Aztlan still controls Yucatan and the massive oil deposits there. That has given Aztlan our own economic miracle. With all that cash, we have made deals with International arms traders for a huge cache of military equipment. It’s not the most advanced, but it’s massive in volume. We can deliver it anywhere in the world. It’s an exchange: more military resources for you to fight your rebels, in exchange for advanced cyber technology we would get for the Mexico liberation.”

“Your offer to us just makes your civil war scenario messier. It wouldn’t end it,” Sydenham said.

Davalillo leaned forward. “Here’s the ace: Consider the ease I was able to mine Tyrene, and target your leaders with snipers. Do you have any doubt that I have the capability to kill Julio Carreon and his entire cabinet in exile? It would be like.”— He grabbed Ruiz’s cigar and crushed it in his bare hand. “First, I deliver the military hardware to any harbor you choose, for stockpiling. Then we assassinate Carreon and his advisers. The Rebel Alliance, totally headless, is in disarray. Then you use our extra hardware to chase down the demoralized remnant of the guerillas like dogs.”

Sydenham thought for a moment. “How fast can you get your hardware to our shores?”

Naiad

“Here, you steady the weapon like this,” Angel Taveras showed Miyaro a semi-automatic

pistol. They stood at a target range, just outside the gates of the Roackaseen estate. “Go ahead, give it a try.

Miyaro squinted and fired. And missed the bullseye by a foot.

Taveras laughed. “Sometimes it’s just instinctual.” He took the weapon and BLAM! Hit the bullseye.

Miyaro shrugged, “Academics and the military don’t mix very well.”

“Go ahead and practice, Dr. Miyaro. Keep the pistol. I’ve got to check the workers at the field sites.”

Taveras pulled out a marijuana cigarette. He lit it and took a toke.

“Emile Roackaseen would approve of that?” Miyaro asked.

“As long as the business is going smooth and his daughter is safe, Mr. Roackaseen is happy. Since his wife died, he’s a pitbull of protection for his daughter. She’s all the bloodline he has left.”

With a wave, Taveras hopped into his jeep and disappeared down the highway.

Miyaro made the trek past the open gate and up the long driveway toward the mansion. Every so often he would stop and engage the Renland, and groan with frustration such he’s never felt about this advanced gadget.

Finally, he went into his room, locked the door, and programmed maximum encrypt. He paged General Andrews.

“It’s about time you called,” Andrews said over the Renland.

“The Renland has been malfunctioning since I got here. Never seen a Renland go down.”

There was a pause before Andrews spoke. “Jude, I mean Rene, we’ve been sabotaged. Someone has jammed the Renland GPS in the PNR.”

“Sir, I shouldn’t have called you.”

“No, the encryption and diversion properties still work. Our call is safe. The thing is, you can call me. But I can’t call you. The ball’s always in your court. We’re almost blind in the PNR. It’s back to stone age Intelligence,” Andrews said.

“Who on Earth can jam a Renland GPS?”

“Someone very high up with expertise in this technology. A very small cast of characters.”

“The same creep who set me up for a kill,” Miyaro said.

“I had to tell Bullock about this development, because he would expect me to know and report it.”

“Still got a bullseye on my back maybe, in paradise,” Miyaro said. “Bullock doesn’t know the rest, right?”

“No,” Andrews confirmed. “But now we know there is something diabolical coming down in the PNR. If God forbid there is a nuclear plot there and you can expose it, President Velasquez will hit the PNR with Viper missiles.”

Later that day, Miyaro saw Vonda gathering flowers in the rose garden lining the mansion. She wore an orange flowered dress, and that fantastic emerald necklace. She was with Roebuck, Roebuck’s long-haired, Chinese girlfriend Jing, and Liccardi. Roebuck saw Miyaro and trotted over to him.

“Vonda keeps planting the roses, and every three days we lay roses at her mother’s grave. Grab one and join us.”

Miyaro obliged, and joined the quiet procession. There was a fenced-in plot with gorgeous perennials surrounding a white tombstone rising to Miyaro’s waist. The first person to lay the fresh rose was, as always, Vonda. Then came Roebuck, Jing, and finally, Liccardi. When Liccardi turned around, Miyaro saw him brandishing an M-18, and with his dirty blonde hair pinned in a small tail in the back—all of which accentuated Liccardi’s determined, warlord facial expression.

Vonda patted Miyaro’s shoulder with appreciation. Even Liccardi nodded his approval and gave Miyaro’s shoulder a squeeze. And it hurt just a little.

As they headed toward the house, Vonda locked her arm with Miyaro’s.

“My fascination with America began after my junior year in high school,” Vonda shared. “With Papa always so busy, Mama took me on a summer long trip. Let’s see, Orlando, San Francisco, New York, Washington, the national parks. I cherished every minute of it. I’ve been studying your country ever since, and I love sharing my research with the TU students. I shall go back to America some day—and see if there is any place that compares to Tyrene’s beauty.”

“In Boston, we’ve got plenty of cold weather. The closest Boston ever came to Tyrene was back in my college fraternity days, when we drove to Florida, dug up a palm tree, and planted it right in Harvard Yard.”

Vonda laughed. "My next American trip will only be a visit. My home is Tyrene until I die—God's gift to humanity. Maybe you shall be persuaded to stay in Tyrene for a long time, Dr. Miyaro."

Up ahead stood Emile Roackaseen. The person standing next to him made Miyaro stop cold; this older, lumbering man with tweed suit, large nose and clumpy hair.

Emile said, "Mr. Miyaro, this is Dr. Mario Pendergrass, on the physics staff at Tyrene University."

Vonda greeted Pendergrass with a little bow.

"Ah, your Korean side always comes out around me, Vonda," Pendergrass said.

"An nyoung, Dr. Pendergrass," Vonda said, beaming. She reached into her shoulder bag. "I prepared this for you. A written letter of appreciation, personal, from me. Thank you so much for your research on peaceful and humanitarian uses for nuclear power."

Pendergrass took it and said, "Dr. Miyaro! I have read your accounts. The circus master out to tame the wild horses." His voice was almost giddy. "Let's have a taste of tea together some day, to share some brain orgasms."

"Radioactive tea. With neutron sugar. My favorite." Miyaro tried to be cute.

Liccardi said with his crocodile smile, "Dr. Miyaro will not be shy about asking about your research, Professor Pendergrass. A man of action we really like around here."

Afterward, Miyaro excused himself and retired to his room. He stared at the wall, fixating on

rapid-fire frightening developments. Roebuck had to knock twice before Miyaro perked up.

Roebuck sat next to the desk where Miyaro was sitting.

“You need to hear this: Vonda adores you, but only as a favorite uncle and mentor. That’s just in case you got romance bugs in your eyes, ole chap.

“Vonda is spoken for,” he continued. “Has been for years. I rather like you, so I’ll tell you more than I probably should.

“Emile Roackaseen’s number one business client is an Argentinian baron named Luis Mendez. They are like blood brothers; nothing will separate them. Luis has a son named Lauro. The Roackaseens and the Mendezes used to spend several weeks a year together. We’d fly to Buenos Aires, and they would fly to the PNR. As an adopted Roackaseen, I can say from personal experience that Lauro Mendez and Vonda fell madly in love. Mee Hye was a little cool on the idea, but Emile, Luis Mendez and Ms. Mendez wanted them both to get married. Lauro and Vonda were designated mates, an arranged relationship, until Vonda’s junior year in college. She studied in Seoul, Korea, using her mother’s connections, and Lauro would visit her all the time.”

“Where is Lauro Mendez?”

“This is where I get brassed off about it. Lauro was a great guy, respectful, fun to be around. But he had this knack for adventure. He envisioned himself a hero agent of sorts. While Vonda was in college, he would often chase after International criminals and terrorists, as a freelancer using the millions of dollars of Mendez money at his Dad’s

disposal. Finally, he was recruited by the American CIA.

“One day he wrote letters to his parents and Vonda, saying he had found his life calling, and had to disappear into the CIA deep cover underworld. He apologized profusely to Vonda, but said that God had given him duty as terrorist-hunter. To Vonda, he said that he still loved her deeply, and one day after a few years, when God released him from his heroic mission, he would surprise Vonda with an emerald ring cast in gold, with her name carved on it. Vonda still has that letter from Lauro framed. The emerald necklace we see on Vonda was a gift from Lauro, stating his undying love for her.”

“Do Emile and Luis Mendez still visit each other?”

“Yes, but not as much since Mee-Hye passed. It is a might awkward since no one knows where Lauro is. But make no mistake: The Roackaseen-Mendez bond is sacred, and the marriage between Vonda and Lauro will bind those families together forever.”

Miyaro squinted. “If Vonda does not go along with this arranged marriage—which may not happen since the future husband has disappeared—Emile may go as far as cutting off her inheritance?”

“Professor, you’re not getting this,” Roebuck said dourly. “Vonda expects Lauro Mendez to come riding in on his white horse--if not this year, then the next. These are not ordinary people. They live in a galaxy world that blokes of middle class upbringing like you and I cannot even fathom. Lauro was so serious that he cut his palm and rubbed blood on the letter to Vonda, to underscore the seriousness of his promise.”

Tyrene University

The next morning Miyaro mused about yesterday being the worst day of his life, and did some extra Bible reading about trials and lights at the end of the tunnel. And as if by providence from God, he got a major uplift.

His cell phone rang. At least something worked. Vonda was on the other line.

“Good morning, Dr. Miyaro!” Came her bright enthusiasm. “I was wondering: our International Affairs Department is holding a World Events Forum at the Tyrene U. auditorium. As a faculty member I have a major say in the agenda. I would be deeply honored if you would be the keynote speaker. The audience will be students, faculty, staff, and it’s open to the public. Please say anything you want: your team successes, your reconciliation theories. You will deeply move so many people! Next Thursday night.”

“For you Princess, of course. And one more thing. Did your father gave me permission to use one of his vehicles?”

“It’s okay to use any car that’s available. Extra keys are in the catamaran shed, the silver box.”

Miyaro found the special parking pass used in the Roackaseen vehicles. Old fashioned code conversation on a cell phone set up a liaison with Lansford at the familiar Tyrene pier. They rested against one of the thick posts, while wearing bright patterned beach shirts.

Miyaro said, “Network and visual are supposedly the only functions dead on the Renland.

The phone hijack app may still work, and shake out a lead on our rogue nuclear scientist.”

“I’ve never seen that function in action”, Lansford said. “I imagine it would scare the crap out of the receiver of that call.”

“Let’s find out.” Miyaro took some time to research a database on the pocket Renland. “Okay, Pendergrass, Mario, Tyrene PNR; the one and only. We’re good.” He handed her a paper with handwritten notes. “Feel free to ad-lib on this script.”

“Just a taste of the grief Intel officers once had to go through,” Lansford said.

“It may take two or three visits, Belinda. When I make contact with him, I’ll flag your Renland. Make the call exactly five minutes later.”

Miyaro found the reserved parking space at Tyrene U. The Physics Department was an imposing stone building.

2:00 PM. Two rather imposing computer machines faced Miyaro as he walked in. There was a gentle whirring sound. Pendergrass sat in a chair in front. To Miyaro, his white lab coat only highlighted the shadiness. Miyaro was relieved to see a cell phone in his belt pocket.

Pendergrass almost tripped, recognizing Miyaro. “You came for your radioactive tea? Sorry, I don’t have neutron sugar; only electron honey.”

“No tea, thanks. Wow, I didn’t know they made computers that big anymore.”

“Here for nuclear research? Out of your expertise, one would think,” Pendergrass said in scattery voice, one eye squinted.

“Just a friendly visit. You’re one of the few people I know on this campus.”

“Well, the machine on the left is Fransesca, and the machine to the right is Juanita. These are specially-fitted for the unique research we are doing here. Right now, Francesca is a real witch, and will get a butt-kicking soon if she doesn’t function better.”

**“What kind of research are you doing?”
Miyaro tried to make his voice sound innocent.**

**“Liccardi warned me you’d be here snooping around. What kind of derelict goes into your kind of Profession, anyway? Playing whack-a-mole, hopelessly trying to preach kumbaya with International criminal gangs and Imperialists forever popping up to spoil your dream. What will be the answer for your International excursions when streetcorner shmoes can get access to pint-sized nuclear bombs as easily as smuggling in a carton of cigarettes?—Buhhhhh! Kehhhhh!”
Miyaro leaned forward, and quickly realized that Pendergrass’s throat was simulating a nuclear explosion. Pendergrass laughed, to signal it was all a big joke.**

Miyaro said, “Actually, I’m very interested in nuclear issues for professional and academic reasons. New nuclear weapon technology and proliferation dramatically impact our research and applications for International intervention teams.”

“These machines are perfecting the synergy of nuclear energy and cyber-science, for the most efficient economic and commercial applications. I would explain it to you in more detail, but it would be like explaining calculus to a kindergardener. You are indeed a Professional derelict, Dr. Miyaro, but a

likeable one. So let's have lunch later and educate me on your multinational negotiation techniques."

There came a loud squawking sound from Pendergrass's cell. It startled him such that he briefly dropped it on the floor. It was a deep-voiced alien sound, "Pendergrass you rascal! Big brother has exposed you!" Over and over again.

"I can't shut it off!"

Miyaro took the phone. "What do you mean? Of course you can"—he frantically pushed the button. "You're right," he said as the twilight zone voice kept on:

"You are the scum of the Earth with your nuclear bomb plot, Pendergrass! You're exposed. We know everything about you, but you will never find us."

"Can you hear me?" Pendergrass asked.

"Can I hear you? I know how many times you peed yesterday. Your technology is sand compared to ours. You will be exposed as the nuclear terrorist you are, and will be hunted like a dog by every authority."

"If you want to shut me down, why didn't you just do it?"

"Smart question, Mr. Pendergrass. We have similar capabilities. The difference is, we are protected and secret. You are exposed. So you will have to pay us for your silence."

"I still don't know what you are talking about. What nukes?"

"Don't be cute. Right now we are texting you the address, the date and time. You bring \$100,000, untraceable cash. That is the price of our silence. If you miss the date, you will be an instant

International fugitive—and Mr. Rene Miyaro, we know you have been meeting with him.”

“Wait, I have nothing to do with him. I just met him!”

“Too bad; next time, you should keep track of the company you keep. Your colleagues will blackball you when they discover you are cavorting with a nuclear terrorist.”

“You’re crazy.”

“Our silence will cost you \$10,000, Miyaro.”

The phone went dead. “I don’t know who you ticked off in your research,” Miyaro said. “But I’ve done nothing wrong, and I assume you haven’t either. That’s obviously a sophisticated criminal extortion group, and with my connection to Roackaseen, I’ll make sure this is reported to the highest authorities of the PNR.” Miyaro handed a card to Pendergrass. “Please call me if we need to talk more about this.--You jerks will never get a dime from me!” Miyaro yelled as he walked out.

Later, in a secluded part of a Tyrene beach, Miyaro took the pocket Renland to his mouth. “General, I hope I didn’t wake you with the time difference.”

“I’ve got an alert set 24-7 just for you. We can’t afford any cracks on this project. Potential stakes are enormous.”

“We just delivered the phone hijack trick to Pendergrass. Belinda was magnificent.”

“We’ve got backup coming in for you,” Andrews said. “Hardware pros just flew into Tyrene under good cover. You and Belinda will get their contact info.”

“And if Pendergrass takes the bait”—

“Don’t try to handle it yourself. Just call it in. We’ll see what Pendergrass brings to the location, money or muscle? Whose money will he gather for the payoff? What kind of communication dynamics will your trick provoke? Where will he lead us?”

Vonda had a late afternoon class. As he approached the International Affairs building, his heart pumped faster at thoughts of Vonda. He took deep breaths to control impulses he had never felt so strongly.

Miyaro found a quiet hallway. Faint murmurs sounded from connecting classrooms. He recognized Vonda’s voice down the hall on the right. The sign on the third door read INTRO TO AMERICAN CULTURE.

He poked his head inside, and found a classroom filled with about 40 multi-ethnic students. At the head of the room stood a chalkboard and a huge map of the United States. Vonda, wearing a bright green dress, faced to the side while addressing a student.

“Please give it here, Kim,” Vonda said to a male student. The student reluctantly deposited a rolled-up cloth into Vonda’s hands.

Vonda returned to the head of the class and froze for a second upon seeing Miyaro. There was a flash of a smile. Then Vonda stretched out a wrinkled blue PNR flag representing the Sydenham government.

“I do not expect this to ever happen again. I think too highly of you all,” Vonda lectured.

“I don’t see any harm in removing a flag,” the male student said.

“It’s symbolic. The government considers it an insult,” Vonda continued.

A different woman student spoke, “But isn’t freedom of expression an important American value you are teaching, Ms. Roackaseen, as part of this American studies curriculum?”

“Good question, Madam Instructor,” Miyaro called wryly from the back.

Vonda wore a smile of fascination. Then she said, “We shall exhibit freedom of expression in this class by hanging our flag on the wall. Kim, could you please do it?”

Vonda pulled down a second map identical to the first one; except the names of the cities were deleted. “Come on now, you shall all become experts,” Vonda encouraged. A student called out as she pointed to a city. “San Diego, not Los Angeles. Look closer,” Vonda corrected.

“Denver...Chicago...Seattle,” several students answered in response to her roving finger. She zeroed in on an Arizona city. There was hesitation; then some feeble responses.

“That’s TOO-SAHN. Not TUCK-SON,” Vonda said amidst laughter.

Miyaro, enjoying this discourse, waved his hand. “Question, Ms. Roackaseen. What is the largest manganese manufacturing city in the USA?”

“Tyrene. Because soon all of America’s manganese will be imported,” Vonda answered playfully. Then she extended her arm. “Students, we have with us a very distinguished American from Harvard USA, a world expert on foreign affairs, Dr. Rene Miyaro. You will be hearing valuable lessons from him soon.”

“It’s a shame the map doesn’t go further down to South America,” Miyaro said. “Then you could show them the home town of a very distinguished business family with ties to the PNR: Luis and Lauro Mendez.”

He instantly craved her reaction.

“Huh?” Her brown eyes became taut.

“Listen to her. She’s a good teacher and a better person. I’ll let you continue.” Miyaro waved them away.

After the class, Vonda walked into the International Affairs front office and asked a plump Native secretary, “Dean Trottier, please?” The secretary pointed to the adjacent building.

Vonda was dazed, walking out into the university yard. She sat next to a row of statue fountains, and covered her face. Then she looked at her hands wet with tears. She walked through the next gray-stone building almost aimlessly. Finally she leaned back against the hallway, eyes closed.

Her cell rang. “Vonda?” It was Miyaro calling. “I want to sincerely apologize for my insensitive comment in your class. It was a very careless and reckless abuse of the trust handed to me on a sensitive family matter. I cannot imagine how much I hurt you. I feel very bad. Can’t believe how stupid I was. I am an energetic extrovert, and sometimes careless words just flow out. Sometimes we let our guard down around people we really like. Again, I am truly sorry. I hurt with you.” Vonda met his silence with hers, as she bit her lip. “Vonda, please forgive me.”

“If people accept you enough to share family information, it’s okay to discuss it,” Vonda said. “It’s an emotional family issue, and not your fault at

all. But I am moved by the depth of your apology. It's the most powerful apology I've ever heard, and I'm touched by your sensitivity. I love you—I mean, I love how you're just a cherished part of our family.”

“Thank you. It won't happen again.”

He disconnected. Then Vonda called him back. “Thank you, Rene. You always have a way of making me feel better.”

While searching for Dean Trottier, Vonda came upon a courtyard enclosed by four buildings. There were steel tables and chairs, and large opened umbrellas mounted on the tables. Two students stood off to the right, one wearing a long ponytail.

Vonda stepped into the courtyard and approached the students. She heard their soft chants,” LIBERTY! LIBERTY!” They stopped at Vonda's approach.

“Have you seen Dean Trottier?” She asked. Then she beheld a mutilated PNR flag. There was also a puppet replica of General Sydenham; the neck strangled by a rope.

“I know who her father is,” the pony-tailed student said nervously to the other student. “Please don't let word of this get back.”

“I just need Dean Trottier,” she said softly. The students ran out of the courtyard, leaving the battered flag and puppet effigy behind.

Vonda finally got her appointment with Dean Trottier that evening. As she waited, a semi-bald Army Lieutenant with blue uniform and insignia approached her.

“I am very sorry to trouble you, Ms. Roackaseen,” the Lieutenant said. “We've gotten credible reports about radical students stirring up

trouble on this campus. Burning flags, hanging effigies, other acts of sedition against our government. Have you seen anything like that within the past week?"

"Um"—Vonda pinched her lips together in apparent deep thought. "Ah, nothing I can think of. Sorry I can't help you, Lieutenant."

Miyaro sat on a bench overlooking the sea; the dusk leaving just a few stragglers and hard core surfers. Thoughts of Vonda gripped his mind. There was an acute awareness of his surroundings. Gusts of winds flapped the palm branches. The sea was mean, full of chops and foam. Swirling dark storm clouds hovered from the ocean. Miyaro sensed that Tyrene was in for more than one storm. Then without warning, a Biblical Scripture came to him. It was Matthew 24 paraphrased, Jesus speaking: "Do you see all these beautiful buildings? Every one will be thrown down." Long lightning bolts streaked the horizon, followed by rumbles of thunder.

Tyrene Beach

The next morning as Miyaro awoke in the Naiad, Tyrene's brilliant sunshine had returned. He took the Renland to call General Andrews. Evening in Washington DC.

"General, no evidence of movement from Pendergrass or close associates," Miyaro reported.

Andrews answered, "We've got some good Headquarters intel for you, Rene. First, Syed Mohammed: He is President Velasquez's unofficial liaison to our Islamic nation allies. Syed has

apparently, with the President's blessing, convinced two of the moderate Muslim nations to send aid to Julio Carreon's Rebel Alliance. Syed has proved himself very proficient. Expect the civil war where you are to heat up during the next couple weeks."

"Intel on Liccardi?"

"Yeah, your bad dude Crococuda," Andrews laughed. "Eumir Liccardi is from Italy. But he was raised in a family of diplomats and lived ten years in Merrifield and Annandale, Virginia. He went to Annandale High School through his sophomore year. He's fluent in English, Italian and Spanish. He went to the Italian Military Academy, and was fast-tracked to the rank of Colonel at a very young age. Very aggressive leadership abilities, and machismo."

"I'll second that," Miyaro said.

"He had a wife and two young daughters. They took a vacation excursion to Cancun without him. Terrorists brought down the plane, and all 139 occupants died, including Liccardi's family. That changed the direction of his life. He moved to Nicaragua before Aztlan ate it up, and served as a paid military advisor to the Nicaraguan government. Here's the interesting part. He was on Agency payroll."

"Liccardi a CIA agent?" Miyaro asked.

"A foreign proprietary contractor. Liccardi's emphasis as a military advisor was to enroll Nicaragua in the International effort against Islamic terrorism."

"So Liccardi had contact with Caliphate people at some level."

"You can say that," Andrews relayed. "Liccardi personally killed five Islamic Jihadists. Then he vanished. Right off the face of the planet."

Later, Miyaro saw people stirring in the Naiad driveway. Everyone had beach attire. There was Vonda, Taveras, Roebuck, and Jing. Taveras noticed Miyaro, and ran quickly in the house to a clothes drawer. He grabbed four colorful surfing suits and tossed them to Miyaro.

“Choose one, Professor,” Taveras said. “Beach day is an official Roackaseen holiday. No one works, except the Mister.”

A few minutes later, Miyaro came out with a colorful, knee-length red and white bathing suit.

One of the garage doors opened, and a \$150,000 Tyger Cat sportscar pulled out. The car stopped, and Emile Roackaseen jumped out, obviously agitated. The fast pace of this imposing man and flashing medal from the chest came at Miyaro as an instant assault. Emile stopped and stared at Vonda in her blue bikini, and Miyaro next to her with his surfing attire.

“Vonda! You have nothing more decent to wear?”

“Sorry, Papa.”

“And Mr. Miyaro. Do you fashion yourself as Vonda’s personal bodyguard? That’s what we have Taveras for.”

“I’m not impressed with Mr. Taveras’s capabilities.” Everyone laughed except Emile.

“I learned next week that you, Mr. Miyaro, will be speaking at the Tyrene U. auditorium, spouting your rebellious, anti-government propaganda.—And Vonda, this was your idea!”

“I have no authority,” Vonda said demurely. “Dean Trottier approved Rene.”

“Rene! When did that start?” Emile bellowed.

Vonda firmed her posture. “Papa, I will address my friends any way I choose.”

“I need a private word with you, Mr. Miyaro,” said Emile.

Miyaro sighed deeply and followed Emile to the garage doors. “Mr. Miyaro, if I ever find out that you’ve touched Vonda in any inappropriate way, you will be banished from the Roackaseen Naiad permanently. With your insults against our government I doubt that anyone else in Tyrene will subsidize your stay here. Even your Harvard salary won’t cover the Tyrene rents, so you will be banished to a backwater village.”

Miyaro didn’t blink. “Mr. Roackaseen, you have gone to great lengths to show me the fairness and compassion of your government and country. Making a threat on the basis of a nonexistent wrong, makes a mockery out of everything you’ve stood for so far—Now, your apology is accepted.”

Miyaro walked away, leaving Emile Roackaseen still in his tracks.

Taveras drove one Tyger Cat, and Vonda drove the other one, leaving early. Miyaro rode with Taveras, who threw the beach gear into the back seat. Taveras’s hairy body was interrupted only by a black bathing suit. The Tyger Cat drove past the open sun gate and roared down the paved road.

Taveras was all smiles with dark glasses and dreds. Jet black clouds were suddenly streaking their way. At first, Miyaro thought a tornado was overtaking them; the whole sky in front of them, all the way to the mountains, darkened such that evening seemed imminent. The lightning flashed

every couple of seconds. Then the wind stirred, bending the pine and palm branches, and making the tall grass dance in the fields.

Taveras made a couple of sudden turns. “This shortcut is no fun except when it rains, man,” Taveras said in his Jamaican accent.

The last thing Miyaro remembered was a lily field, until water slammed against the Tyger Cat like brick wall. Taveras had difficulty keeping the car out of the lilies. And Taveras was loving it, whooping with every bump. Low branches thunked against the sports car. The dirt road quickly became a quagmire.

The squall passed in about 15 minutes, and soon they were on a wide road flanked by fenced-in stone homes, and an occasional upscale store. Taveras reached in the seat behind him, and grabbed a 152 mm gun.

“That on the beach? You plan to shoot some stingrays?” Miyaro razzed.

“This is my passport. It speaks, brother. I learned to use this baby in Kingston, where my father struggled in a food store. Packing fruit with flies and mosquitos and fighting off occasional rascals who would steal your body, soul, and the last dime out of your pocket.

“When Paps died they approved me for immigration here. Mr. Roackaseen hired me for security, because he knew I had mastered these babies,” he said, shaking the 152mm in his hand. “I gained his trust, and extended that trust, man, to the Roackaseen workers. They got my back because they know I have theirs. Mr. Roackaseen, I’d both kill and die for him. He cares about his people because he knows people is how is business works.”

Taveras lit up a marijuana cigarette. “Want a toke?”

“No thanks. You have Davey and Vonda into weed?”

Taveras laughed. “Davey will toke once in a blue moon. But Vonda—she tried it once, and I’ll never forget that expression on her face as she spit it out.”

Miyaro decided to get a little bold. “Your boss, Mr. Emile: he seems a little polished for Sydenham and his bloody hammer.”

Taveras smiled over his reefer. “Ain’t goin there, man.”

The beach was on the fringes of Tyrene city and relatively free of development or people. A wildlife preserve sat to the left. This beach was free of charge, with plenty of parking. Then, only people inside the checkpoint wall could use it.

Miyaro felt like a child again as he ran to the top of a tall dune and gazed down the sloping beach for 200 yards until it met the sea. No debris appeared anywhere, and the sand was dark-colored because of the hard rain. Miyaro felt the ocean’s mist from the swirling white water of the ocean. The waves rose to swells of over ten feet, but then flattened out on the right because of a protective coral reef. There were ample sailboats in the sea to the right, under the protection of the reef. But in front of them, and on the left, there were no recreational boats challenging the roaring Pacific Ocean.

Roebuck and Jing beckoned to them from a palm grove to their left. Taveras, wearing his automatic rifle, joined them along with Miyaro.

“Sydenham drafts young kids into his army and sometimes they can get drunk and mean and give you problems. When they see me with my passport, they back off,” Taveras explained.

Miyaro saw Vonda near the waterfront. The water from each spent wave would kiss her feet and retreat to the sea. Miyaro ran down to meet her—and saw her with the striking emerald necklace over the bikini.

Vonda laughed, “I put this on in front of Papa before he left. He calms down every time he sees this on me.”

“Like the harp that David would play to calm King Saul; a story from the Old Testament.”

“That’s a nice reference, because the Roackaseen-Mendez connection goes back almost as far—well, three generations, anyway,” Vonda said. “Lauro told me in a letter that he had to do undercover secret agent work, for America, for a few years. Part of the American culture is secret agents changing their appearance, right? When he shows up, will I even recognize him?”

Miyaro said, “Then I could tell you that I am Lauro Mendez...how would you know, with all the robotics and personality-bending technology?”

Vonda slapped his shoulder. “Okay, Mr. Lauro Pretender: Where is your monogrammed emerald ring?”

“Okay, I confess: I checked all of the pawn shops in Tyrene, but couldn’t find any.”

“Caught you twice, Rene. Tyrene doesn’t have pawn shops.” Vonda gazed up at him. “I believe Lauro will come back soon.”

“The man you love must be your choice, not a family heirloom,” Miyaro said.

Vonda stopped walking. “If you stopped your peacekeeping, the world would be more brutal because of your amazing gift. If I refused to consummate this marriage, my world would die. I would cease to be a Roackaseen.”

“By whose expectation? Yours?”

“I was only an adolescent when we first visited Argentina. Lauro was in his twenties, and always respectful, kind, never taking advantage of me, physically or other ways. Rene, this is to your honor. Until Lauro comes, would you mind—oh how do I say this—be a temporary guardian angel, spiritual advisor, close companion?”

“The American term for that is placeholder.”

“I’m so sorry. That really was brutally selfish of me. It’s my turn to ask for forgiveness, Rene.”

“For you, Princess, of course.” She kissed him on the cheek.

Miyaro and Vonda frolicked in the ocean water, but only in the suds, well in front of the dangerous wave breaks. They took turns splashing each other. Then Taveras and Roebuck called them out.

“Boat ride time,” Taveras said. Jing made a circling motion around her temple, to signal it is crazy taking a boat out in this turbulent ocean. Vonda gave Jing the emerald necklace for safekeeping.

The small marina was an inlet from the sea, down to the right. There was an assortment of speedboats.

Two uniformed soldiers guarded the dock as Taveras examined the boats. They simultaneously beckoned and smiled to Taveras.

“Come on, Angel,” one soldier cajoled. “You know the Provincial restrictions about loaded firearms in Tyrene city proper.”

“Sure. But it will take more than two to take it from me.”

“Angel, you gone daft?” Roebuck asked with a nervous laugh.

“Angel, please lay your gun down,” Vonda pleaded. Instead, he tossed the weapon into one of the cockpits of a runabout speedboat. Roebuck warily took care of payment with the manager at the dockhead.

Vonda clasped her hands together as a pleading gesture. “No harm,” she said with a sheepish smile to the soldiers.

“We let him pass only because you’re with him,” the stern soldier said. “You need to talk to him, Ma’am.”

Taveras took one boat, and Roebuck commandeered a second boat, with Miyaro and Vonda in the back; Vonda hugging his chest. Two purring engines exploded into loud grinding sounds. Both boats ripped through the placid protected sea and headed for the reef, cutting wakes in the water. Taveras opened his engine to full throttle, racing past some small sailboats and drawing their ire.

“Sorry!” Taveras called, and veered his boat away from the crowds. The 100-hp motor together with the tunnel hull and the long narrow bow transformed the fiberglass contraptions into high-speed rockets, barely touching the water. The sea rushed past both boats like a torrential flood. Both boats swerved to the right in unison—and everyone yelped when they narrowly escaped head-on collisions with rapidly-approaching speedboats.

Terror struck like a lightning bolt. The two speedboats, each transporting a gunman, turned rapidly toward Roebuck's runabout. Instinctively, everyone in Roebuck's boat turned and saw the aimed rifle barrels. Then they heard the shots hitting the fiberglass. Miyaro turned and covered Vonda's head and ducked as low as he could.

Roebuck veered hard to his left, toward the reef, to escape this sudden horror show. Then he swerved left again at the approach of the reef. The engine was full throttle as he sped along inside the reef. The two assault boats remained in hot pursuit.

"Come on! Leg it!" Roebuck yelled at his boat. Then he shimmied the boat, to dodge any bullets coming at them.

He was quickly running out of reef. The tip of the coral shoal was only a hundred feet away. After that, it was no man's land—the rough sea. The attacking speedboats were gaining the inside track. Roebuck had to speed his boat away from the calm, reef-protected waters.

They heard shots but didn't dare look up. Behind them, Taveras's boat was stationary, and his gun was aimed. The two attacking boats were veering out of control because Taveras had shot all four of the attackers.

Roebuck was too much in panic mode to notice. Now the breakers, once a faint glow on a distant horizon, were whitecapped mountains. The churning whitewater rushed toward them as if a dam had burst. They screamed at the roller coaster ride from an angry sea. Unmercifully, the runabout was sucked into the pipeline of a mammoth 13 foot breaker and then crushed by a torrent of white water that sent spray another ten feet into the air. The stern of the boat bolted from the sea. The

swirling white water tossed the boat around like a surfboard. The cross-currents sandwiched the boat, smashing it ruthlessly from both sides.

Roebuck, not a good swimmer, flailed his way toward shore in the rough water. By the time he waded through the whitewater, a small crowd had gathered on the beach. The boat moved quickly in the swirling current toward the shore. Onlookers pointed to a body prone in the water, and another swimmer reaching it.

Miyaro, on the beach side of the breakers, was able to stand and lift Vonda out of the water. He ran with her in his arms, and set her down delicately on the beach.

“She’s alive!” Roebuck cried exuberantly, as the crowd gathered closer.

Miyaro started to perform CPR. Vonda rolled to the side and started wheezing, coughing, spewing salt water. By this time soldiers had been alerted, and ran frantically to the scene. A couple onlookers banged on Vonda’s back. The soldiers pushed them away, and sat Vonda up, as she continued coughing, gasping.

A fully-uniformed Colonel called out, “Precious commodity! Be careful.”

Eight soldiers whisked Vonda off the beach, as Miyaro, Roebuck and Jing followed. They set her gently in the back of a jeep.

“Get her immediately to the St. Marks Hospital,” the Colonel instructed.

“No, I’m fine,” Vonda said.

Taveras ran up from the beach, brandishing his rifle. “I got those suckers.” he said to the soldiers. “Like my ultimate baseball hero Willie Mays, I’m four for four.”

“The bodies are still in the water,” a soldier volunteered. Verification came from about a hundred captivated beachgoers, peering out at the empty boats and human flotations. Not what they came to Tyrene to see.

“Colonel, you need to hear this,” a uniformed Sergeant spoke up. “Our nation is facing a difficult period because of rebel activity. This man, Rene Miyaro, International agitator and someone considered a radical in his own country, is here to stir up the traitors. And the Roackaseens, too. We need keep a close eye on that family.”

The Colonel walked up and gave the Sergeant a hard slap. “How dare you insult the First Family of this great Republic! Take him to the brig!” The other soldiers immediately grabbed him and roughly dragged him away.

“Ms. Roackaseen, on behalf of the PNR High Command, I extend my deepest apologies for the physical and verbal assaults you have endured today. I am ordering an investigation of that Sergeant and his inflammatory words, and his possible connection to those attack dogs floating out there on Coral Beach. If I find a link, I will personally hand you a rifle, Ms. Roackaseen, and give you my personal permission to execute him.”

Vonda smiled weakly. “Thank you, Colonel. But I shall decline the offer.”

The Colonel slapped Taveras’s shoulder. “Great work, Angel.”

Miyaro declined to say that the shots fired in the ocean were probably meant for him.

Naiad

The next morning, Miyaro finished the delicious keke vai breakfast that Vonda had personally brought to him. Emile, Vonda, Taveras and two house servants were in the anteroom, where a huge TV, with volume turned up loudly, showed images of people all over the PNR being dragged out of their homes by soldiers. The female announcer said:

“In announcing the latest crackdown against people disrupting established government laws, the High Command said that yesterday 79 persons charged with crimes against the State were referred to the Adjudicator Judge Liccardi.”

As the two house servants watched the TV report with almost hypnotic interest, Vonda sat between them and wrapped her arms around both of the women. Emile, reading a newspaper with seeming disinterest, stirred and rose from his chair when he noticed Miyaro.

“Everyone, I need your immediate attention. Angel, turn off the television. And where’s Roebuck? This is a critical Roackaseen affair.”

“Davey!” Taveras called loudly. He shrugged.

“As a result of that disgusting scene involving criminal elements of the PNR High Command, I am asking General Gough Sydenham for an official nationwide investigation into the deliberate attempt to murder my daughter and David Roebuck, an adopted member of our Roackaseen family.”

“If you’re looking for government crimes, you should look at the highest places of this regime,” Miyaro said. “The systemic paranoia we are witnessing usually comes from people desperately fearing a loss of control. When the dam finally

breaks, people will have to decide what side they're on."

"Enough, Mr. Miyaro. I'll get to you later. I acknowledge the heroism of Angel Taveras for averting this tragedy. Without his quick and efficient actions"—Emile's voice cracked—"My daughter would not be alive."

"What you hired me for, sir. Me and my passport." He tapped the 152 mm rifle slung over his shoulder. "Vonda was so calm through it all. What do you remember about yesterday, my sister?"

"It was like a blink," Vonda said. "I remember us running in the water, and these protective arms over me, as if saying, nothing will harm you; it wasn't my time to die. It got violent for a few seconds, and I got dizzy from banging on my head. Next thing, I'm on the beach struggling to breath. I am forever grateful to Rene and Angel."

"Mr. Taveras," Emile continued, "Whatever your employment status here, even if you decide to leave us, you will never, for the rest of your life, have to worry about paying for any living expenses, because of your amazing service to my family."

"On the subject of ample finances, Papa," Vonda said, "Those goodwill picnics and friendship parties with the Native and poor villages outside Tyrene are great. But more is needed. All those fancy doctors in Tyrene. They need to be out in those communities some of the time, addressing critical health challenges. Papa, you have the power to make that happen."

"Now, Mr. Miyaro," Emile continued, ignoring his daughter. "I apologize for my failing to realize you are not threat to the Roackaseens, and in fact, possess an attitude of friendship and loyalty to

us. I thank you most deeply for your role in saving Vonda's life. You, too, will receive ample financial reward."

"Sir, keep all the money you are offering me, and instead take a deep look at the images we saw on that screen, and consider there are family members of those handcuffed victims who care just as much about them as you care for Vonda. Please also consider the origin of all love; how God could love each of us so much, that He sent his son to a tortuous death on the cross and resurrection to save us in spite of our sins. Please consider, sir, how God wants us to respond to that perfect love in how we treat the precious people He created. Please imagine Vonda in those handcuffs, and how you would respond. That is your gift to me."

Miyaro halted his words at the sound of pounding and shattering in the back of the house. Roebuck shrieked. Vonda ran to him.

A minute later, she reappeared with a desperate expression. "They arrested Jing and sent her to Mr. Liccardi. He's already assigned her to the prison camps."

Roebuck ran past them, punching the wall along the way. He turned toward the garage area.

Vonda got down on her knees in front of her father. "Please, I beg you. Intervene and stop this."

"I will talk to Liccardi."

"And Papa—it's not just Jing."

"I said I'll talk to Liccardi!" He boomed. "Now bring Roebuck back here. We have a client meeting at noon."

Vonda ran out to the driveway. But one of the Tyger Cats was already roaring down the driveway toward the gate.

Bunkers

Roebuck was blinded by the one-mission force propelling him. The Tyger Cat ran some red lights on the way to downtown Tyrene. The Tyrene Headquarters of the High Command was a prominent, three story gray stone building, four blocks from the ocean. A smaller white stone building sat off to the left, with a carved sign, OFFICE OF THE JUDGE ADJUDICATOR. A wall of security surrounded these buildings, including checkpoints on the roads.

Roebuck drove his sportscar right up to the checkpoint. “Why don’t you blokes move those blasted hunks out of the street!” He yelled.

“Mr. Roebuck?” A familiar portly Captain confronted him. “Calm down son, right now.”

“You stupid fools. You aren’t going to get away with this stuff anymore, you hear me? You take me to Liccardi! Now!”

“Call Mr. Roackaseen.” The Captain instructed one of his soldiers. “Mr. Roebuck, if you weren’t a Roackseen and talking to me like that--whatever you’ve been drinking, son, for your own good you need to be gone before you’re in chicken wire.”

Leaving was not an option. He calmly got into the Tyger Cat, backed it up a few feet—and then propelled the car toward the checkpoint, crashing into one of the jeeps and knocking it sideways. Soldiers ran around the twisted metal and dragged Roebuck, bloody face and all, out of the sportscar.

“Okay, boy, you want Liccardi? We’re giving him to you. Enjoy the remainder of your life.”

Two army guys dragged him hard such that his knees scraped the pavement. By now there was a commotion; soldiers running into the white building. They dragged Roebuck up the white steps. A security contingent of 20 gathered outside the tall brass entrance door.

Roebuck never had to go inside. Liccardi, wearing a neat blue suit, stepped outside to meet him.

“Where’s Jing?” Roebuck shouted. “How could you? She’s just a quiet little numbers expert, kind to everyone.”

Roebuck’s eyes burned from the blood from his forehead gash.

Liccardi threw him a handkerchief from his pocket. “Here, clear your eyes, Davey. Maybe it’ll clear your brain. Your girlfriend was caught with incendiary literature against our government. I will not give her special treatment just because of special connections to the Roackaseen family.”

“Liccardi, you’re a monster. Everything people say about you is true.”

“This is your last chance to listen to reason. When people are caught with evidence of hostile intent against our leadership, do you expect us to invite them in for tea? This Republic flourishes because of order, not anarchy!”

Roebuck trembled with rage. “All I want to do is kill you, Liccardi. Take me to Jing! Let me die with her!”

The Captain ran up the steps. Liccardi addressed him: "Captain, bind this man's mouth and cuff him."

"May I suggest sir that we take Roebuck to a clinic for observation."

"This man has rebelled against our authority and threatened to kill a member of the High Command," Liccardi said contemptuously. "Maybe you would have him do ten pushups for penance."

The Captain nervously tugged at his insignia. "Roebuck isn't right, it's just temporary. Let's not needlessly offend Emile Roackaseen."

"Return to your post, Captain," Liccardi said ominously. He nodded to two of the soldiers, and they took Roebuck behind the building, and threw him into a van with bars and opaque windows. It was hot inside. Roebuck felt his hands yanked and cuffed. A rag covered his mouth, and a blindfold covered his eyes.

He heard Liccardi's voice. "This Roackaseen is a sensitive case. I will personally deliver this prisoner."

The van started into motion. Suddenly Roebuck felt an overwhelming sense of doom, drowning the previous emotional bravado. The purring engine, the bumps in the road, the turns, the traffic sounds outside—all an eternity of mental torture. Then he felt the van stop. The side door slid open. Is this the end? Execution?

Then he heard Liccardi's voice again—surprisingly soft: "Davey, I don't want you to move." A needle jabbed his arm.

An hour later Roebuck awoke. He saw blue skies above him. He gazed at the distant mountain ranges surrounding him. A gentle breeze caressed

his hair and a barley field in front of him. There were no handcuffs, blinds or gags, and a bandage covered his forehead gash. Maybe he died and went to heaven.

He stood and saw the van parked behind him. There was also a square wooden cabin. Liccardi stepped out with his patented dirty blonde hair to the shoulders. But there was something different. He wore a black beret and a black and red stripe across a green uniform.

Liccardi beckoned him into the cabin, and smiled. “Jing Liu is fine. You’ll have the chance to see her soon.”

Inside the cabin Roebuck sat in wooden chair across from Liccardi. Liccardi said, “It took me two years, using my military, administrative and intelligence training, to gain the trust of Gough Sydenham. This was a long range plan of Valentino Davalillo and our Vanguardia Sindicalismo to come here undercover, and not only get access to the PNR’s cyber technology, but also to help put Julio Carreon in power as an alliance with Aztlan—and make Tyrene the Wall Street for the Vanguardia Sindicalismo. The fascist Sydenham fell for our trick!

“Davey, since your contempt for this regime was beautifully on display, I can share with you info that very few people know. Davalillo recruited me into the Vanguardia several years ago. I was always the guy working undercover. I am the Second in Command of the Vanguardia.”

“I’ve read about Davalillo and his army,” Roebuck said. “Fascinating stuff. But what about all those prisoners you sent up here?”

Liccardi laughed, “We keep them for a few days in the abundant caves and bunkers, and then quietly smuggle them out of the country via a mountain underground railroad to an isolated Native port across the ridge that the authorities don’t pay much attention to. Undercover soldiers have loyalty to me and Davalillo.

“If anyone in the High Command ever inquired about a prisoner, we would say that he’d been executed already, or blame a renegade smuggling network. But Sydenham never questioned me. I didn’t start the dissident escape program until I was sure that there were no questions about my loyalty to the High Command.”

“What did the prisoners have to do to get sent up here?”

“Make clear their disdain for this fascist dictatorship,” Liccardi answered. “Your friend Jing was caught hanging out at a Tyrene U. underground pro-Carreon student group. Many of the escapees go to Auckland to join Carreon’s government in exile.”

“Aren’t you afraid I may tell someone?”

“Davey, we’ll keep you up here for a few days. After that, you can tell the world for all we care, because then it’s on: Not just Julio Carreon’s bush army; it will be serious revolution. We have a high-tech American friend who gave us an umbrella of surveillance blackout.

“I’ll show you to your cabin. Your favorite Polynesian patty, fresh clothes. This evening, I’ll give you a box seat treat: Valentino Davalillo addressing our Order of Great Fighters.”

It was dusk in a nearby tropical pine forest. Roebuck rode in a jeep with Liccardi, who was armed with a machine gun. Between the trees was a

meadow occupied by a multi-ethnic group of heavily armed men and women of different races; 100 strong. This scene exceeded anything Roebuck had ever dreamed about. All the warriors had green uniforms, the most advanced Miranda M-18 machine guns, and black berets.

Davalillo, with jet back hair touching his shoulders and eyebrows, paced before his warriors in front of dozens of lighted kerosene torches. Davalillo had a microphone attached to a small generator.

“We have tricked General Sydenham into arming John Carreon and the Rebel Alliance!” Davalillo announced in his lively, uplifting voice. “The arms shipments the dictator Gough Sydenham expects to receive will be diverted to our mass liberation army! Sydenham has given the sword to the slaves, and he will be slain with it! To the people of the Polynesian National Republic, the Vanguardia pledges its support forever.”

Liccardi ran into the meadow and trust his carbine into the air. “Vanguardia Sindicalismo!”

“Assistant Commander Liccardi has joined us,” Davalillo called. “Revolution now!”

St. Augustine

The next evening, many televisions in Tyrene displayed the same overseas network news station. The streets in Tyrene were eerily quiet, as the TV watchers stared at the screen in suspended fascination.

There were video shots of jubilant reveling in the downtown streets of St. Augustine. People rode on each other’s backs, and there was a parade of

jeeps. The eagle-adorned flag of the PNR government in exile waved everywhere. Guns were fired in the air, and the TV screen showed couples kissing. Also, there were blue-uniformed soldiers displayed with hands raised in the air. The older male newscaster explained:

“In the Polynesian National Republic, the capital city of St. Augustine has just fallen to the Rebel Alliance army led by President in exile Julio Carreon. General Sydenham and his High Command leadership have fled to Tyrene, hunkering down behind a prominent military wall to protect the amazing resources of that city and province. Mr. Carreon, who flew in from New Zealand, has taken control of the moat-enclosed hall of government. We are there now for a live interview.”

Carreon stood behind a podium, a wide smile beneath thick black hair and vivid moustache.

“Mr. President—“

“Please don’t call me that until all of the PNR is liberated,” Carreon answered lightheartedly, a baritone voice carrying a low-grade Argentinian accent.

“What shall we call you then, sir?”

“How about for now, interviewee in training, so I can learn how to speak to the TV media.” The onlookers laughed.

“If your Rebel Alliance gains control of the entire PNR, what programs and policies do you plan to introduce?”

“That is premature. We still control only 30% of the PNR.”

A different person spoke up. “On that note, Mr. Interviewee,” some laughter sounded again, “With General Sydenham controlling a large and

advanced military machine purchased with energy wealth, what strategy do you have for taking the City of Tyrene?”

“We may have a surprise,” Carreon said with arched eyebrows. “But if we tell you, will you promise not to broadcast it?” That drew out loud laughter, and Carreon high-fived one of the reporters. “I didn’t think so. But let me say that the heart and soul of the PNR is not Tyrene, with money, money and money. It is with the racially diverse unity, hard work, family, Godly values, and strong determination of a populace standing high against corruption, evil and tyranny.”

“Come on, Mr. Carreon, can’t you give us just a clue as to your program?” Came another question.

“Now we just have one slogan—Liberty! Liberty!” He pumped his fist, and many onlookers applauded.

The Bunker

Liccardi and two Vanguardia warriors drove a jeep up to the opening of a cave. Inside were wired lights, a tiled clearing and a rudimentary elevator. They rode the elevator down 20 feet and connected with a wide hall enclosed in steel. They marched lock-step down the hall, and opened the door to ramp leading down to a makeshift factory of sorts. Inside stood Mario Pendergrass and a handful of men operating some loud contraptions.

“Dr. Pendergrass, it’s time,” Liccardi called.

The physicist looked up from below, with a goofy smile. “Anyone tell you that you have every attribute of a snake”?

“Only when we’re ready to bite. Bring the men up now.”

Dr. Pendergrass and the other six men, short-haired, middle-aged, and all wearing white lab coats, came to the conference room at the end of the hall. There was a table, and a small fridge and coffee machine. Liccardi and his M-18-brandishing men stepped in, and faced them from the opposite wall.

“Mr. Aziz, are the nukes about ready?” Liccardi asked.

“We are not quite to operation level; some loose parts. Honestly, the Imam council is not happy with the contributions or expertise of Dr. Pendergrass—and what is that funny uniform you have on, Mr. Liccardi?” Aziz asked.

“Oh, that!” Liccardi tipped his beret. “On behalf of everyone in the Vanguardia Sindicalismo, we extend a sincere thank you for providing expertise on the Middle East nuclear efforts, to supplement Dr. Pendergrass’s knowledge gaps. We would give you certificates of accomplishments, but that could make a lot of people unhappy.”

“Mr. Liccardi, you must explain this right now, to take back to the Imams. They will not be pleased by these developments.”

“Okay. There is a book you probably don’t read, and a Chapter called 2 Kings. Way back in yesteryear, there lived an Israeli King named Jehu. There was so much evil and pagan worship in that land, and God anointed Jehu as his agent to rid the land of all the wicked idolatry. So he hunted down the evil leaders and killed them, including the infamous Jezebel. Finally, there was a false religion, opposed to God, called Baal worship. Jehu calls all the Baal priests together and tricks them, by saying

he will honor them.” Liccardi raised his right hand high. “but in reality, Jehu was there”—

Liccardi dropped his hand rapidly. Two M-18s started drilling, rapid-fire, deafening in those close quarters.

“—to have them executed,” Liccardi said as the shooting stopped.

Pendergrass blew his nose without a tissue. “Disgusting,” he said, beholding bloody jihadist bodies dead on the floor. “Ooh—or should I say Jehu-ooh.”

“Dr. Pendergrass, do I really have to explain the difference between a terrorist and a liberty warrior?” Liccardi shouted, “These jihadists are people who mutilate women, kill innocent children, behead people, commit mass murder and bring mayhem, destruction, maimings, and feel not one twinge of guilt. An embodiment of evil. Anytime you see any Vanguardia person abusing an innocent person, or using a weapon against any innocent civilian—that’s the day I call it quits and work in a library.”

Tyrene University

This was the evening of the America forum at the university auditorium. Miyaro and Pendergrass sat at a steel table outside a campus coffee shop, overlooking a long yard surrounded by the stately University buildings. A heavenly 80 degree Tyrene breeze caressed Miyaro while he sipped his green tea.

There was a festive mood on campus. Students were sitting on the grass, or throwing Frisbees, or playing low-grade ball games. Groups

of students walked to the left, toward the auditorium where the event was scheduled. Miyaro saw the towering silver dome about three blocks away.

Miyaro looked his watch. “Fifteen minutes and then I’m on. I’m in no hurry, Professor.”

Clumps of Pendergrass’s gray hairs swayed in the warm breeze. “That’s a wise comment, Dr. Miyaro. Even wiser to wonder if you need to speak publicly at all.”

There were distant sounds of firecrackers, and frolicking whoops. Every crack in the air provoked a corresponding whoop from Pendergrass, and a bounce in his seat.

Pendergrass said, “It’s a childhood thing I can’t explain. But I’ve always gotten a thrill out of the sound of bangs. I knew the schedule of every old building being torn down, and I made sure I was there for it.”

“Listening to bangs is fine,” Miyaro said. “As long as you don’t feel the bangs.”

Pendergrass sounded his wheezy laugh. “On the subject of childhood, all my suburban New York classmates shunned me and thought me weird and eccentric. I was bullied. So sometimes I would simulate bangs in my head, and imagine gleeful revenge against the bullies.”

Pendergrass’s cell phone vibrated, and he excused himself, walking thirty feet away.

“This is Liccardi,” came the voice in Pendergrass’s ear. “About that 100 grand blackmail call. It’s an easy fix. The Arabs stashed plenty of cash in the cave. That’s untraceable money. Go ahead and take the 100 grand to the drop location tomorrow. That will buy us time to get all the nuke stuff on trucks to the Kai’lawa port.”

**“Where are you taking our prizes?”
Pendergrass asked.**

“That depends on where you and Weimar are most comfortable,” Liccardi answered. “Your call.”

Pendergrass disconnected and returned to the table.

“Everything okay, Professor Pendergrass?”

“Oh yeah. Since you were also targeted by that blackmail call, you need to know that I will go ahead and pay them. My lawyer advised me to go ahead and get rid of this problem. Of course, there is no wrongdoing. Nukes? Crazy! 100 grand in Tyrene is like change in a parking meter, so if you can swat the mosquito rather than have it bite you, why not?”

“I was blackmailed only because of accidental contact with you,” Miyaro said. “It’s not fair that you are making me pay the \$10,000 out of my own pocket, when I am an innocent bystander. I need some of that Tyrene parking change.”

“My obligation is to give you a courtesy update—not to be your welfare daddy.”

“I don’t have the money, and you walking into my life caused this problem!” Miyaro said. “At least give me the name of your bankroller, so I can try to squeeze out my share.”

“No.”

Miyaro calmed strategically. “I’m disappointed in you, Dr. Pendergrass. Please call me if you get a responsibility tinge. I gotta go.”

It took Miyaro only a minute to jog 100 feet toward the auditorium, and send General Andrews an encrypted text over the Renland, “Pendergrass just bit.”

The crowds grew larger as he approached the silver auditorium. The walking crowd blended into a thick crowd standing outside the auditorium. The doors were shut. The reason was quite apparent, from the scattering of prominent makeshift signs:

FOR SECURITY REASONS, TONIGHT'S FORUM AT TYRENE UNIVERSITY IS CLOSED TO THE PUBLIC—GENERAL JOHN CALKINS

Miyaro had trouble getting close to the auditorium, because hundreds of people were packed in tightly. The mood was much different from the fun and games scene three blocks away. These young adults reacted as if a popular concert had just been sold out. Some were banging on the doors.

Miyaro followed Vonda's instructions, and went to the very back of the auditorium, where the speakers were cleared to enter. The crowd was lighter there, and Miyaro found Vonda next to the door. The emerald necklace covered a turquoise gown. She greeted him with a soft hug.

Miyaro briefly touched the necklace. "These trinket reminders are important," he said. "Because we are often inclined to forget in the heat of the day."

"I have an important confession." Vonda held a finger to her lips, and gently pulled him to a palm tree, away from the crowd. Out of her bag she took out a folded photograph. She flashed it for a brief second, then put it back. It was of Julio Carreon.

Vonda leaned toward Miyaro's ear. "Liberty! Liberty!"

"Brave girl."

“No, coward. Blood is on my hands too, because of my silence.”

“From your second wind, Princess, any advice about my speech tonight?”

“Not a word. I trust everything you will say.”

Loud voices sounded over hidden speakers. It was Dean Trottier exchanging words with a panelist. A commotion ensued; soldiers running everywhere, looking for the source of the booming voices. The words seemed to originate from the surrounding buildings, such that echoes followed the words.

“Not supposed to be a public broadcast, right?” Miyaro asked. Vonda suppressed a smile. There was loud applause from the crowd outside, as the soldiers rushed in different directions. “You did this?” Miyaro asked her.

“We’ll call it a team effort,” Vonda answered.

Vonda unlocked the back door and presented her credentials to the guard inside to let them pass. The soldier took the pocket Renland GPS out of Miyaro’s pocket.

“No cell phones, cameras or social media devices allowed inside,” the soldier explained.

“He’s the keynote speaker!” Vonda said with indignance, snatched the Renland away from the guard and handed it back to Miyaro.

Vonda took him through a semi-dark hallway, until he found his spot on the stage. Vonda took her assigned seat in the front row.

Miyaro listed patiently to the preceding panel, and saw an auditorium holding about 3,000 with only about 500 people inside. Some of the

attendees wore the uniforms of the regime. Most were students, or suit-clad faculty or staff. As Miyaro waited his turn, he prayed silently over his speech. God gave back to him a righteous anger about the human rights violations of the regime.

Outside, as soon as Rene Miyaro's name was announced, the sound went dead. The soldiers had caught on to the clandestine broadcast. The crowd outside booed.

Several minutes passed. It was getting dark, and some students lit candles to supplement the fancy Tyrene postlights. One group of students started a bonfire.

Miyaro's voice then blasted loudly: "Is it mere coincidence that I chose this part of the world for my treatise?" Students outside cheered that creative engineering students had set up a backup broadcast system in answer to the government censorship.

Miyaro continued his discourse, "Browsing through the library, I stumbled across a long list of Machiavellian adjectives, most of which began with the prefix 'un', or the antithesis or negative of a descriptive nexus to a derivative noun reflecting—uh, say a platonic ideal: unaccountable, unreasonable, untempered, unrestrained, unethical, unabridged, undemocratic. Lo and behold, I have discovered in this part of the world, a practical application, in the flesh, as an International reminder. Some may know the name of this mystery person."

Inside, the taut-eyed uniformed persons were hair-triggered.

"Merlin. That's right. Merlin the Priest," Miyaro said to break the tension. "If you don't

know Merlin, that is because he is above us all. You see, Merlin has a hotline to God that we mortals could never understand. Merlin's perceived special hotline to the Deity reflects centuries of trends. Jesus said to the most religious, depart from me, I never knew you. This Pharasaical attitude gripped much of organized faith, while the true power of Jesus's power and Biblical truth glowed in broken people, crying out their need, and watching the miracles, as evidence of the Gospel truth.

“We see the same tension in today's world, especially where authorities reign and decisions are made. You see, Merlin is the divine right king over his own kingdom, and he considers the rule of law—his rule of law--to be supreme on Earth. Of course, Merlin gives lip service to other moral laws including peace, the brotherhood of man, equality, respect for the human rights of all people. These laws are an okay afterthought to Merlin. But his real god is divine right of the chosen. In my USA, we often see this manifest in the politics of expediency, just because leaders have defined expedience as the unofficial law of the land—even if it does bring long range problems to our nation because God offended by this immorality.

“To Merlin, the higher morality of the divine right is so sacrosanct that ‘lesser moralities’ can be sacrificed to preserve it. Historically, this divine right, even with very moral-sounding rhetoric, makes every means justifiable. We've seen this over and over: economic exploitation, racial oppression, imprisonment without trial, and even torture and summary execution.

“Moral judgments aside, does not Merlin have tunnel vision? If he acknowledged God—as do most of the world's population, and a majority of the

world's leaders due to overwhelming evidence of His existence—then why cannot Merlin see that all these beautiful and diverse humans that God has created have to fit in with a beautiful plan of a perfect creator; and that we all benefit from each other's experiences and callings—but when we disempower, hate or marginalize a percentage of God's people, aren't we cheating ourselves as a civilization? Why do so many nations fail to recognize this obvious truth? John Locke spoke about the virtues of liberty and restraints on the oppressive power of government—with an emphasis on how much the contributions and empowerment of the individual benefits the public good. Take George Washington. How could America have flourished without his very God-centered vision of popular sovereignty and power, above the draining idea of concentrating power in the hands of the few—and of Divine Right Monarchs? In previous generations Boris Yeltsin saved Russia by courageously staring down the rule of the few, even when they possessed massive weapons of destruction. How about Martin Luther King Jr., and a civil rights movement that would have not succeeded without inclusiveness of people in a democratic movement, and a deep respect for God in his movement? Most important, how could Merlin ignore Jesus himself—who Merlin gives lip service to—when Jesus declared that all people from all backgrounds are equal in His eyes, and precious for their contributions in this physical world? When will we as a collective civilization, on all continents, insist that Merlin abdicate his divine right throne?"

Miyaro's next words died in their tracks. The microphone on stage went dead.

The lumbering bald man Dean Trottier walked to edge of the stage.

“We need technical support up here!”

Outside, after a couple minutes of silence, the crowd outside grew restless again. Faint chants grew louder: “Miyaro! Miyaro!” More crowds appeared on the tennis courts beside the auditorium. Some in the crowd chanted, “Let us in! Let us in!” Objects crashed against the outside of the steel dome.

Officers reached for their radios for emergency calls, to bring in reinforcements. Immediately, dozens of soldiers rushed to the front of the dome, cutting a turbulent path through the crowd such that many people fell from being pushed. With precision, these bastions of order fell into line like dominoes, forming a ring around the auditorium. Then came a sight never witnessed in Tyrene: More soldiers, this time with shields, gas masks and bayonets, threatening the crowd from a few feet.

An Officer grabbed a bullhorn. “Attention everyone!” His voice rang loudly. “A curfew has been imposed on Tyrene International University, effective immediately. This demonstration is over. Disperse, or face arrest!”

He repeated those words like a broken record, and with his every order, the taunts from the crowd grew angrier. Then the chants started from the back, and cascaded forward, like a wave at a sporting event:

“Liberty! Liberty!” Students were running from everywhere, pumping fists, chanting, “Liberty! Liberty!”

The officer shouted final warnings, but the chanting drowned out every word.

Ominous sirens shrieked through the streets of Tyrene. Dozens of red flashing lights reflected

from the glass of the highrises. Roving, chanting mobs moved away from the auditorium through the tennis courts, their "liberty" chants echoing off of the surrounding buildings. Soldiers with bayonets swarmed the streets of Tyrene, remaining stoic for the moment in the face of angry clenched fists.

Some demonstrators carried a palm tree trunk as a battering ram, and attempted to break through the line of soldiers to get inside the auditorium. The soldiers pounced on them, throwing them to the ground. Several demonstrators screamed in horror at the sight of the gush of blood from a protester who took a bayonet in the neck. Now it was a full-fledged brawl, and soldiers dropped the demonstrators with batons and rifle butts. Like a pandemic disease, more demonstrators and soldiers joined the free-for-all; a black and red Vanguardia Sindicalismo flag flew from the crowd.

The ring of soldiers at the auditorium fired shots over the heads of the demonstrators. The throng turned and ran, many screaming. Dozens were pushed over and trampled by the stampede. The more militant of the demonstrators hurled rocks and bottles at the soldiers.

A large group of protesters retreating through the open tennis courts ran head-on into a phalanx of soldiers. Frenzied soldiers attacked the protesters like wild dogs, throwing them over nets or down to the concrete. Visceral cries came from the demonstrators, "Murderers!"—to compete with the "Liberty!" chants.

Some soldiers began shooting--this time straight at the demonstrators. As the wounded fell, mobs dispersed, racing through the streets of Tyrene, sometimes running into other roving mobs,

and clashing with soldiers. The riot spread like a wildfire, as those with rebel sympathies poured out onto the streets. Clashes between soldiers and protesters clogged the downtown streets, causing traffic backups.

On Ocean Boulevard, in front of the campus, a mob rushed up to a row of army jeeps, doused them with gasoline, and then threw a pack of lighted matches. Within seconds, scorching yellow and orange flames engulfed the jeeps. Intermittent explosions filled the air from cherry bombs being hurled from dormitory windows.

With wailing sirens and flashing red lights everywhere, mobs smashed car windows and the glass of adjoining highrises. Terrified pedestrians hid under cars to escape the mayhem.

The High Command ordered tanks and howitzers into Tyrene U.

Inside the auditorium, as sound technicians kept working around the frustrated panelists on stage, the attendees murmured from the commotion among officers. Finally, a high-ranking officer ran up to the stage.

“We have an emergency situation,” he shouted. “Everyone must move to the back of the auditorium.”

People slowly piled up against the back walls. There were about a hundred soldier escorts. Miyaro looked for Vonda, but she found him first and took his hand to navigate him out. Her other hand clutched a phone pinned to her ear.

The many doors swung open as one coordinated motion. The only thing that greeted the attendees were sirens and the pungent smell of teargas.

“Everything is under control!” Supervising officers kept shouting. As verification, outside the auditorium there stood dozens of heavily-armed soldiers walking over bodies on the ground, some moving, some not. The retreating panel attendees walked slowly and with their hands up, as to not provoke the soldiers.

“Oh God help us,” Vonda said, and fell to her knees with a shriek. Miyaro comforted her, all while watching some retreating pedestrians fainting, and two vomiting. Vonda finally rose, shaking. “Ocean Boulevard. Papa has an escort waiting for us.”

As they walked past the carnage, Vonda held an ID over her head, so they would not be stopped, or worse. Distant flames, shouts, screams, sirens, flashing lights, broken glass were everywhere.

“What have they done to our precious city, Rene?” Vonda said sadly.

A young soldier from a row of soldiers suddenly approached Vonda, physically restraining her. He clutched at the emerald necklace. “That’s mine, now darling.”

Higher-ranking soldiers quickly intervened and pulled the young soldier away with an apology to Vonda.

Ocean Boulevard was quiet and under the thumb of armed soldiers, except for a sporadic skirmish down the street.

A van cruised up to the designated street corner. Two Roackaseen guards appeared. “Your father is waiting for you at the marina.”

Vonda stepped into the van, and as Miyaro followed a guard met him nose to nose.

“It’s okay, he can come,” Vonda said.

They found the same huge marina that sat across from the hotel Miyaro stayed in during his first night in Tyrene. Eyes burned as the van occupants got out in front of a familiar Roackaseen yacht.

Emile Roackaseen and an armed Angel Taveras greeted the others in front of the ramp to the yacht.

“You haven’t found Roebuck yet?” Emile boomed.

“No, Papa.”

One of the guards commandeered the yacht, and everyone else locked themselves in for the rough ride. After a few minutes of purring through the inlet, the yacht hit the open sea with a shock. For Miyaro and Vonda, this was a *déjà vu* from the day of terror at the Tyrene coral beach. The Pacific was as angry as the combatants in Tyrene. The boat would often rise at a steep angle and then precipitously drop. There were occasional gasps when the water hammered the boat. Unlike the brief trauma from that near-death afternoon, this rocking and tossing went on and on.

Later that night, mercifully the boat ride smoothed out. Emile kneeled next to the guard at the helm. They both spoke quietly into a military radio. Outside the windows, everyone could see land on both sides. The boat was cruising through an inlet between a peninsula and the mainland. To the right was darkness from a wilderness area. To the left were bright streetlights from the main peninsula highway, and beautiful stone ranch-style vacation homes bordering the inlet.

The Roackaseen yacht pulled into a dock. The Roackaseen vacation home, now dark, stretched more than a hundred feet long.

“We call this Roackaseen Valley Coastal,” Vonda told Miyaro as they approached the house from the back.

Inside there were ten bedrooms. Everyone found one quickly and crashed from the exhaustion of the frenzy in Tyrene.

Roackaseen Valley Coastal

The next morning brought a bright sun, warm baths and restful renewal. Vonda cooked everyone breakfast from stored up frozen food. Everyone dressed in shorts and bathing attire, ready for Angel Taveras’s announcement of a “special beach day.”

Everyone, exempt Emile Roackaseen, who clapped his hands for everyone’s attention.

“There are ample clothes in the last bedroom. Everyone dress nice, because we have very important business today.”

Later that morning, they switched on a TV to find an independent, overseas account of yesterday’s events in Tyrene.

A Black woman from London announced from the TV studio, “Many world leaders are calling the recent events in the Polynesian National Republic Bloody Thursday. Government security forces cracked down on protesters in the coastal city of Tyrene. Many Tyrene residents, especially university students, became upset at government censorship of an International forum. Some of our camera persons were roughed up while attempting to

get footage of the riot. Scores were injured, and independent estimates put the death toll at more than fifty.”

Emile Roackaseen switched off the TV and left the room, visibly angry.

Taveras peered intently out a front window. He beckoned to Vonda. There were soldiers at intermittent checkpoints along the road.

“Do you notice anything strange about those uniforms, sister?” He asked. She shook her head. “The color. They’re all green. No blue in sight.”

“Papa!” Vonda called. Hearing nothing, she ran to his nearby bedroom and knocked. Finally, he came out.

“Papa, we are going to sit here and listen patiently while you explain what is going on. This time I am calling the meeting.” And everyone sat before the family patriarch.

“Young lady, you have spoiled the surprise I was going to give all of you at noon, at a historical meeting you will be witness to,” Emile said. “The reason we had to boat to our vacation home was the highway between here and Tyrene is a battle line. We would have been in danger. This peninsula is now under the control of Julio Carreon’s Rebel Alliance forces.”

“We are not in danger now, Papa?” Vonda raised her voice. “The Roackaseen family, a visible member of Gough Sydenham’s inner circle?”

Emile hesitated. “Years ago, I pledged my support to Julio Carreon and agreed to serve in the military government in an undercover role. Deep down inside, know that the values of this family are not those of the Sydenham dictatorship. This is very

sensitive; I had to put on a show or else many lives could have been lost.”

Vonda stood and walked to within a foot of him. “You show such a lack of trust in the very people you say you would die for?”

“Obviously Rene Miyaro’s sassiness has worn off on you,” Emile boomed. “That’s good. When I watched you stand up for Mr. Miyaro and victims of the Sydenham regime, you cannot imagine how proud of a father I am of you—now there will be full disclosure at the noon event.”

11:45. Loud whirring sounds. Everyone went outside, and saw four helicopters land on the beach, on the opposite side of the highway. Suddenly security was tighter; twice as many soldiers on the road. Through the openings of the homes came an entourage of a dozen soldiers surrounding four middle-aged civilians, two men and two women, all with casual tropical shirts. As they approached the Roackaseen house, the lead civilian became apparent: President in exile Julio Carreon.

He was wearing large head phones. Miyaro thought him a little shorter than he had imagined.

Emile and Carreon exchanged bear hugs. Then Emile pointed to the headphones.

“Extra security precaution?” He asked.

Nawwww! It’s Kona Kauai, the first Polynesian rock band to go double platinum. A taste of R n B, too. Here”—Carreon let Emile have a brief listen, then took the headphones back and danced a little shimmy. “In tough times, if you can’t have fun, then there’s never any fun.”

Emile introduced Carreon to Miyaro and then Taveras.

“Angel Taveras! A legend in Emile’s mind,” Carreon said. “Your reputation precedes you. Or you precede your reputation. Which is the right American expression, Dr. Miyaro?—and this must be Vonda. Girl, where are your braces?”

“It is a pleasure and honor to meet you, President Carreon.” Vonda bowed four times.

“We have met. It was at your Daddy’s big house. Right before I had to run for my life.”

“Yes, I remember, sir,” Vonda said shyly.

“You cooked me that Korean bibimbap dinner. Your Mom was teaching you, and you were afraid you would poison me. It turned out one of the best meals I’d ever eaten.”

“Sir, I remember how grateful I was when you as Education Minister pledged more support for the Tyrene International Studies program.”

Carreon introduced the three friendly, middle-aged members of his government in exile. Then Emile took Carreon into a private den where they shared a drink and conversation. The two guards took the green-clad Rebel Alliance soldiers to a padded conference room next to the garage, to set up for the meeting.

12:00 noon. Everyone sat around a large round table, and remained stone quiet, waiting for President Carreon to speak.

“First of all, the democratic government of the PNR and myself extend a thanks to you, Emile Roackaseen for risking your life to quietly support the democratic liberation forces, and providing underground resources to help the Auckland government in exile. My wife Vania and my children George and Maria extend their warmest greetings, also.”

Then came a knock on the door, and in walked an escorted Asian man of vintage age and hard physique. His green uniform carried ample medals.

“I have asked General William Shigeta to join us. He’s the military leader of the Rebel Alliance forces. This gathering is to discuss military strategy for what I call the PNR D-Day, a final push toward victory, bolstered by friends of our government. Please keep the three seats over there vacant, because three other military leaders will join us within the hour. Emile Roackaseen is here with family and friends as the host of this meeting, and of course as a staunch and valuable supporter of the democratic PNR government. Now, General Shigeta, as of this morning, what is the status of the Rebel Alliance’s successes?”

“Our liberation forces continue to advance, and we currently control about 50% of the PNR,” Shigeta answered.

“The government I head is a democracy, and that reality drives my next few comments. First of all, as a functioning democracy, the interim government with its representatives took a vote in St. Augustine yesterday, 17 to 2, to authorize me to supervise this military strategy meeting.

“Secondly, when a nation is a house divided with conflicts, there are bound to be hidden alliances and things that cannot be discussed. That has been the case in the PNR. But from this moment forward, everything is in the open.

“Now Emile, how well do you know Eumir Liccardi?” Carreon asked.

“He has been a great supporter of the Roackaseens. But he speaks little about his personal life.”

“That’s by design. Mr. Liccardi, like you, contacted me about serving in the Sydenham regime underground, with loyalty to me. He has a group of independent military advisors planted in key parts of the Sydenham regime, especially in Tyrene. Liccardi did not divulge his undercover role to you for one reason: Full disclosure to anyone but the Auckland government in exile would be a security risk with potential devastating consequences.”

“You mentioned an advisory group with Liccardi,” Emile said.

“Yes. Mr. Liccardi owes his ultimate allegiance to Valentino Davalillo and the Vanguardia Sindicalismo.”

“That Aztlan bunch?” Emile said incredulously. “Julio, could you repeat what you just said, to verify that either you or I aren’t crazy?”

“I have researched Mr. Davalillo carefully,” Carreon said. “His human rights record in Aztlan, where he has virtually-uncontested control, is okay. Secondly, his mischief does not directly hurt any of our supporters—the USA, NATO, Pacific Rim, two from Middle East. Diplomatic fallout should be minimal.”

“I disagree, Julio. You risk replacing one pariah government with another.”

“To borrow an American phrase, 50 birds in the hand is better than zero in the bush,” Carreon said. “The trickling of economic aid and low-grade military is not enough for us to take Tyrene, considering Sydenham’s black gold-financed military machine guarding their Princess City. That

means, under current conditions, a civil war could go on for years—General Shigeta, could you verify?”

“That is my assessment too, Mr. President.”

“Davalillo has promised to bring us a large cache of military hardware within days. He has the military genius. Look what he has accomplished around the world with his dedicated guerilla army! With Davalillo’s backing, we could end this civil war in a month.”

“Still too risky, Julio—including your overly-optimistic prediction.”

Carreon stood, shaking his finger. “We are talking about saving a country from being ravaged--destruction, economic hardships, and thousands of PNR deaths! Will I accept help from Davalillo to save thousands of precious PNR lives, and quickly end the oppression we saw yesterday in Tyrene? Absolutely!---Dr. Miyaro, could you give us an American perspective, based on your expertise?”

Miyaro answered, “Peacekeepers like me are never pleased about war. But sometimes you try every theory you learned at Harvard to charm military bullies into reason, and they still don’t listen. Then there is a quote by Jesus in the Bible about not throwing your pearls to pigs.”

“Julio, Davalillo wants something huge in return for this. What exactly is it?” Emile asked.

“An economic and technological treaty between the PNR and Aztlan is all. There will be no military connections with Davalillo once we control 100% of the PNR. Ay-Yay-Yay, Emile, don’t give that look. 95% of the countries of the world have those arrangements! There is zero harm!”

“We can expect Davalillo to walk through that door any minute now?” Emile asked.

Carreon said, “Emile, don’t take this up with me. Take it up with our DEMOCRATIC government. The vote was 17 to 2. Petition to change the vote if you don’t like it. Our government respects dissidents.”

“President Carreon,” Miyaro spoke up. “Any humanitarian benefits from a just and short war are mitigated by dealings with Aztlan. Trust my words, sir. President Velasquez will not look kindly on ANY treaty between the PNR and Aztlan.”

Carreon smiled. “President Velasquez and I are on very friendly terms. He has expressed his passionate support for our democratic government. When I visited America last year, Jaime and I went to Camp David and participated in a football, or soccer, game. He’s good, and we call each other by first name. I can call his direct hotline. After this meeting, he and I will have a friendly chat, so he will not be surprised.”

“Good luck sir,” Miyaro said soberly.

Gun shots sounded from outside. Taveras ran out to check, and Miyaro followed him. Outside more soldiers crowded the street; this time black berets and Vanguardia stripes were visible; people shooting into the air. Three men walked briskly toward the Roackaseens home. Miyaro recognized Davalillo and Liccardi. Chants filled the air, “Vanguardia Sindicalismo! Vanguardia Sindicalismo!”

The guard opened the door for the three Vanguardia leaders. They walked in without acknowledging anyone. Miyaro and Taveras followed them inside the conference room.

They sat in the empty padded chairs; all three wore the black berets, black and red stripes in front, and M-18 rifles slung over shoulders.

Carreon introduced, “Valentino Davalillo, Eumir Liccardi we all know and”--.

“Carlos Ruiz. Third in command of the Vanguardia Sindicalismo,” Davalillo introduced in his brisk, crackling voice.

Ruiz lit a cigar. Carreon spoke up, “Mr. Ruiz, please don’t smoke in this room.”

Ruiz ignored Carreon, but extinguished the cigar only at Davalillo’s signal.

“Let me introduce”—

“No further introductions are necessary,” Davalillo interrupted Carreon. “I’m familiar with everyone in the room.” Throwing a bit of a chill on the meeting.

“Dr. Miyaro! How do we keep meeting like this?” Liccardi called with his flash-teeth smile. “Didn’t I tell you I like you? Every time I see you, I like you more.” He reached over and shook Miyaro’s hand. It hurt just a little.

Carreon said, “Mr. Davalillo, I have in my hand a draft decree signed by me and the representatives of the interim PNR government, assigning you temporary military command over General Shigeta and the Rebel Alliance forces. We have a democratic government with civilian authority. Therefore, on all strategic matters, you will report to me as interim President. And obey every order I give you. Are we clear on that?”

“Yes sir.”

“Also, during the course of this liberation campaign, there will be no public displays of you or

any of your army taunting the United States or any other PNR ally.”

“What do you mean, I love America!” Davalillo smiled. “Jawon Tyler won the NFL rushing title last year. I betcha Dr. Miyaro didn’t know that. Go Cleveland Browns!”

“There must be unity among all brothers and sisters fighting this military dictatorship,” Carreon said.

“Here’s one for your unity,” Davalillo said sourly. “The United States Government placed a death warrant over my head. But it was his assassin coming to a fiery death in an airplane crash. The same fiery, crashing fate will befall anyone who messes with this Revolution.”

Miyaro remained still as a cold wave surged through his body.

Carreon continued, “This second document is a draft treaty that we discussed between the PNR and Aztlán. It calls for economic and technological cooperation without specifics, because as we know economies are often fluid from week to week. The draft treaty also ceases all military alliances between Aztlán and the PNR as soon as our government gains total control. Most importantly, the treaty binds both nations to maintain positive relations, as far as it depends on us, with all current PNR allies, including the United States. The treaty is neutral and silent on your current conflict with Mexico. I need your signature, sir.”

Davalillo took it and signed. Then he pulled a small knife and, to the shock of onlookers, he cut a small incision on his hand until it bled. “I am a man of integrity, and this dramatizes my commitment of

support for the peoples of our two nations!” He smeared blood on the treaty.

Liccardi leaned toward Carreon, “Mr. President, if we don’t hand you Tyrene in two weeks, ask for your money back.”

Vonda rose and ran out of the room.

After the meeting, Davalillo led his two assistants to the side of the house. The warriors outside chanted, “Viva Davalillo! Viva Davalillo!”

Davalillo asked, “What about our Manhattan Project?”

“Nuke infrastructure and equipment are already loaded on the trucks,” Liccardi answered. “They will be out of the PNR tomorrow. Pendergrass is working with Weimar on a North American site.”

“Carlos, I need you to personally track this project until completed,” Davalillo said. “Eumir, your focus is the Revolution here. Carlos, I will not tolerate any mistakes with this nuke stuff that could draw hostile parties in, and create an International calamity. Do nothing without my final okay.”

Miyaro, noticing that Vonda had totally withdrawn, knocked on her door. “Vonda? This is Rene.”

“It’s okay to come in.” Vonda was resting back on a bed in a sterile room; her emerald necklace falling crookedly over her turquoise dress. She sat up at Miyaro’s approach.

“Are you alright, Vonda?”

“I just had a very significant life event occur. I’m trying to make sense of it. I’m okay.”

Davalillo stepped inside Vonda’s room, followed by Liccardi. “Rene Miyaro, the Harvard

Professor who started a riot in Tyrene!” Davalillo crowded. “Nice to meet you. Now get out.”

“I know what you are going to say,” Liccardi said to Davalillo. “I think Dr. Miyaro may be of help.” He beckoned his leader outside briefly. There were hushed voices, then they returned and closed the door.

Davalillo sat on the bed, two feet from Vonda. “Were you surprised?”

“Not what I expected,” Vonda replied. “Obviously modern technology does wonders changing someone’s appearance. But your voice you cannot disguise, Lauro.”

“Now I don’t care who finds out—considering the imminent liberation! If people whisper about past irrelevancies, to me it’s like a drug addict coming clean about his past. I probably need to tell mi Padre, so he is not blind-sided by third parties.”

Davalillo took a small silk bag from his pocket. From it he produced the monogrammed emerald ring with inlaid gold. “I will ask you what you feel about this, Vonda. Then I will tell you what I will do.”

“This is totally alien to my expectation, Lauro,” she said with a little edge. “How did all this happen?”

“During all those years you and I spent together, you knew about my calling to adventure, to dispatch authors of evil from the world. The final letter I wrote revealed my recruitment as an agent of America, and my longing to return to you some day. That was an honest, heartfelt belief at the time.

“But things changed. I met Eumir when he was given a similar assignment by the American

CIA. There was a team of three of us, including a big Black guy named Ted Byler, former Ohio State linebacker whose injury ended his career. That’s how I got loyal to Ohio sports teams. The three of us were inseparable; our assignment was to head up the counter-terror program against Islamic Jihadists infiltrating Latin America. We reported to a CIA chief operating out of Mexico City. He was recklessly incompetent, and blew our cover. The Caliphate found out about our real mission and targeted us. They kidnapped Ted.” Davalillo trembled. “They cut off his head. Monsters!”

“I’m sorry, Lauro. I truly am,” Vonda said.

“Eumir and I had no choice but to go underground. Mi Padre’s cash that he’d given me paid for my change of appearance. Eumir and I spent all our time with the indigenous population, living their lives, sharing their struggles. Those months gave us new meaning to the term human trafficking. To be human trafficked is to be powerless in the face of systemic bullies, whether vicious drug dealers, exploitative landowners, multinational companies, or corrupt and oppressive government officials. The end of this evil human trafficking is simply the people uniting and saying, we will not be your slaves anymore!

Eumir and I learned about the longing many Native peoples had for the unified indigenous nation called Aztlan—free and empowered Natives! Eumir and I built the movement—and it caught on, because we hold in our hands the heart of the trafficked peoples!”

“I understand your anger, Lauro,” Vonda said. “I truly feel sorry about how it is possessing you.”

Liccardi smiled, "Tell her how you got the name Davalillo."

"Eumir had an alias name that the Caliphate recognized, so he could revert to Liccardi. But I was using my real name, and needed a new name for my new identity. Growing up in Argentina, I was a huge American baseball fan, as everyone knows. Followed the history going back to Babe Ruth. About three quarters the way though last century, there was a baseball player named Davalillo. His team was desperate. He was the last chance: if Davalillo did not come through, his team would be eliminated. But he sparked the team by getting on base, and his team came all the way back to win the playoff series. That's me! Start just the little spark, and follow it through until we have total victory! I am Davalillo!"

"Please look at me, Lauro," Vonda said, and he did. "You promised me you would return to me and unite our families together in matrimony. You sealed the promise with that same blood that is on your hand!"

"That promise is dead, Vonda, because that person is dead. Lauro Mendez is dead. I am Davalillo. Everyone must accept this new life."

Miyaro stared at Davalillo for several seconds, imagining himself looking in the mirror.

Davalillo picked up the engraved emerald ring. "Vonda, I want you to have this as a gift, anyway. Consider it a beautiful shrine to a past life that was very meaningful and fun."

He placed it in her right hand. With her left hand Vonda peeled open the fingers of Davalillo's hand. Then she placed the ring in his hand with a firm slap.

“You can keep your shrine, Lauro. I’m sure you can find a nice jeweler who will give you a good price, and you can feed maybe a hundred poor families. You are the ultimate dragon slayer. There are no dragons in this room. Please get out now.”

Davalillo left, but Liccardi stayed to console Vonda with gentle rubs to her shoulder. Miyaro was struck by an uncanny tenderness in Liccardi. Eyes that were normally aggressively darting, searching, were now very soft.

“Dr. Miyaro, both you and I have been adopted into the Roackaseen family,” Liccardi said. “Me, I’m mostly a distant cousin, and now more distant in the heat of battle. You, though, are the favorite uncle and counselor. Right now in this meatcleaver world, Vonda needs a good friend. Please take good care of her.”

Later that afternoon, helicopters whopped overhead in retreat, taking Julio Carreon and his Ministers back to St. Augustine. Dozens of warriors looked skyward with carbines pumping, and shouting “Vanguardia Sindicalismo!” Davalillo, Liccardi and Ruiz stood on the street, to lead the frenzy. Taveras, witnessing the passion and charisma of Davalillo, got caught up in it. He raised his M-18 and joined in the shouts, “Vanguardia Sindicalismo!”

Davalillo and Liccardi raised their fists to their chin and then snapped them down, as the Vanguardia salute. Then they approached Emile standing stoic by the front door.

“Our brigades are moving out now,” Davalillo said.

“Mr. Roackaseen,” Taveras said. “Could I have your permission to join the rebel army? You

support the rebel movement, and I want to help liberate Tyrene, and use my talent in a meaningful way.”

“You are a free man. That is your decision, Angel,” Emile said without enthusiasm.

“Mr. Liccardi, can I join you, man?”

“I have no objection, Angel. But it’s Davalillo’s final call.”

Davalillo, standing close by, answered, “He’ll have to go through the training camp.”

Liccardi laughed, “You don’t know how talented Angel is. He will be TEACHING at the training camp.”

As the warriors packed for their trip to the battlefield, Emile beckoned sternly to Davalillo.

“After this is over, your father and I will have a serious talk with you about your lifestyle choices—and don’t give me that smirky look, son. Or I will take this belt off and whip your behind, like the time you tried to fly that plane and wrecked one of my buildings.”

“Thank you very much for your hospitality and support for the Revolution, Mr. Roackaseen.” Then he turned, “Vanguardia Sindicalismo!”

Nighttime arrived, and everyone had left except for Vonda, Emile, Miyaro and the two guards. Outside was so quiet that the hissing of the sea was audible. A few Rebel Alliance soldiers stood guard at the checkpoints. Inside, Miyaro locked himself in his bedroom, firing off coded narrative over the Renland to Lansford and Andrews, describing this amazing sequence of events. The frozen turkey pie a guard had given him earlier was half eaten. He would occasionally get distracting thoughts about Vonda, then return to his typing.

Finishing, he came out and found Vonda in the conference room, at the table reading a book about the Black civil rights movement in the USA. She perked up.

“Sorry, but I didn’t have a chance to pack your books for this excursion---Uncle.” They both laughed.

Vonda rose. “Papa calls this a Roackaseen inventory. Let’s see. I have now been separated from my students, faculty colleagues and friends at Tyrene University, and away from hired workers at the Naiad I call friends. An adopted Roackaseen family member has gone missing, another has gone fighting. To top it off, I learned that my father still treats me like a child on matters of national patriotism, and my pre-arranged husband has gone off the deep end. All in a 24 hour period. Pinch me, and tell me this has all been a dream---yet, why am I not insane, Rene? Why do I feel like I am walking on air?”

“You have an amazing resiliency, courage, from a strong spirit. I saw that when you bounced back from the near drowning, and witnessing the carnage at Tyrene U.”

“Yes, a reminder of my blessings. And you are blessing numero uno.” Vonda switched on a radio lodged in a wall-lined cabinet. She turned the dial until she found an upbeat Polynesian dance song, heavy drums. “President Carreon said what? If we can’t have fun in trials, what hope is there for any fun?”

She began dancing and shaking, alternately twirling Miyaro and locking arms with him. When the song ended, Miyaro dimmed the light and switched off the radio.

He slowly approached her. “Don’t worry, Princess, I won’t undress you. But there is one item of adornment that needs to come off.”

He clutched the emerald necklace, then slowly lifted it over her head and tossed it to the side.

“I have a favorite dolphin named Mako who appears in the ocean here at the Roackaseen Valley Coastal,” Vonda said, smiling contently. “Any dolphin shall appreciate an emerald gift, surely.”

He drew closer to her. And closer. Her lips were partially open, and her eyes closed. Heart racing, he drew within an inch of her, such that he smelled her sweet cherry breath.

Then he gave her a tender kiss—on her cheek. “My spirit tells me that’s all you get now, Princess. Not to take advantage of a dear friend in a vulnerable position.”

She headed for the door, then turned. “I remain breathless by your compassion and concern, Rene.” A sole tear rolled down her prominent cheek. “Mr. Liccardi keeps saying, he likes you more every time he sees you. With each new encounter, I LOVE you more.”

She ran up to him, and planted a big kiss on his lips.

They heard the booming voice of Emile outside. He was on a transcontinental phone call. “Luis, your son is here! Come get him!” That train of discussion continued.

Vonda was openly amused, mouthing “No! No!” alternatively to Miyaro and Emile, and making slashing motions with her arm. The more Emile persisted with his Argentine colleague, the more playfully animated Vonda became.

“It’s over, Papa,” she called---and then louder, “Hello, Mr. Mendez!”

Deafening shots tore through the house as glass shattered. Miyaro took a quick glance.

He ducked. Vonda’s screams started just as the shooting stopped. Miyaro saw the horror of Emile Roackaseen face down in his blood.

He made an emergency distress call as a Roackaseen guard ran outside. It was quiet; the jeep where the shooting came from was stationary, and the gunman was nowhere in sight. The Roackaseen guard returned, rifle drawn, and he called for backup.

Then Miyaro heard the sound of a motor firing up in the back. “They came up by boat!” He shouted to the guard.

The guard ran outside. There were multiple shots. Miyaro ran to the guard’s bedroom and found a stash of weapons. He picked up a grenade launcher and loaded it. Miyaro ran to the side of the house. From the streetlights and dock lights, he saw two bodies on the ground: the guard and an assassin.

The boat was chugging away; yellow internal lights marking its course. Miyaro ran to the dock and aimed the launcher. The boat was still only 30 feet away, and turning.

With a determined jerk of the hand Miyaro let it fly. The clanking and the explosion were almost simultaneous. There was a flame, scream, and a human torch. Rebel Alliance soldiers from the checkpoint quickly arrived, and blasted the boat with machine gun fire. Other soldiers ran through the neighborhood, guns drawn for other possible assassins. In front, near the jeep, they found the

second Roackaseen guard, dead from a bullet wound.

Finally the shooting ceased, and they saw the mangled boat.

Miyaro examined the two bodies behind the Roackaseen house. They both wore the green uniforms. But the pocket of the assassin carried the badge, Domestic Enforcement Branch, High Command—of the Sydenham government. Carreon wasn't the only leader to master the art of infiltration.

“Weren't you guys patrolling the inlet?” Miyaro shouted at the soldiers. “The deadly perils of a premature revolution!”

Miyaro ran inside the house. There were three soldiers standing above Emile and Vonda, not knowing what to do. The sight of Vonda sobbing loudly, while throwing a body shield over her assassinated father, brought Miyaro to tears. He couldn't bear it. He went outside, sat down, and covered his face.

A gentle sting of the Renland knocked him out of his grief. Belinda sent an encrypted request for an emergency meeting. Apparently Miyaro's recent briefing sent via the Renland had gotten someone's attention. Big time.

Belinda sent him the coordinates. It was on the beach, just 2 Km from Roackaseen Valley Coastal. He ran down the beach, toward the meeting point. It was dark; he could barely see the whitewater from the crashing waves on his right.

As he ran, he prayed. He had just killed. There were all these blurred lines: war, justifiable homicide, murder. The previous few minutes were

vivid contrast to those nights in Kissimmee, where he'd counseled people on anger management.

The lights from a beached helicopter caught his attention ahead. He heard the whirring. He ran faster. He wanted to finish the meeting with Belinda and return to Vonda right away. Vonda desperately needed him, is all he could think of.

Reaching the helicopter, he saw Lansford and a young stud both dressed up, like news reporters. Two guards approached them from the road. Lansford produced a press pass.

"We're covering the civil war for multiple news outlets," she explained calmly. "Are there any comments you would like to share for our broadcast?"

"Just this." The bearded speaker wore the Vanguardia uniform. "This isn't a civil war. It's liberators chasing fascist dogs into the woods."

Lansford and Miyaro got into the chopper. The stud guy was the pilot.

"Got your report. That's eye-opening intel," the pilot said to Miyaro. "Viruet, you're amazing!"

Miyaro grabbed the pilot's shirt hard with his left hand. Then he extended his right hand. "Rene Miyaro is the name."

"He's okay—one of the hardware men Andrews cleared to join us," Lansford yelled over the noise.

"Where are we going?" Miyaro yelled back.

"We have orders to airlift you out of here."

"What?!"

Then the chopper was airborne, soaring over the ocean toward Tyrene.

**“Vonda has no one! I need to get back there!
Put this thing down, now!”**

**“Can’t do that. Presidential Order. We’ll
explain at the hotel in Tyrene.”**

Tyrene

The chopper landed at the Tyrene airport, and a fancy air-conditioned cab drove them downtown. Tyrene was calm and pristine again; a bastion of order, even if they didn’t yet clean all the blood off the streets. The reality of Miyaro again inhabiting territory controlled by General Sydenham made him want to puke.

Lansford checked Miyaro into a different hotel than the one Roebuck had found. It was just as nice, with fountains and a miniature golf course on the side. Lansford calmly suggested Miyaro get some rest to prepare for the briefing in the morning. Miyaro’s royal and soft room overlooked the ocean.

After a six-course breakfast, Miyaro met Lansford under the usual pier on the quiet Tyrene beach.

“Your intel had no bearing on the President’s Order last night,” Lansford explained. “Yesterday, PNR Interim President Julio Carreon had a telephone conversation with President Velasquez that our President found very troubling. Right after that, the President ordered an immediate suspension of US economic and military aid to Julio Carreon’s interim government, and consulted Congressional leaders. The President considers you his prized agent, and wants you out of here soon. He was very appreciative of your HUMINT feedback in light of the Renland blackout. Your report added

confirmation to President Carreon's briefing to our President: that Carreon's rebel forces are under control of Davalillo and Aztlan."

"If my intel was so good, why not leave me here?"

"The President believes he can have it both ways: Let me and the hardware guys follow up on Pendergrass's blackmail payments on our scam, while getting you out of harm's way."

"What harm are we talking about, Belinda?"

"President Velasquez is very upset. All options are on the table, including a possible military strike against Carreon's forces, contaminated by Davalillo—and possible nuclear terrorism, given Pendergrass's 100 K payment. If he hits Carreon, he will also hit Sydenham, to show he is not siding with a dictator, and in response to the documented brutality of the Sydenham regime. If the President does strike Sydenham, that's Tyrene. We're ground zero."

"I understand. I warned Carreon--but not strongly enough."

"You're scheduled at Tyrene airport 1500 on Tuesday, to a fight to Dulles. Until then, enjoy the beach, and pray that your exit is soon enough."

"One more thing: there was a terrible tragedy. General Martin Andrews died of a heart attack yesterday. What a loss of a great man and nice guy. You probably didn't have time to follow all the recent International news reports."

That's the last thing Miyaro needed to hear, on top of the other adversities. Stunned, he remained silent for two minutes, processing the possible contingencies.

Finally he asked, "Who's our upline then?"

“General Hester is designated Andrews’s backup.”

“Don’t know him. But as General Andrews knew, and I will tell this just to you out of trust—a high-level person ordered a hit on me during a Special Ops mission in Aztlan. I’m not going to accuse General Hester. But he wasn’t on Andrews’s vetted list, so I don’t trust him.

“Here is the bottom line, Belinda: As soon as I go home, I am an orphan.”

From his Tyrene hotel room, Miyaro spent his time surfing several International TV stations and on-line news outlets, for updates on Davalillo and the Rebel Alliance. He journalled private notes on the Renland, not only for posterity, but as a quiet act of denial, that he was about to be rudely uprooted from a land that had deeply moved him, with unforgettable friendships and relationships.

By the second day of his hibernation, just a few hours before his airline departure, the news accounts crackled with an amazing find: Rebel Alliance forces discovered and liberated a human trafficking prison camp near the central town of St. John’s. Cameras all over the world captured images of 3,000 malnourished, some beaten prisoners destined for sex brothels or slave labor camps, now freed. Human trafficking victims and rebel soldiers alike addressed news reporters on TV.

As worldly rage built against the Sydenham government, Carreon and Davalillo got instant notoriety as human trafficking liberators. This added to Davalillo’s mystique in the PNR countryside, as laborers, field workers, the jobless, grabbed whatever weapons they could find, to join

the revolution. Cameras caught real-life images of advancing warriors, some Vanguardia, thrusting carbines into the air. Those cameras also caught the sight of Sydenham's soldiers retreating.

One pro-Aztlan channel caught a photo of Davalillo high on a mountain, looking down with binoculars. Miyaro thought about Liccardi, when the network news described soldiers suddenly coming out of mountain caves with anti-aircraft weapons, and raining down destruction on Sydenham's army in the valley. Vivid pictures showed a central valley airport used by Sydenham's High Command for fighter jets. Now those jets were in flames.

News updates poured in: "Valentino Davalillo and the Rebel Alliance now control an estimated 75% of the Polynesian National Republic including the national capital. The rebel forces are now just 35 Km from the wealthy port city of Tyrene."

Miyaro recalled Liccardi's preposterous claim to Carreon about a two-week conquest of Tyrene. Now he wondered if Liccardi might be a prophet.

"So much for President Velasquez's military plans against the rebels. He certainly won't be blasting human trafficking liberators for the whole world to see," Miyaro said quietly to himself, as he packed his bag for Tyrene International Airport.

During the long flight to Dulles Airport, Miyaro mused about his Orphan status. Literally he had no one in his life. Viruet was "dead," his biological family was dead, Reverend Gonzalez was exposed, and Miyaro had to stay away from former

church members due to his double life. With the trusted General Andrews also dead, any dealings Miyaro had with the US Intelligence establishment was certain Russian roulette possibly leading to death, because of the faceless official who had ordered that he be killed.

This was one of those momentous life decisions. He would be literally passing from one life into another. He found comfort from Biblical truth: no decision or change of circumstance in this physical life could ever compare with God's promise of an eternal, wonderful afterlife in heaven for those who have faith in Jesus Christ.

Miyaro gave a name for his new life leap: Orphan Chase Game. As the jumbo jet approached the USA, he worked out all of the details in his steel-trap mind.

The New York Orphanage

Landing at Dulles and tired, he got a Renland message from General Hester ordering him to appear in his office at 2:00 the next day, and then attend the funeral for Martin Andrews. The command was blunt and without deference to the General's family, or the trauma that Miyaro had just experienced. This rude message just propelled Miyaro with more vigor to diss the US Intelligence establishment.

He planned the three jabs in the eye that would surely provoke the chase after him. The first he was able to accomplish that afternoon: Cab it to CIA headquarters in Langley, walk quietly into one of offices he uses without speaking to anyone, drop the Renland GPS in a desk drawer, and then leave.

After all, this fancy gizmo belonged to the US Government, not an Orphan. And it would make the Orphan glow.

The second two jabs in the eye occurred the following morning, in the hours preceding his scheduled meeting with General Hester. He closed four of his bank accounts of significant savings spanning years. That was \$150,000 in a large shoulder bag. Totally legal, but the government would notice.

The third action was arranging the delivery of flowers and note—from Rene Miyaro—to the sight of General Andrews’ burial—meaning he would not be there.

The last planned words from Rene Miyaro were spoken to the flower delivery service: “We Christians do not have funerals; only celebrations of passing. There is no death here. Martin Andrews was a Godly man.”

3:17 PM. General Hester would be looking for him now; he had to make his dive. He found a woman’s clothing store, and bought some clothes and stuffed them in a bag. At the New Carrollton train station in Maryland—and temporarily transgendered--he found a deserted space and stuffed the large cash bills from his large shoulder bag into two smaller ones, as fast as he could. Then he boarded an Amtrak train for New York.

In Gotham, with eons of people, he was truly in the wilderness. He changed into more normal clothes. He paged a car at Times Square, and thought about Sunset Park as a destination. No, that was Rene Miyaro’s birthplace, he remembered. He thought of a place more innocuous: how about Astoria, Queens.

The cab dropped him in a quiet residential community with brownstones mixed with tenements, a few unattached houses, and stores along the avenues. He looked for a hotel, but then remembered that they would require plastic; something that would be traceable. He found a restaurant and had a meal. He got a safety deposit box for the cash. As he slept in a urine-scented alley that night, he considered how technology, and government tracking capabilities, had almost totally removed anyone's ability to remain private and anonymous. Maybe we were close to the end times, he mused: The Mark of the Beast.

He had some holdover IDs from his former profession, so the identity challenge was taken care of, in case of emergency. He settled on which ID to use: Julius Jones; a name that wouldn't stick out. The next day he searched for several hours, until he found a tenement manager who would take cash payments on a weekly basis.

With all that money, he needed to protect himself. Purchasing a gun, even on the black market, was traceable. He bought whatever he could get over the counter via cash: knives and archery equipment.

The second-floor tenement room was devoid of furniture. The second night he had to sleep on the floor, and battle the loud voices outside and honking horns. On the third day, he paid cash and delivered the furniture, including bed, fridge, TV and some books including Bibles. Now, for his appearance: no alterations were necessary, except maybe some scruffy whiskers and shorter hair. A car wasn't needed because of the elaborate New York transportation systems.

On the evening of the third day, he treated himself out to a nice Italian dinner. He smiled and relaxed. He had found his Orphanage!

He kept a calendar under his bed, with dates circled. He was counting the number of days that he remained elusive of the American Intelligence establishment. In the back of his mind, he knew that he would need income in the future. He resolved to worry about that later. Maybe next year. God will provide, he told himself.

Now onto his next life: And that was emersion in church activities, because he knew he needed God's help during this trial on the run. He found a multi-ethnic church in Flushing, similar to the Kissimmee church he once pastored. It made him feel good with fond memories. He met as many people as he could. When they inquired about his background, he said that he was getting Federal disability payments for a neurological disease, and just wanted to spend every day serving God.

Everyday meant Bible studies, small groups, and volunteer work at church for the Black Pastor, James Merritt, who accepted him warmly. Over time, this Pastor recognized Miyaro's—nee Jones's—Biblical knowledge, Christian walk, charity activities among the poor, and an ability to disciple and encourage young adults. Within a month Pastor Merritt offered him a part-time job at the church, as spiritual counselor. He loved the 20-25 hours per week spent encouraging, mentoring, problem-solving, for young Christians trying to navigate through a wild world and a clash of values. He made friends easily and often, very gregariously—though the relationships were focused on church activities and occasional outside social activities. He had no

deep relationships involving his personal life—because he had no personal life with himself.

From Day One of his new life, he made a firm decision to ignore accounts of events in the Polynesian National Republic. That was part of his past life, and he considered it a distraction. More significantly, it was painful to think about. Thus, if he walked by a TV where the news was on, he would turn his head. He shunned newspapers.

The recollections came in, though, like Tyrene waves. He fended them off with prayers and enjoyable New York sporting events.

The nights were a little tough. Even with the distractions of classical music and TV sports shows near his bed, he had “near dream” experiences with Vonda Roackaseen: Her soft voice calling “Rene”; or “I love you more every time I see you”—her grace; compassion for the humble; courage to confront the mindboggling oppression alien to most Americans; breathtaking beauty; riveting scenes playing over and over again in his head--the entire aura of the Naiad and Tyrene. A Roackaseen Valley hangover.

Weeks and weeks went by like clockwork. The 88th day was a cold, rainy day in November. He was leaving an Astoria coffee shop, where he had given job advice to a young Japanese man from the church. Chilled, he was relieved to walk up the wooden steps to his second-floor abode, go inside, and toss away the wet windbreaker, and settle in to check the sport scores.

Day 89 would not be circled. The knock came firmly on the door. Outside, he saw a reedy

Black man in his thirties, hair a little thick and light, and well dressed. He held up a very special ID.

“I’m Terry Fowler, Senior Advisor to President Jaime Velasquez. May I come in?” His voice was confident.

There was a hesitation. “Yes, Pastor Merritt did say a member would be visiting for spiritual counseling. Wow, I didn’t know we had Presidential appointees at our church! Come in.”

They sat across from each other, stiffly. “Now, how can I help you, Mr. Fogler?”

Fowler laughed, “I’m not sure who to call you.”

“Well, I am Julius Jones, Pastoral Assistant at Jubilee Presbyterian Church. Maybe you have the wrong address. Can I help you find the right person?”

“Sure,” Fowler answered. “I am looking for Dr. Rene Miyaro, for starts.”

“For starts? Are there any other people you are searching for?”

Fowler answered, “I have a list of names in this briefcase. A couple I can’t pronounce. I’ll spell one of them. V-I-R-U-E-T. First name, Jude.”

“Mr. Fowler, I’ll ask you a question. If you don’t answer, I will physically throw you down those steps and mess up your Presidential suit. Tell me everything you know about Jude Viruet.”

“For starts, President Velasquez considers him our nation’s top Intelligence Officer.”

“Did you say past tense?”

“Present tense,” Fowler said sharply. “The airline crash was a fake, to give Mr. Viruet—that’s YOU, a new identity.”

“Why would Viruet need a new identity?”

“Because someone high up in the Intelligence community tried to have Viruet killed in Merida, Mexico.”

Viruet sprung like a cat onto Fowler, knocked him off his chair, pinned him to the floor and ground his fist against Fowler’s neck.

“If someone is trying to kill you, and you kill them first, that is justifiable homicide. Only four people besides the President knew I was on the Aztlan special assignment. Not one of them was told about the top-secret identity change to Miyaro. Only someone with very high Renland capabilities would know that; the same person who is sabotaging Renland surveillance in the Pacific. Two and two tells me you are the attempted killer.”

Fowler locked Viruet’s eyes with his. ‘For one, you are man of Christian faith. That spells fairness and integrity. So am I, for twenty years now, and there is not one shred of evidence to implicate me in wrongdoing.’ He raised his voice, “Give me the decency of letting me sit up and explain.”

Viruet relented, and the two men were face to face again.

Fowler said, “If I had to go through what you did, I would have behaved exactly like you did. But has there been a slippage in your analytical skills, Viruet? If I wanted to kill you, and I saw you and you didn’t see me, why would I knock on your friggin door?”

“I’ve been traumatized by certain events. Please accept my apology.”

Fowler nodded, “That crazy Pacific island. A thorn in Jaime’s side, like the Apostle Paul’s

thorn. That's why the President sent me to New York."

"How did you find me?"

"The network tentacles of the Renland took a while to reach you. I'm sure if things were reversed, you would have found me in a week. President Velasquez ordered that Agency technical experts train me thoroughly on the Renland GPS. Call it insurance for Elton Bullock's lapses."

"Bullock make mistakes?" Viruet said, and they both laughed.

"Viruet, I will give you the good news first, and the better news second. We've solved the mystery about who wanted you dead. It's not Bullock. Syed Mohammed's training is uncovering International finance fraud. He did extra vetting on Bosley Taylor since Taylor was new to the White House. Taylor was running a double life, using his own Renland capabilities to shield his criminal side. He operated a very lucrative International arms dealership. With Davalillo marching into the Mexican oil fields, Taylor saw dollar signs that could make him a billionaire—like, being the Pentagon for Aztlan. The only problem is, you were there to kill Davalillo, as Bullock's loose lips informed him. So Taylor paid three of his trusted heavies to hit you.

"When they failed to kill you, Taylor approached Davalillo directly about his offer of arms to Aztlan. To gain more credibility in Davalillo's eyes, he devulged the name Jude Viruet as the person sent to kill Davalillo. Then, when the Agency leaked news reports about Viruet's death, Taylor lied and told Davalillo he was the one who killed Viruet. Davalillo, fully trusting him now, signed the agreement with Taylor's arms cartel. Then Taylor

used his Renland expertise to give Davalillo a blackout in the PNR for his mischief.”

“If Taylor would have approached Davalillo directly earlier, my encounter with Davalillo in Merida wouldn’t have been so pleasant. Stupid Bullock and his big mouth. What did you do with Taylor?”

“Mohammed confronted Taylor with the evidence. First Taylor pulled a gun to threaten Syed. Then Taylor turned the gun on himself. Caught dead to rights, then suicide.”

Fowler led Viruet outside to a black limo, with the engine still running. Viruet and Fowler climbed into the back seat, and the driver fought through the New York traffic until they reached Manhattan. They stopped in front of a ritzy Gramercy Park townhouse that Viruet recognized as an Agency safe house.

Viruet had a hard time keeping up with Fowler, he was walking so fast. This guy doesn’t fool around, Viruet thought.

Fowler unlocked the door, and within five minutes, Fowler had a bright map of the Polynesian National Republic displayed on a wall screen inside a bright paneled room. Viruet felt immediate excitement, beholding this former wonderland of ecstasy and death.

Fowler said, “The green mass is territory controlled by Carreon and Davalillo and his guerillas. The smaller blue area, around Tyrene, is the territory belonging to the Sydenham government. The black line between the colors, west of Tyrene, is a demilitarized zone. There is currently a lull in the fighting.”

“I can’t believe Davalillo hasn’t taken Tyrene yet. They were days away!”

“Viruet, you obviously haven’t been paying attention to news. That’s pretty hard these days. Sydenham had a nice surprise for them. The High Command has advanced cyber-technology—which we have here in the US, top secret—that can knock out power. I am not talking about Renland Intelligence surveillance. That’s ALL power. Now we know why Davalillo wanted into the PNR so bad. He wanted that technology to black out Mexico.”

“And then Phoenix, San Diego, Houston, LA,” Viruet said.

“No, we can stop that. But Davalillo just didn’t fathom that it could be used on his forces so easily. Carreon is busy getting shipments of generators from New Zealand.”

“What’s the status of the Rebels?” Viruet asked.

“Disarray, of course. Carreon got a vote of his government to officially change the name of the rebel-held country to Roackaseen Valley; named in honor of the Native tycoon murdered as a martyr by Sydenham agents—as you well know.”

“Yes.” Viruet’s heart suddenly raced.

“So, we’ve got a 20% wealthy tyranny called the PNR. And an 80% abyss named Roackaseen Valley. Back to Biblical times economic activity, just to survive. And neither the PNR or RV are recognized by the International community of nations.”

Viruet took a deep breath for the magical question. “I’m going back there.”

Fowler nodded to confirm. “President Velasquez, your biggest fan, is giving you huge cover

this time. You're going in as Miyaro, of course--as the President's Special Peacekeeper Envoy to those two nations, to facilitate a dialogue leading to possible peace and national unification. You go in with full Renland capabilities, and SIGINT and HUMINT backup."

"Why am I going back?"

"To bring peace? Sure, if you can pull off the impossible, go for it." Fowler leaned forward. "We have a big problem. Mario Pendergrass, that weird nuclear scientist who laid offered 100 grand to stop talk about nuclear weapons. Our agents there have failed to locate him. He disappeared under the cover of Taylor's Renland jam, and he is nowhere to be found. The President is insistent that we find him. We can't have a potential nuclear terrorist unaccounted for. Any on the ground intel from that dormant revolution would also be appreciated."

"Okay."

"One thing you won't like: Your upline is Elton Bullock. He is still the President's overseer of all American intelligence activity, and we now know he's clean. You'll need that immense infrastructure he has, to track down a potential nuclear terrorist. But you'll still have a direct line to me, if need be. We have Bullock on a short leash, and scrutiny, after his recent ringling displays."

Viruet, now Miyaro again, was so thrilled about going back to the PNR, that Bullock's annoyances didn't phase him a bit.

Polynesian National Republic

Miyaro's plane ride into the PNR was full of anticipation. After a long nap, he saw the majestic

island below him, and the sun glowing beyond the fuselage. Smoke hovered off in the distance near the mountains, indicating residual fighting.

His reception this time was not as before; the Harvard Professor fumbling around. This time a motorcade of three limos greeted him at Tyrene International Airport. After all, he was now a Presidential appointee. Tyrene remained the jewel that Miyaro remembered from before. Sydenham's military had done a remarkable job protecting their prized Princess City.

Miyaro's sparking hotel sat only a block from the ocean. Ed Grayson, the very accommodating escort with blonde beard, sunglasses and blue suit, called this hotel the Diplomat Compound, because this is where Sydenham wanted the national envoys to stay. Diplomat Compound was a misnomer; since Sydenham's military regime had very few diplomatic relations, these envoys represented informal Missions, not Embassies.

The only difference between this sparking hotel, with its water and sporting features, and other Tyrene hotels, was the armed blue-uniformed soldiers patrolling the grounds. Ostensibly, it was for the envoys' protection. Miyaro suspected the soldiers were there also to keep track of the envoys.

"I don't want my presence a big deal and media circus," Miyaro told Grayson. "Get rid of the motorcade. But I do need a helicopter."

Miyaro used his considerable expense account to procure a helicopter out of Tyrene Airport. A middle-aged woman from the US Mission piloted the helicopter. They soared over the ocean to the south of the island, until they reached the blacked-out capital city of St. Augustine.

A major protocol issue needed to be addressed: Since Roackaseen Valley was technically a separate nation from the PNR per the vote of Carreon's cabinet, a different US Mission had to handle Miyaro in St. Augustine. The Mission Chief there was Beck, an ex-Army Major, who had already notified the Rebel Government of Miyaro's arrival in St. Augustine. That cleared the landing of the helicopter in the quiet St. Augustine airport, without hostile military acts aimed at the chopper.

Viruet had a sickly feeling staying at a downtown St. Augustine hotel that night. It had a generator, but still the lights seemed dim. He had a hard time finding a restaurant out in the streets, so he ate semi-spoiled seafood at the hotel restaurant. Outside, there were constant bonfires on display. He didn't sleep very well.

The next morning, a US Flag-bearing limo carrying Beck and Miyaro drove to the moat-lined government palace. This would be a rude encounter. Three surly officials met Miyaro, et. al., outside the building. One older gentleman in a tweed suit greeted them with a limp handshake.

"President Carreon is on an extended trip overseas working on critical energy issues," the man explained. "There will be no government meetings until he returns—especially for world leaders who won't give us respect and recognition."

That meant the end of this five minute meeting. Miyaro cited the name Dr. Mario Pendergrass, the renowned physicist. These rebel government representatives hadn't a clue who Miyaro was talking about. At least they claimed not to.

Miyaro asked Beck to take him back to St. Augustine Airport for helicopter escort. Beck was a

trained helicopter pilot from the Army, so he personally flew Viruet back toward Tyrene.

“There’s a peninsula over there on the right. Put the chopper down on the beach,” Miyaro said. “This is home to the sole remaining member of the Roackaseen family.”

As the chopper landed, Miyaro’s heart raced. Weeks and weeks of anticipation rose to his throat. All the previous recollections of his precious Vonda roared back to his conscience.

The familiar road on the blacked-out peninsula was quiet. The checkpoints remained exactly where Miyaro remembered them; the difference is, the soldiers now were lounging around, some smoking.

Right in front of Miyaro stood the 100 foot long Roackaseen Valley Coastal. He walked briskly across the stone path to the home awash with history from his last visit. With a deep breath, he knocked on the door.

After two minutes of suspense, the door swung open. He met a casually-dressed, middle aged South Asian man.

“I’m Rene Miyaro, US Presidential Special Envoy.” He flashed his credentials.

“Mr. Singh. How may I help you?”

Miyaro peeked inside. Everything looked different; there were Hindu trinkets.

“May I come in?”

“We can speak here.” Singh stepped outside.

“I’m looking for Vonda Roackaseen.”

“Yes, the family that supposedly controls this island,” Singh said. “I’ve never met them. But this

used to be one of their properties. I bought this about two months ago after my business transfer.”

“Who did you deal with for the sale?” Miyaro asked.

“Don’t remember his name. He had a British accent—wait, his name was Rowland, or maybe Roebuck.”

“Address of the sellers?”

Singh accommodated him by going inside and digging through papers. He brought out one with the address listed: the Naiad.

Beck was not agreeable to landing the chopper at the Naiad, in the heart of the war zone. Miyaro, deflated, had Beck return him to Tyrene and Grayson’s jurisdiction. The continued mystery of Vonda’s whereabouts propelled him on his mission with residual excitement. He also thanked God that Davey was alive; an adopted Roackaseen.

He reasoned that he would get a better reception from General Sydenham. After all, Sydenham was crowing on the Tyrene TV stations how he had the rebels on the run and was winning the civil war.

The next morning, a limo bearing American Flags, along with Miyaro and Grayson, reached the three-story stone government fortress in Tyrene. They were greeted and escorted by a half-dozen army officers. A friendly blonde woman met them inside a large rotunda room. They walked up the steps smelling of fancy paneling. They came to a tall wooden door. The name on the front was General John Calkins—the same guy who’d placed those gaudy signs around Tyrene U. on the day of the massacre.

The tall blonde woman led them through a large front office, to the General's private office. An elderly gray man with flashing medals on blue uniform sat behind a large wooden desk. He offered seats to Miyaro and Grayson.

"We have frequent communications with the American Mission already. What different offers do you bring to us today, Dr. Miyaro?" Calkins's hard voice carried an Australian dialect.

"I'm here on behalf of President Velasquez, to--"

"Is that so? Well, we have a question for your dear President: when is he going to show proper respect and protocol spanning centuries, and give due diplomatic recognition to our sovereign PNR? Your meeting request with General Sydenham is denied. The General will only meet with President Velasquez. The topic of that discussion will be resumption of normal relations between two nations, including economic exchanges."

"That may be a possibility if we can get both sides talking," Miyaro said. "Please keep the door open for General Sydenham to meet with key leaders, including Davalillo and President Carreon. We also encourage key economic and academic leaders. On that note, we are trying to locate Dr. Mario Pendergrass. Do you have contact information for him?"

"I know of a Dr. Pendergrass, but I have no idea how to contact him."

"Can you ask your military intelligence operatives to help us? Also, a key player, economically of course, is the Roackaseen family. Since Emile has passed, we are looking for his

daughter, Vonda. Do you know where she may be located?"

Calkins expression hardened. "I have no idea where Vonda Roackaseen is. But if you do find her, you are duty bound, as a guest of our nation, to turn her over to us. Ms. Roackaseen is being sought by our government for treason—now, Mr. hot shot negotiator Rene Miyaro. Next time you come to my office, get your facts straight: Valentino Davalillo is dead. In the most glorious day for this nation, we killed him in battle three weeks ago. This is a great service the PNR provided for the entire world! General Sydenham is declaring October 20th a national holiday."

Miyaro smiled over his humiliation and frustration, then offered his hand. "Thank you, General. You have my card."

"One last thing," Calkins said. "You bring that rich traitor Vonda Roackaseen to me in handcuffs, you can have your meeting with General Sydenham."

Back at the hotel lobby, Miyaro confronted Grayson, "Why didn't you inform me about Davalillo's death?"

"That's Sydenham's claim to rally is troops. We don't have confirmation of that. For some reason, we've received incomplete intel from our services during the past few weeks."

Miyaro thought about the most obvious place to check. "Ed, I need an official escort to the Roackaseen Naiad."

Grayson turned white. "The Roackaseen Naiad sits right on the battleground fault lines. The rebel forces have taken the actual mansion. But Sydenham controls all the energy fields. I can get

you up to the DMZ. You will have to cross it yourself.” Grayson reached into his large shoulder bag and handed Miyaro an automatic pistol. “I don’t know if you know how to use it. You may have to.”

Grayson provided Miyaro a jeep escort up the hill away from downtown Tyrene. So far, the surroundings were all vacation wonderland. But as darkness crouched, the abyss was at the door.

Finally Grayson stopped next to a large park. “This is as far as we go.”

“I’ll get you back to the Mission and take the car.” Miyaro displayed the bullet proof vest beneath his guayabera shirt.

The residential neighborhood became more sporadic; spotty subdivisions now. Neon lights disappeared, and Miyaro saw darkness, like an advancing thunderstorm. Soldiers and jeeps sat along the highway. The scene escalated, until he saw a fortress of weapons, shacks and soldiers on both sides of the road. A checkpoint with four blue-uniformed Officers came to view. Miyaro stopped his jeep .

“No vehicles beyond this point,” the lead Officer said sternly.

“US fact finding mission.” Miyaro displayed the credentials.

“We’ve got real soldiers, bombs, bullets and bodies out there. War isn’t politics or CNN.”

The Officer took the keys out of the jeep. Miyaro proceeded on foot into the restricted zone. Jeeps carrying Sydenham’s soldiers dotted streets lit with weak neon. Miyaro ran on smooth pavement where he could, to avoid possible land mines. The Renland helped navigate. Now there were box

cabins along the road, housing High Command soldiers. Artillery guns peaked out.

Up ahead were the remains of a Roman Catholic cathedral, shattered by bombs. Huge chunks of cement, rock and brick, some as high as four feet, clogged the highway. Now there were stragglers; refugees digging through debris for food.

The occasional box cabins were damaged or deserted. Lights from flashlights darted about. The road itself was cracked and chunky. Visible were ash and cinder and charred wood and twisted steel rods.

With deep prayer, and then fast movement, Miyaro climbed over fallen palm trees to reach another block. Through the semi-darkness, ahead were a dozen men in green uniforms, hands held high, being pushed by blue-clad soldiers. The few pedestrians were all walking in the opposite direction, toward him. A subliminal warning.

He ran into total darkness, until the nighttime wildlife serenaded him. Surrounded now by palm, pine and high grass, he pulled out the Renland GPS with the lighted screen. Using his years of expertise, he located the Roackaseen Naiad mansion: 9 Km to the northwest.

Before beginning his trek, he programmed the Renland search for IEDs. Over thirty flashes danced across the screen. Then he did a search for people. There were none nearby, but a large cluster directly north, at the top of his screen. Using a flashlight in his free hand, he jogged through the brush toward the cluster, navigating away from the IEDs. Winded 35 minutes later, he saw a road ahead. To the left was a steel gate and low voices from soldiers. Waving flashlights and battery-

generated floodlights brought clarity. These three soldiers had green uniforms and automatic rifles.

A makeshift painted wooden sign caught his eye: **YOU ARE ENTERING THE NATION OF ROACKASEEN VALLEY.**

The sign had wheels: wheels of hope.

Miyaro shined the flashlight on his face, and after hiding the Renland raised his left hand high. The soldiers greeted him with drawn weapons. They led him to the jeep, pushed him down, and search his pockets.

“Cellphone,” Miyaro said of the Renland, “And an ID from the US Government, White House, is in my back pocket.”

The soldiers eyed the ID with fascination. “Presidential advisor?” the lead Officer questioned wide-eyed.

“I’m the Special Envoy working with President Velasquez on a fact finding and peacekeeping mission.”

The soldiers exchanged looks. Then the lead Officer said, “Take him to Commander Ruiz.”

They gave Miyaro a breezy ride in a jeep, passing tall grass and lilies. He knew he was close to the Naiad. The jeep turned right down a paved road, toward a different mansion. Dim lights shined from inside. Other soldiers greeted the jeep driver, and took them both inside.

“Wait here,” the jeep driver said.

Miyaro beheld a large den area. Light came from small generators, hand-held devices and candles. There was soft furniture, but most soldiers rested on the floor or on sleeping bags. These soldiers were both Vanguardia and regular Rebel

Alliance soldiers. Some soldiers ate rations or fruit. The stench of body odor was gagging.

The jeep driver returned with four briskly-walking Vanguardia soldiers. The lead soldier had a beard and cigar.

“Hello, Dr. Miyaro,” Carlos Ruiz said.

“President Velasquez gave me a special peacekeeping assignment,” Miyaro said, flashing his ID. “Can we talk for a few minutes, Mr. Ruiz?”

Instead, Ruiz gave him a firm shove. “You made a very suspicious entrance to our compound. You couldn’t just contact me?”

“Listen, I’ve been back on this island for three days, and I’m not finding many friends. That’s strange for someone wanting to end the killing and suffering.”

“You can thank that plastic in your pocket for your rude reception,” Ruiz said with his Mexican dialect. “Your President Velasquez made very clear his disrespectful attitude toward oppressed people on this island, including our Revolution.”

Ruiz took him back to a private library used as his private office. Miyaro was surprised to see a picture blowup of the shaggy-haired Eumir Liccardi—with a bulls-eye painted on his face.

“Feel free to crash over there in that corner tonight—no one’s going to take you back to any fancy Tyrene hotel.”

“Davalillo is dead. Is that right?” Miyaro asked, anticipating.

“Sad but true. Davalillo was too bold; blind to his limitations from all the media hoopla. He recklessly took a brigade of Vanguardia soldiers to try to break through the military wall in Tyrene. We

tried to give him artillery support, but Sydenham's machine was too strong. They blasted Davalillo."

"How is the Rebel campaign progressing?"

"General Shigeta was taken prisoner and is languishing in a Sydenham prison camp, near the oil fields. President Carreon is out of the country trying to save this nation from the Stone Ages. That leaves me in charge of the Revolution—both as Rebel Alliance leader and Commander of the Vanguardia Sindicalismo, replacing Davalillo."

Miyaro said, "I thought Eumir Liccardi is second in command of the Vanguardia Sindicalismo."

"WAS second in command," Ruiz emphasized. "Eumir Liccardi has abandoned the Revolution, and disgraced the organization of liberation that he pledged his life to."

Miyaro did a quick double-take, recalling Liccardi's fanatical passion for the cause. "Commander Ruiz. I need access to the Naiad mansion. To prepare for possible peacekeeping talks, we need to involve the Roackaseen family because of their obvious prominence on this island. Vonda is there, right?"

"Some Roackaseen people are still there, including Taveras, one of our revolutionary leaders. But I haven't seen Vonda. The Naiad is a symbolic Revolutionary post. With your diplomatic pass, you have free reign of the entire nation. As the leader who runs Roackaseen Valley, I will send out a communiqué, so everyone will respect your American authority and your travels here."

"Thank you, Commander. Once last thing: I've been asked to include key academic leaders in peace talks. A prominent scientist with links to both

sides, Mario Pendergrass, is a valuable addition. Any ideas where I can find him?"

"Haven't a clue, Dr. Miyaro. But I fail to see what Dr. Pendergrass has to do with peace. He is muy loco!"

Naiad

The next morning Ruiz's soldier deposited Miyaro in front of the Naiad. Nothing was familiar. The sunshine gate was gone, and much of the fence was mangled. The manicured grass inside the grounds was long and brown. The rose garden was thorns. The stately three story mansion was partially damaged, caved, from an artillery hit. All that remained untouched was Mee Hye's grave site.

Two Rebel Alliance soldiers stationed outside intercepted him. After he displayed his Presidential ID, they led him inside. This was eerie; all the ghosts, the memories returned. The furnishings were exactly how he remembered them. Like a blast from the past, Mildy, one of the familiar Roackaseen servants, shrieked his name and gave him a big hug.

The jeep driver returned with Angel Taveras, who gave Miyaro a big hug and welcome. Taveras, with M-18 slung over shoulder and black and red Vanguardia stripe, took Miyaro outside. They sat in the tall grass next to the driveway.

"Nice to see a friendly face for a change," Miyaro said. "President Velasquez sent me here with the ultimate peacekeeping assignment; a saving angel--except I've got lots of dust on my wings."

"Yeah, we got peace, man. And poverty. And oppression. And a revolution that ain't doing nothin. Davalillo would never have allowed this."

Taveras tossed the M-18 to the ground. “That’s what I think about the current leadership. My passport can smell a skunk.”

“Commander Ruiz?”

“He keeps bragging about a big surprise for the Revolution. But I ain’t seen it. All he does is complain about Liccardi, saying he deserted us. I think this is just a Ruiz power play.”

“On the subject of power—none at all?”

“Plumbing, but no electricity—I mean, nowhere up here, man.”

“Hey Angel. You know that crazy scientist, Pendergrass? Know where I can find him?”

“That’s something else to take up with Commander Ruiz. I’ve got nothing to do with that. A couple brothers mentioned Ruiz and Pendergrass used to hang out.”

“Vonda inside?”

“Naw, she disappeared,” Taveras said. “I personally believe she took Roackaseen money and left the country for some nice place. Tokyo? Paris? Who could blame her?”

“Mind if I look inside?”

“The Roackaseen Naiad is as much your home as mine, Dr. Miyaro.”

Taveras escorted him inside. Then Miyaro walked down the hall to Vonda’s bedroom. He’d never been inside. He opened the door, and found a huge, royal-sized bed. The room was cluttered with weapons, military garb, and materials that could only belong to women soldiers.

He checked the closet. Hanging there were pants suits and dresses that he recognized from previous encounters with Vonda. The fond

memories came back again; a piece of Vonda still around.

He examined a mahogany cabinet, going through drawers. They were empty, except for photographs. They were all of Vonda: posing with family, one with her late mother, some hugging local children and the Roackaseen domestic help. Vonda's beaming smile marked each of the Photos. Miyaro was hypnotized. Finally, he put the photos in his back pocket and rejoined Taveras. They went back outside.

"Where are Ruiz's forces?" Miyaro asked.

"They're mostly up here in the highland overlooking Tyrene. Some soldiers he's got in the inland communities, looking after townspeople, women with children. The soldiers in St. Augustine he left under the non-Vanguardia RA command structures; the capital is safe from attack, pretty much."

Taveras took Miyaro to the target range outside the gate; *deja vu* from Miyaro's previous visit. Taveras lifted his M-18 and coughed a few bullets right into the bulls-eye.

"I heard Roebuck is running the Roackaseen enterprises with Vonda gone."

"You heard right, Professor. Emile's Last Testament says if blood Roackaseens are gone—that's Emile, Mee Hye and Vonda--then Davey Roebuck runs the show. He's keeping a very low profile."

Miyaro squinted his eyes. "What are Roebuck's loyalties?"

Taveras put the gun down and faced Miyaro at close range. "This is very sensitive. But you are family, and I know you won't betray this info. This

is why I have more respect for Liccardi than Ruiz. Do you remember when you were here, when Liccardi sent Davey to a prison camp?”

“Yeah, I remember. We couldn’t find Davey anywhere.”

“Check this out, man. Liccardi’s prison camps were actually a secret underground railroad to help dissidents escape the Sydenham regime. Some escapees were recruited into the Rebel Alliance. Liccardi looked at Davey and said, ‘what am I going to do with you, man? You can’t shoot no gun.’ They both decided to send Davey back to Tyrene as a double agent.”

“No kidding,” Miyaro smiled widely.

“Here’s how the setup worked: Liccardi gave Davey a song and dance to tell Sydenham’s Generals. Davey’s story was his so-called shock to learn that Liccardi was actually working for the rebels, and that he wanted to kill Davey, considering Davey loyal to Sydenham. So Davey made a frantic escape back to Tyrene, supposedly scared out of his wits. To prove his supposed loyalty to Sydenham, Davey gave the Generals another hot tip: Emile Roackaseen is defecting to Carreon! Wow, really? That tip was a joke, because Emile publicly announced his Rebel Alliance loyalty almost the next day. ‘They murdered Jing!’ Davey screamed to the Generals, as Jing was on a boat off the island. The fascist government thought Davey was sincere. To dramatize the scam, Liccardi lashed Davey three times on the back. When Davey gets to Tyrene, he lifts his shirt and says, look what these rebel monsters did to me!”

“Sounds like some kind of CIA trick,” Miyaro said. And they both laughed and laughed.

“Here’s the deal,” Taveras said. “The fascists let Davey run the Roackaseen enterprises from Tyrene. Davey can travel, and visit Jing in secret. But in reality, Davey is in touch with Liccardi, wherever he is. And Liccardi has deep-cover agents working with Davey in Tyrene. As soon as Liccardi goes Ruff! Ruff! Davey jumps.”

Suddenly distant shots rang out from the highway, toward the mountain. Taveras alerted his soldiers via the radio, and dozens of battle-ready soldiers responded, creeping slowly through the fields, toward the wooded area. Many crouched down, ready to fire. Taveras ran up toward the front, gun drawn. Miyaro followed behind.

“Stand down, we’re coming out.” That voice sounded over Taveras’s radio, and simultaneously over the frequency of other lead Vanguardia officers.

“Liccardi?!” Taveras perked up.

A different group of soldiers came out of the pine and palm forest. Green uniforms, and black and red stripes were everywhere, with carbines pointing upwards. These warriors were precise and energetic; eyes eager.

Eumir Liccardi appeared, his uniform battered, and a tight white rag smothered his left leg. His shoulder-length hair was tied down with a black headband, accentuating a warrior demeanor. He refused to take his piercing eyes off Taveras and six other top Officers as they rapidly approached each other. They met with the clenched fist salute.

Miyaro tried to approach Liccardi, but he was boxed out by about 100 soldiers engulfing their leader.

“Davalillo’s spirit lives to guide the Revolution!” Liccardi called. “And the Revolution

must continue until fascism and human rights abuses are destroyed on this island!” Licardi’s voice was precise, loud and urgent.

“Ruiz has been in command of the highlands brigades,” Taveras offered, taking the lead among the top Officers.

“Where’s the zone of demarcation?” Liccardi asked.

“The Biglands Highway.”

“The same as two weeks ago!” Liccardi yelled. “This place looks like a morgue. Why are we not attacking? What is Ruiz’s strategy?”

“He and other Officers are holed up in the Helman estate.”

“Ruiz wining and dining in mansions while Tyrene remains a prison?” Liccardi said. “Is that Ruiz’s definition of revolution?—and why haven’t you all responded to our communications?”

The Officers looked around. “We received none from you.”

Liccardi took his rifle off his shoulder and slammed the ground hard, as his Officers backed up. “A jam! We’ve been jammed! Long range blackout!”

“Another Sydenham surprise”--

“No, it’s not Sydenham! Only one thing and person has that capability! Get Ruiz up here! Right now!”

“They’re afraid of you or something, man,” Taveras said. “Ruiz has set up the new Vanguardia leadership. And you’re not included. They say you deserted.”

“Then who does he think was up there in the mountains beating back Sydenham’s forces when

they tried to storm the Roackaseen Valley prairieland! Brothers and sisters died up there to push Sydenham back to his Tyrene fortress, and I've got a leg wound to prove it! This revolution is not about electricity, but the heart and soul of average people coming out with knives, pitchforks, whips, whatever, to fight off Sydenham's army! What desertion?!"

Officers produced photos of Liccardi with a bulls-eye across his face. He slammed the photos down and stomped them under his boots.

"Davalillo named me to lead the Vanguardia if he dies! Officers, line the brigades up! Now!"

One of the Officers accompanying Liccardi rolled up a generator and hooked up a microphone.

"Attention, brothers and sisters!" Liccardi's amplified voice rang out. "This is Eumir Liccardi, Commander of the Vanguardia Sindicalismo! I repeat: The one and only Commander of the Vanguardia Sindicalismo! We are here to avenge the deaths of innocents in Roackaseen Valley; victims of human rights abuses; victims of human trafficking; and of course, our great fallen leader Valentino Davalillo!"

"Viva Davalillo! Viva Davalillo!" Came chants; carbines thrust high.

"Peace and justice is only possible with economic unity, racial unity and political and military unity within the Revolutionary forces promoting justice! Carlos Ruiz has violated that unity! He has committed treason by setting himself up as Vanguardia Sindicalismo Commander, and falsely accusing the Revolutionary leadership of abandoning the Revolution! His betrayal of each of us is only for personal gain! Under my authority as

Commander of the Vanguardia Sindicalismo, I am ordering summary execution of Carlos Ruiz! Officers, communicate this order to every Officer under Ruiz's command! If there is even a hint of non-compliance with this edict, kill them! Now, on to the Helman estate!"

Like a tsunami, Liccardi's army flowed through the field with determination. Miyaro tried to elbow his way through the sea of soldiers to get close to Liccardi. Finally, he was about five feet away.

"Mr. Liccardi, we need to talk—when you have time," Miyaro called.

Liccardi stopped, his eyes wild at the recognition. **"Miyaro! This is not Harvard, this is Revolution!"** Then to his Officers, **"Get this man out of here! Out now! Angel, take Miyaro to Kau'a, and don't let him anywhere near us!"**

Miyaro felt himself rudely grabbed, pushed, held, and finally cuffed. Soldiers lifted him and dropped him in the back of a jeep. Taveras took the wheel.

Then he looked back. **"Sorry, man. Orders."**

Dozens of soldiers descended on and surrounded the Helman mansion. At Liccardi's command, a brief volley of gunfire shattered the top windows. Arms reached out of shattered windows waving white cloths. Then the door opened, and several warriors came out unarmed with hands raised high.

"We got your order! We got your order!" They shouted from the house.

A helicopter bolted from behind the mansion and soared quickly.

“Ruiz!” Liccardi cried. He raised his automatic rifle and fired at the retreating helicopter. But it got away. “Pig! Pig!”

Liccardi then pulled a shiny silver device from his pocket.

“Davey, what’s going on over there?”

“Well, Commander Liccardi, I am a might shy about speaking over this band.”

“I told you already: this is special protected communication.”

“Alright. I’m a little tired from the all this bloody work.” Roebuck’s voice was lazy. “Just a couple more pieces, maybe.”

“I’ve got agents in there with you, three from MIT Boston. You’ve got to be close. You’ll be a hero to countless freed peoples.”

“A few days, maybe.”

“Keep up the good work, Davey.”

Liccardi disconnected, then thrust his carbine in front of his soldiers. “Tyrene in less than a week! Liberty! Liberty!”

Tyrene Highlands

The next day, an Officer of the High Command drove up to a stately, fenced-in home in upper crust Tyrene. He knocked on the door. A middle-aged woman with long brown hair, glasses, and pink cotton jumpsuit answered the door.

Dr. Laura Wagner, right? I'm Major Dean. General Calkins asked me to send out a call to the Doctors here in Tyrene. We have a desperate situation here, Ma'am. As you know, our hospitals are beyond capacity from the hostilities. Ten more Doctors have just exited our country. If the rebels launch another offensive, this will be a humanitarian catastrophe. You've got the connections to International relief agencies. Please call them, Ma'am, and tell them how dire this situation is."

"Okay, I will."

She went inside her home past the imported furniture and chandeliers, and down the steps to a large basement. Six wounded men and one woman lay on mats. A young man with pony tail and two Native women tended to them. Medical equipment appeared everywhere.

"Mom, this is Marva," the pony-tailed man introduced one of the Native women. "She's a nurse friend of mine, and wanted to help during free time."

"You know the rules: Ask me first, Johnny—nice to meet you, Marva."

Laura dialed a transcontinental call and put it on speaker.

"We all miss you, Peter. When is your New York assignment up?"

"The 28th. Can't wait, Laura Dear. We may all want to consider moving back to the States if the situation in Tyrene gets any rougher."

"I need a favor, Peter. The government put out a distress call for medical help in Tyrene. Could you please call all your NGO contacts and emphasize the critical need here?"

"Sure. How many injured stragglers has Johnny pulled off the street this week?"

“About ten. Only two for our house. Five other Doctors have basement clinics, to supplement our hospital work,” Laura said.

“How is your longstanding patient, the one with the head injury?”

“He’s doing much better. We’ve kept him sedated because of the high fever, but it’s coming down. The medicine is working, Peter.”

“He was your biggest challenge in your clinic, so if he survives, congratulations, Madam Nightengale. There is one important question I forgot to ask: These soldiers we are treating. They all have blue pants, right?”

“All except for our head injury patient. He has green pants.”

“Laura. Green pants means they are rebel soldiers. If the army comes into our house and sees you treating a rebel soldier, you can be arrested for harboring the enemy.”

“Peter. I am a Doctor. I save lives. When Johnny and I see critically wounded people in the street, we don’t ask their political affiliation.”

Laura hung up. “How is our favorite patient now?” She examined this sturdy man with torn green pants, shoulder length black hair covered by a tight bandage, scruffy beard, and ample hair on his bare chest. His arm supported an IV, with sacks of liquid dripping in.

“He’s trying to talk,” Johnny said.

“Your father warned us about his affiliation. Let’s try again to find out who he is,” Laura said.

Johnny reached into a drawer and took out a burned ID. He examined it. “I still can’t read it.” Then he took the black and red stripe out. One of

the Native nurses took it and wrapped it around her waist, smiling.

“That probably means double trouble,” Laura said. “Please don’t tell your father our patient was wearing it.”

Johnny took one more item out of the drawer: A silver phone device.

“This kind of cell phone I’ve never seen,” Johnny said.

The injured man stirred, moaning. Johnny said in enunciated voice: “What is your name?”

“Le—Le”—He slurred.—“Lauro.”

“Mom, he’s calling you! Now, what is YOUR name, sir?”

Tyrene

Miyaro expressed deep gratitude to the Native couple in Kau’a who welcomed him in and shared fruit from their modest orchard. God showed him that love and smiles were great mitigators of poverty and hardship.

Grayson pulled Miyaro out of that Native village via helicopter, and returned him to Tyrene via coastal route. Miyaro spent the next three days in his hotel, working the Renland GPS with a reckless abandon. The sole mission at hand: use all video and network capability to locate Mario Pendergrass and Vonda Roackaseen. With each session that came up with nothing, he prayed and cried out to God, and asked honestly, if the Astoria layover had diminished his top-notch skills with the Renland.

By the evening of the third day, Miyaro saw God answering prayers, but not anyway close to the way they were asked. These revelations hit him like a one-two punch. He texted Lansford, and she met him under the familiar Tyrene pier, as dusk began to caress the swirling Pacific waves. They both wore beach shorts; just blending into the environment.

“The perpetrator of the Renland blackout got careless and failed to delete shadow image references. Check out this image,” Miyaro said. “Underground compound near the island’s mountains. A big cutout, used for assembly.”

Lansford was very quiet. Then she looked up with a grave expression. “Could be used for nukes.”

“I want you to hear this call to Elton Bullock.”

The Renland’s speaker function with encryption: “Viruet?—I mean, Miyaro?”

“I hope I didn’t wake you, Mr. Director.”

“No, no. Andrews briefed me how he kept a 24-7 alert for you. I got you on a short leash too, boy.”

“How familiar are you with the technical aspects of the Renland, sir?”

“I am Administrator of all aspects of Intelligence in the USA. What makes you think I have time to master every technical detail of everything we do?”

“People who have great expertise on the Renland can actually program it as a malware device. They can hack into Langley, and have Langley support bootleg Renland activities. I have verified that the Renland control in Langley has been hacked, and at least one Renland has been hijacked. How many Renlands are in use? Are they

all accounted for, assigned only to top secret clearance?”

“How would I know, Viruet? As umbrella Intelligence Director, I am over the cotton-pickin CIA, DIA, NSA, PIS, OIR, FIS, DLA, FFB, MIR and CLC.”

Miyaro yelled, “Nobody has time for crazy American bureaucracy with possibly millions of lives in the balance! What I need is for you to scramble your alphabet soup, and give me the name of every operative assigned a Renland GPS. Next, I want the names of every operative ever, in history, who received advanced training on the Renland. ASAP.”

Miyaro disconnected. “Disrespectful, I know. Sorry. I’ll apologize later.”

“You apologize for nothing,” Lansford said. “I’ve got the coordinates for that underground compound.”

Mountain Cave

The next morning, Lansford and two hardnosed accomplices drove up to the cave in a van. She patched Miyaro in on her Renland.

“Big stone in front of the entrance.” She tried to laugh, “Where have we heard about that before?—Also, cement over the cracks.”

“Population proximity?” Miyaro asked.

“Let’s see—two and half miles. This is an isolated mountain area.”

“Blow it.”

“That’s what we got the hardware for.”

After consecutive explosions, they found the dormant light wires, tiles over the dirt, and an open

shaft where the makeshift elevator had collapsed. The agents lowered themselves down with long wool netted ropes. With large flashlights, they found the wide corridor, then the opening to the underground factory. They took the ramp down.

The space was deserted. They inspected it carefully, and found some loose debris. Lansford picked one up, fascinated. “I’m not a nuclear scientist. But based on briefings, this looks like a tamper for a nuclear gun tube.”

The search team found the conference room at the end of the corridor. Floodlights hit the floor, probingly.

“Dried blood,” Lansford said. “I’m getting samples for DNA testing.”

One of the other team members took digital images of the whole scene.

“Who gets this revelation?” Miyaro asked.

Lansford said, “Recommend discreet notifications to President Carreon and General Sydenham via the two US Missions.”

“I concur, and let’s watch the dynamics unfold.”

Tyrene/DC

At 2:00 that afternoon, Bullock sent Miyaro a list of 313 names: everyone who had advanced training on the Renland. The first name he saw was Bosley Taylor, close to the top. Halfway down was the name Jude Viruet. Eight names below his was a

name that jerked his head: Lauro Mendez. A hundred names later, Eumir Liccardi appeared. Carlos Ruiz was not on the list.

Miyaro called Bullock: “Thanks for the list, Director Bullock, and sorry for the tone of yesterday’s call.”

“Manners, son.”

“Yes sir.” Miyaro breathed deeply to keep his voice low. “How do Lauro Mendez and Eumir Liccardi, not even US citizens, receive the most advanced intelligence technical training that the US has to offer?”

“I wasn’t in charge, Viruet, so don’t be blaming me,” Bullock said petulantly. “But I’m aware of the circumstances. Lauro Mendez and Eumir Liccardi oversaw Agency-funded Islamic counter-terror activities in all of Latin America. Someone in authority obviously made the decision to give them the best tools to fight these ragheads. You have a problem with that, Viruet?”

Miyaro rubbed his face. “To save time of me looking through every name—can you please assure me that all Renland GPSs have been properly assigned or reassigned?”

“Three are unaccounted for—Viruet, I can’t do everything here!”

“Sweet. Let’s do the math: Number 1: Lauro Mendez, AKA Davalillo. Number 2: Eumir Liccardi. Number 3: Carlos Ruiz. Bosley Taylor, a Renland expert, before he died not only gave the Vanguardia Sindicalismo jamming capabilities over the PNR. He also stole three Renlands, and gave them to the Vanguardia Sindicalismo Triumvirate—along with refresher training, including Ruiz.”

Bullock said, “We got three violent revolutionaries and a possible nuclear terrorist with them, with blackout and jamming capabilities. How did this happen, Viruet! I need to explain all this to the President!”

“Two revolutionaries. Davalillo is dead. Someone found an unusable cell phone,” Miyaro said.

“Viruet, we need you, boy. You need to fix this as you always do, and fast.”

“Yeah, me”—Miyaro raised his voice a little. “And your countless thousands of employees. And the zillion or so dollars for US Intelligence. And your alphabet soup.”

Tyrene Revisited

Eumir Liccardi, with clean uniform and wide smile, stood on the roof of a lowrise building in the highlands above Tyrene. His high-powered binoculars gave him a great panoramic view of the Tyrene skyline. He put down the binoculars and took out a Renland.

“Davey, are we ready?”

“Some blokes about to get their comeuppance,” Roebuck said.

“Good. We need 24 hour prep time for mobilization. Tomorrow it’s Roackaseen Valley 18:00, Tyrene 21:00. I repeat: Roackaseen Valley 18:00, Tyrene 21:00.”

“Mr. Liccardi: Our compound is secure, but after a day or so the Generals may sniff us out.”

“Davey. You won’t need a day.”

The next day Miyaro put down his Renland GPS and went to the balcony overlooking the sea. The waves were huge; the sun reflecting thousands of tiny rays off of 20 foot monster breakers. A half-dozen surfers caught his eye with interest, and he watched one wipe out hard.

Then his Renland flashed. It was Lansford.

“Rene, are you catching the amazing population migration?”

Miyaro pulled up the designated map on the Renland. It was like a lava flow, west to east, toward Tyrene. Then he got visual: inland roads were flooded with cars, trucks and pedestrians, some armed with rudimentary weapons. The mass was moving to the right on Miyaro’s screen.

“Davalillo took out the few fighter jets that Sydenham had,” Lansford reminded. “All these Generals can do is hunker down behind their maginot line.”

“Get your rain gear ready, Belinda.”

An eerie calm gripped the beach as Miyaro watched the waves from close up. It was like the wake before the tsunami. As evening approached, he returned to the Diplomat Compound hotel. He stopped by the fancy bar to join a few of his diplomat colleagues for refreshments. The pineapple juice tasted great on this hot day, as he bantered with his French and Mexican colleagues.

Then suddenly the large TV above the bar flashed images of revelers in the capital, St. Augustine.

The newscaster clarified, “Power has been restored to the rebel-controlled parts of the Polynesian National Republic island.”

The screen reflected hugs, dancing, singing, firecrackers going off.

“Oh boy,” Miyaro said, excusing himself. Taking the Renland and the binoculars, he trekked to the beach, sat against a chair, and faced the highlands in front of him—waiting to catch this action live. But he waited and waited. Everything remained quiet. He took a break and got a pizza on Ocean Boulevard. Still, as nighttime approached, Miyaro caught not a speck of action up in the hills. He shrugged and returned to his hotel.

Later, as he looked for a nightly International newscast, everything went dark. Pitch blackness, except for the stars above the sea. He heard the frantic voices outside his hotel room, reacting to the Tyrene power outage. He went to the balcony and looked outside. Except for car headlights, Tyrene was dark.

He took a flashlight along with the Renland, and navigated his way up the hotel stairwell, to the penthouse overlook on the roof. He called Lansford.

“My place is higher up the hill,” she replied. “We’re dark, too.”

Below, Miyaro saw dim lights from the hotel generator, suddenly activated.

Lansford paged him, “This evening I got photo images of flatbed trucks moving toward Tyrene—and all kinds of artillery guns.”

“The fruits of Davalillo’s purchase of heavy duty hardware from Bosley Taylor’s rogue arms company—now being redeployed from St. Augustine.”

It all started with the soaring whistling sounds. Then earth-shaking explosions rocked Tyrene near government headquarters. More

explosions came as rapid-fire. Huge orange and yellow flames rose between bordering highrises.

Bedlam hit Tyrene. There were blaring horns, and loud voice of panicked people outside. There also shouts from rebel sympathizers cheering the bombardment.

Other explosions ripped through Tyrene, at other government compounds. Then Miyaro saw mortar rockets streaking over the Tyrene streets, meaning that rebel infiltrators were hitting Sydenham's forces from within.

"God please be merciful," Miyaro said.

Then, in the highlands came a bright display of lights: fireballs, flashes, bright glittering shapes—like a fireworks display times a hundred. Miyaro heard and felt the constant blasts, and smelled the cinder. Fires dotted key locations in Tyrene. Outside there were occasional rifle shots, fireworks, revolutionary chants, screams of agony--all simultaneous.

Lansford came back on, "Liccardi has totally destroyed Sydenham's government headquarters." True to those words, Miyaro saw the bright flames towering about 30 feet into the sky.

The seeming-volcano in the Tyrene highlands kept erupting its display of colors and power for two, three hours. It was like lightning without any breaks.

It was well after midnight. Miyaro programmed the Renland for International newscasts. The cameras carried photo images of the explosions. Then came the newscaster:

"PNR government soldiers, without light and adequate communications, are in total confusion. Many are deserting their posts and running in

retreat, as waves of rebel forces cross the military fortress that General Sydenham had established. Guerilla leader Eumir Liccardi has entered Tyrene proper, as the government desperately tries to hold.”

Miyaro collapsed on the roof from exhaustion. When he woke up a few hours later, the Tyrene sun scorched his eyes. There were still honking horns, and shots being fired. Car movement on the streets below was at a standstill. People were running in different directions. The chants, Liberty! Liberty!--were everywhere. People came in and out of restaurants below; the red and green colors on the traffic lights returned. Power had been restored to Tyrene.

Miyaro went down the hotel stairwell, and heard the constant voices and footsteps from frazzled guests, responding to the outside calamity. Reaching his hotel room, he switched on the TV, and found an International newscast.

A young Asian woman reported, “Our correspondents in the Polynesian National Republic have confirmed the deaths of General Gough Sydenham and most of his High Command leadership as a result of hours of bombardment by rebel forces. At 4:50 AM PNR time, General Jaques Tremaine cited humanitarian concerns, and offered a qualified surrender of the current government to the Rebel Alliance. His only condition was that government soldiers turn themselves in to the regular Rebel Alliance Officers, not the Vanguardia Sindicalismo guerilla army that led the military assault on Tyrene. Guerilla leader Eumir Liccardi agreed to General Tremaine’s condition. At 7:31 this morning, the surviving High Command Generals met with the freed Rebel Alliance General William Shigeta at the Tyrene International Hotel,

and surrendered their weapons. As of now, the violence has ended in and around Tyrene.”

Miyaro went outside to take in this significant moment. Rebel soldiers appeared everywhere, some Vanguardia, some not, all thrusting carbines in the air. The sounds of firecrackers and shots fired in the air never seemed to end. There were competing chants, mostly “Liberty! Liberty!”—but some, “Viva Davalillo!” and “Viva Liccardi!” Restaurants overflowed with revelers. Cheering crowds lined the streets, waving mostly the eagle flag of the democratic PNR government. It was a subdued celebration, resembling more of a huge Macy’s parade.

By the afternoon, rebel Officers, mostly Vanguardia, were trying to clear the streets from roving, chanting mobs. They had whistles and bullhorns, asking the revelers to disperse. They tried to get auto traffic moving again. Some sprayed foam on the occasional bonfire.

Then a deafening cheer cascaded through all the streets of Tyrene. They pointed to a black helicopter descending from above.

“President Carreon!” The crowds chanted.

Miyaro returned to his room, and watched the television set. Within the hour, several International news networks carried the pictures of thousands of people crowded outside Tyrene International Hotel. On the second floor terrace there were soldiers and camera pros.

The whole crowd went wild when Julio Carreon and Eumir Liccardi walked out together—Carreon in a slick brown suit, Liccardi in full Vanguardia attire including beret and M-18. Their hands were raised and locked together.

“We are witnessing something that many local pundits said would never happen”, came the soft voice of a male newscaster. “Exiled President Julio Carreon standing in Tyrene, as ruler of the entire island nation. We’re going live now”—

Carreon stepped to the cluster of microphones, and pumped his fists. “Liberty! Liberty!” The crowd exploded again. “Hello! Hola! Aloha au ia ‘oe! I thank God for this precious moment, and also my family who kept me sane during this trial of exile and oppression. Also, I thank each brother and sister who persevered and fought for virtue and truth, when the negative skeptics said we could not win. Roackaseen Valley is now a unified country, united around its multi-racial peoples!” The crowd roared some more.

“There are two forces that ensure my integrity, and that I keep my promises. That is, my Lord, and you, a newly empowered peoples. Now, I invite all nations to accept Roackaseen Valley into your family of nations, committed to democracy, human rights, freedom, peace and prosperity. We are one with you now. As proof of this pledge, the interim government and I will hold democratic elections in Roackaseen Valley within 60 days. We invite any established ally, whether it be the USA, European consortia, Latin American, Asian and African consortia—whoever—to monitor this free and fair election. Also, to those of you who fought on the other side, we will take no reprisals, as long as you abide by our new Constitution. We welcome you into the debate, we will respect the rights of all dissidents. Some ask if I will be running in two months. The answer is yes: I will be running home to work on education reforms, and spend time with my family. My daughter wants me to teach her

guitar. Also, thank you goes to the Vanguardia Sindicalismo for their ingenious rebel strategies, and most significantly avoiding the abuse of innocent people where possible, in the course of the Revolution. I turn the podium over to Vanguardia Sindicalismo Commander Eumir Liccardi.”

Chants of “Viva Liccardi!” filled the air. Liccardi raised the first two fingers of both hands.

“The left hand means victory. The right hand means peace.” He took the M-18 off his shoulder and raised it. “Liberty! Liberty!” The crowd roared again as Liccardi graciously deferred to the President.

Miyaro turned off the TV and answered a loud knock on his door. He recognized the short man with short black hair and shadow beard.

“Guillermo Ochoa, the Mexican envoy you met at the bar downstairs.”

“Yes, of course,” Miyaro answered. “Come in.”

“Some of the envoys staying at this hotel are meeting at the second floor conference room in an hour, to discuss our different nations’ responses to the new Roackaseen Valley government. Could you join us?”

“Sure.”

Before the meeting, Miyaro patched his Renland to Bullock. It was very early morning DC time, but Bullock still answered.

“What is President Velasquez’s position on the rebel government here?”

“President Velasquez is making no statement now,” Bullock answered. “He’s monitoring the new Roackaseen Valley government, and also sending the

USS Dallas carrier to the Pacific. You are to volunteer nothing, Viruet.”

The meeting of the envoys lasted an hour, re: speculation on how the new government would behave, especially toward the Vanguardia Sindicalismo and Aztlan. The envoys agreed to meet daily at the same time.

After the meeting Miyaro had never felt so tired. He patched in Lansford:

“I am getting nowhere in light of the potential damage from our blindness. I’m feeling totally inadequate and helpless. God please help me.”

“God help us all, Jude,” Lansford said.

“You mean Rene.”

“I mean Jude. You need to focus on who you really are now.”

Tyrene International Hotel

The next day, the lobby of the Tyrene International Hotel overflowed with people. There was President Carreon, posing for cameras, signing autographs and hugging young multi-ethnic kids while flashes came nonstop. People in the back of the crowd called out, just to shake his hand.

“Sorry, gotta run. Meeting.” He took the elevator to the penthouse; his temporary Presidential office. He sat behind his desk in the large office, eyeing intensely the notes in front of him. His thick black hair and moustache were trimmed nicely, fitting for a President.

He took a phone. “You can come up now.”

A minute later, Eumir Liccardi appeared in the doorway; his patented Vanguardia uniform clean pressed with stripe, beret and M-18 on display.

“Mr. President, I would like to include some Vanguardia leadership: three Order of Great Fighters, and three Ministers.”

Carreon rose and waved them in. Of the fighters, he recognized Delano and Maria, two of Davalillo’s favorites. The Ministers also entered, including Vonda Roackaseen. She wore the Vanguardia uniform complete with black and red stripe. Her thick brown hair was pinned under the black beret. The M-18 rifle was slung across her shoulder.

“Vonda Roackaseen, the Vanguardia Sindicalismo’s Minister of Education,” Carreon said dubiously. “Try Ministry of Reeducation for revolutionary syndicalist propaganda. Forgive me if my former Education Ministry job description doesn’t match yours.”

Vonda smiled weakly. “Thank you, Mr. President.”

“And Maria!” Carreon continued with staged gregariousness. “It was kind of you to ask me to dance at yesterday’s victory party. That Polynesian rock rocks my world, but what does an old Argentinian man like me know about that?— Well, rock this one: evil can hide in funny places, but rarely outside the view of a satellite. We found an underground bunker right here in Roackaseen Valley, and nuclear bomb materials were discovered. Can any of you explain that?”

No one answered.

“Okay, let’s start with you, Mr. Liccardi. That compound is in the same area where you ran

your dissident escape underground. You know nothing about it?"

"Your question is not relevant, sir. The Revolution did not involve nuclear weapons."

"You failed to answer my question, Mr. Liccardi. Oh, and did I mention that they found blood in that compound belonging to Islamic Caliphate terrorists!"

Carreon beheld still eyes and still bodies. He faced Liccardi close range. "You have always been a man of truth, integrity and courage. At least the man I thought I knew. Tell me the truth, Eumir."

"Okay. There was experimentation. But it was done under the strictest Vanguardia principles, that they are not used against innocent people, for terroristic purposes, and only as an absolute last resort, in self defense. The Caliphate involvement was a trick. We lured them in, just to pick their brains then kill them all. In a million eternities, we would never allow the Caliphate access to nuclear weapons."

"Where are these nuclear bombs now?"

"These are nuclear materials, not bombs. I don't know where they are."

"These are devices that can kill thousands if not millions of innocent people. And you don't know where they are?"

"That is correct. It's the truth."

"You admit you were developing nuclear weapons. And you also say these materials are loose in the world somewhere," Carreon recapped. "Mr. Liccardi, I find both of your responses unacceptable."

He reached into his desk drawer and produced a stack of papers. He took scissors and shredded them.

“You can inform the President of the Aztlan Indigenous Assembly or whatever you call it, that the treaty between our two nations is now null and void.”

Liccardi said, “You are a man of your word, Mr. President. And you signed the treaty.”

“I didn’t sign a document involving nuclear weapon development! Totally in violation of International Law!—which can get me and this country blasted by the US military!—Now, I want you, Mr. Liccardi, and every one of your guerillas off this island in 48 hours. Any Vanguardia person caught in Roackaseen Valley after the 48 hour time frame will be arrested and prosecuted for sedition against this government!”

Delano faced Carreon, “If it wasn’t for us, you wouldn’t be here!” He aimed his carbine at Carreon, and Maria followed.

Liccardi pushed Delano’s gun down, and Vonda followed by pushing down Maria’s gun barrel. Vonda gently nudged Delano away, and looked at Carreon pleadingly.

“I shall always cherish what you’ve done for our people, President Carreon. But Mr. Delano is right.”

Carreon backed away. “The government of Roackaseen Valley will never deal with anyone remotely close to nuclear terrorism.”

A tense standoff lasted for about 30 seconds. Then Liccardi beckoned to his people, “Let’s go.” They filed out very slowly.

Vonda looked back in. “You cannot do this, President Carreon. This is my country.”

“Was your country, Vonda! Now get out!”

After they left, Carreon paged his secretary over the phone. “Madge, I need you to prepare a personal message to US President Jaime Velasquez. Inform him that I have eyewitness confirmation that the Vanguardia Sindicalismo has been developing nuclear weapons, and may have live weapons already. Our government is severing all contacts with the Vanguardia and the nation of Aztlan. I only have two complete names for the President, but that should be enough: Eumir Liccardi and Vonda Roackaseen.—Madge, I don’t care if they’re nice people and took your kids to the beach! They are potential mass murderers, and if the Americans drone them, I’m like Pontius Pilate, I wash my hands!”

Tyrene Highlands

Later that evening, Miyaro responded to a knock on his hotel room door. Two bearded Vanguardia soldiers barged in.

“Dr. Miyaro, you need to come with us,” one said.

“Am I under arrest?”

“Yes sir. We look to have it resolved soon.”

They handcuffed him, and took him down the elevator to a black van parked in back. Miyaro was put in the back seat with three other prisoners, similarly stunned into silence. The other prisoners were fellow national envoys from the Missions of their countries; colleagues who had attended Ochoa’s meeting the day before.

This fiasco was all Miyaro needed; a dead end project in the face of imminent terror. It couldn't get any worse. The van with the two armed soldiers proceeded up Tyrene sidestreets, toward the highlands. They drove through a park, down a paved road through a mini-forest of palm, until they came to a long ranch-style white compound. The van was met by other Vanguardia soldiers. They took the prisoners through a side door, down a long corridor, and into a large conference room with table and padded chairs.

This room was very similar to the room where the envoys had met yesterday. And as a *déjà vu*, all eight of the national envoys were present. Four burly Vanguardia soldiers hovered over them. One unlocked the handcuffs.

“We need everything on the table: IDs, electronic and technical devices—empty pockets,” the lead Officer said. Another Officer carefully marked the belongings.

Five minutes later, the room's door opened before these shaken and bewildered envoys. Maria, the olive-skinned stern warrior stepped inside, followed by Eumir Liccardi, who flashed his crocodile smile.

“Why are we here, I'm sure you are asking,” Liccardi said. “None of the nations you represent have diplomatic relations with Roackaseen Valley. Yet all of you were housed, protected, and wined and dined by the Sydenham dictatorship before the Revolution's success. We have questions about the nature of your activities in support of General Sydenham. We also have questions about your nations' future dealings with the nations of Roackaseen Valley, Aztlan, and the Vanguardia Sindicalismo. We need this information for our

security and self-defense, given previous hostile gestures directed at Roackaseen Valley, Aztlan and the Vanguardia Sindicalismo. Our assignment here is very simple: you will share information that we need. Then you are free to leave.”

“How long will we be locked up here?” The French envoy asked.

“That’s your decision. You will all be released together, once we are satisfied that each of you has given us sufficient information. If just one of you holds out, you will all be here for a long time. Open communication is very wise—And one more thing: our advanced technology has provided us a total blackout of these proceedings. No one knows we are here. There will be no one riding in on a white horse to rescue you.”

Ochoa said, “This is an illegal kidnapping and hostage taking.”—

“On the contrary,” Liccardi interrupted. “The Vanguardia won the Revolution with the support of the people. Until we officially turn the reigns of power over to Carreon and his civilian advisors—which will happen soon—the Vanguardia is the legitimate government authority in Roackaseen Valley. Our action is a legal and legitimate security measure to defend the Vanguardia and nations we represent against future aggression and harm—to prove our good-faith dealings, Minister Ochoa, I will treat you no different than other other envoys here, although Aztlan and Mexico are in a state of war.”

“Correction: Aztlan is at war with Mexico. We desire peace,” Ochoa said.

“When we are finished, I expect each of you to communicate an obvious truth to your national

leaders.” Liccardi’s eyes burned. “The Vanguardia Sindicalismo is not a terrorist organization. Not one documented human rights abuse is documented under my command during this Revolution. Please inform your leaders about the nature of your detention here: the digital televisions, games, books in your room, room service food delivery. How many detainees get such beautiful treatment? You will report that not one hair on your head was harmed, as long as you don’t violently resist our legitimate security forces here.

“And one final critically important matter.” He held a paper above his head. “Just three hours ago I received a copy of a threatening message sent to some of your nations and the media. It talks about nuclear attacks, and claims to be the Vanguardia Sindicalismo.

“These are criminals of the worst order. The Vanguardia Sindicalismo has nothing to do with these threats. We oppose them just as much as your national leaders. We want to work with your leaders to stop those maniacs. Now, I look forward to lots of friendly conversations among us during the next few hours.”

Liccardi and the bearded Delano stepped outside. Liccardi took the six-inch silver Renland from his uniform pocket.

“All you need to know, Officer Delano, is that this yellow key records and stores every word of conversation of targeted people. That’s them, not us. Leave the envoys in there for three hours, and see who sings. Then we’ll start the interviews.”

“Yes, Commander.”

“We have only 30 hours until Carreon’s exit order takes effect.”

Four hours later, Miyaro rested in his spacious, locked room reading a pocket Bible when he heard a knock.

“Come in, the welcome sign’s out,” Miyaro said, trying to be funny. He heard a woman’s voice on the other side, then the door opened for Maria and an accompanying guard with weapon drawn. She carried a tray.

“Here is your dinner, Dr. Miyaro.”

It was pineapple rice, a favorite he remembered from the Roackaseen Naiad.

“We will begin our interview when you are finished eating,” Maria said.

Miyaro was thinking, we have nothing to share with Liccardi and the Vanguardia. This could be a coerced vacation without end.

Langley, Virginia

The padded room at CIA headquarters carried a dire calm. Elton Bullock sat at a whale of a desk, wires everywhere embellishing advanced communication setup. His wavy black hair was combed; eyebrows aimed severely downward. Three well-dressed and trusted Intelligence officials sat in front of him.

“Are we ready?” Bullock asked. “Are we ready?” Bullock asked louder. After more silence, Bullock said, “Dadgumit, do we have the President on yet?”

“Dadgum what, Mr. Bullock?” The booming voice belonged to President Velasquez.

“Oh, sir—sorry. The communications are coming over via top encryption. But let me just read

chilling words from the threatening letter. Here we go:

“For decades America and her allies have experienced nightmares that revolutionary peoples may get nuclear weapons to use against the American monolith. Now those nightmares have come true. But it is a beautiful dream for the millions of victims of US oppression, especially our heroes in Aztlan. Hold your breath and be ready to die, America and other militarily-aggressive pig nations. The Vanguardia Sindicalismo has nuclear bombs. You don’t see us, but we see you! Very soon you will see a live, terrifying demonstration; evidence of our power. Shake and shiver with real fear. After our demonstration, you will see multiple Hiroshimas. Then the International Syndicalist revolution will be on!”

“No handwritten salutations, nothing traceable, right?” President Velasquez asked.

“No sir. Here is the second communication we just received. It is addressed to the International community of nations. Here’s the text:

“Good morning, I am Eumir Liccardi, legitimate Commander of the Vanguardia Sindicalismo, designated so by Valentino Davalillo before Gough Sydenham’s Generals murdered him. I am distressed to have received a copy of a letter threatening nuclear terror against several nations— authored by a group calling itself the Vanguardia Sindicalismo.

“These terrorists have nothing to do with the Vanguardia Sindicalismo. They are a criminal offshoot who we expelled from our movement. The leader of this terrorist faction is named Carlos Ruiz, working with a nuclear scientist named Mario Pendergrass. We have been trying to hunt them

down. But they are able to hide their location because of lapses in American intelligence systems.

“I and the Vanguardia Sindicalismo oppose this mass murder campaign with every breath in our body. We have taken extraordinary measures to establish communications links with your key diplomats, to work together to prevent this catastrophe.”

“So we may have a two headed monster,” President Velasquez said.

“This second communication bears Eumir Liccardi’s handwritten signature. Verified,” Bullock said.

“I read Viruet’s encrypted reports with great interest,” the President said. “They speak about a serious rift between Liccardi and Ruiz right before the fall of Tyrene.”

“I wouldn’t call it a rift sir,” Bullock said. “Just a cheap power grab attempt by Ruiz, which Liccardi crushed like a hammer on a roach. Virtually all of the Vanguard’s second-line Officers remained loyal to Liccardi, and Ruiz ran away with his pants on fire. The Vanguardia terrorist organization is firmly under control of Eumir Liccardi.”

President Velasquez asked in an enunciating voice, “And just where is Eumir Liccardi?”

“Liccardi has jammed our surveillance so we can’t find him.”

“Yes, along with Ruiz, Pendergrass and now Viruet. Congratulations, Mr. Bullock. Who will receive Special Achievement Awards for those feats?”

Tyrene Highlands

The next morning, Miyaro woke up, grateful that Maria didn't become too aggressive at his lack of substantive answers. The eggs benedict she brought tasted as good as the pineapple rice. He found more reading material and hunkered down for a long stay.

Then the door opened. Delano came in with gun drawn.

“Mr. Liccardi wants to see you.”

He took Miyaro to the end of the corridor into a boiler room of sorts. Miyaro thought, what's this latest surprise in this ongoing adventure?

Delano, with an armed accomplice, backed Miyaro against a metal pipe, then wrapped his hands backwards around the pipe and handcuffed them: a nasty surprise, for sure.

Liccardi came in as his men left. Eyes flashing, he walked briskly up to the restrained Miyaro. Liccardi then took a large army knife from the belt of his Vanguardia uniform—and brandished the knife about four inches from Miyaro's nose.

“This knife is just a toothpick compared to the weapons that your American government have readied for me and my Vanguardia brothers and sisters. Your zipped mouth is creating a life threatening situation for our liberation forces,” Liccardi said. “You know nothing about it? You are aware of the assassination attempt against Davalillo. Why shouldn't I believe that I am also the target of assassination?”

“I am nowhere at the level of people making those kinds of decisions.”

“Is that so?” Liccardi took the Renland from his pocket. “This morning I examined the tech

devices the envoys put on the table. Delano says this is yours. A very nice cell phone. Mind if I make a call?"

"Be my guest."

"Wow, this is strange," Liccardi said with a wicked smile. "I am getting coordinates rather than a cell signal. Wait, that's President Carreon! Meeting at the Oyster Bed restaurant with the President of Tyrene Unversity!"

"Dr. Miyaro. Langley, Virginia is suddenly giving millions of dollars to the Harvard International School for top secret surveillance research? That's what I am to believe?"

"I am an appointee of the President. He wanted me to have the best high tech capabilities for this assignment."

"Really? All Presidential appointees get this instrument?"

Miyaro raised his voice. "Other Presidential appointees were not assigned to address potential nuclear terrorism!"

"Fair enough. But we have one more item to discuss," Liccardi said. "When decent civilized leaders fight politicians that are evil and abusive, there is often a limit to our anger, because we are dueling with a face and name we don't know personally. But when someone violates us in a personal way, it cuts to the core—Dr. Miyaro, what you did to Vonda and I was deeply personal. You abandoned her in her time of most desperate need! What is the last thing I said to you before the Revolution? She needs you! Cut off from her support network, and then to have her father murdered. She had no one, and trusted you as a

family member. You disappeared without warning or explanation, running like a chicken from danger.”

Liccardi lowered the knife to Miyaro’s groin area. “I would take these, except you don’t have any. All your Harvard intellect, your peacekeeping accomplishments, mean absolutely nothing, if you cannot be loyal to people who depend on you.”

“All your efforts to show the International leaders just how humane and civilized you are, will all be a lie for the world to see, if you touch me,” Miyaro said. “And that will guarantee the full wrath of the US military hunting you down.”

“You’re so sure of yourself, Miyaro?” Liccardi said. “How about if there was a terrible accident? A vengeful former High Command officer kills the esteemed Rene Miyaro. We dutifully announce we’ve killed the murderer. The Vanguardia has sufficient infrastructure in Tyrene to create dozens of scenarios like that.

“And I have a nasty surprise for you. Vonda is right here in this building. She is Vanguardia now. After your act of cowardice, I came back for her, and saw how dedicated she was to the rebel cause. I recruited her into the Vanguardia, and trained her on syndicalist liberation concepts in defense of the oppressed. She was very open. She is not combat-suitable, so we used her education background, and let her develop a PR plan for Vanguardia principles. She is a true believer—and that includes passionate indignance when someone is mistreated.

“I will bring Vonda in here, and let you explain to her eye to eye why you threw her to the wolves. I’ll let her decide what to do with you. Whatever it is, I’ll not stand in her way.”

He set the large-toothed knife on a chair beside Miyaro, then left.

For Miyaro came the initial shock of Vonda's name tied to the violent revolutionaries. Then upon his recollection of those frenzied moments for Vonda, and the brutal murder of her father by military dictators—the news was not so surprising after all. As he waited, he breathed in the intense anticipation about how she would greet him and treat him.

After two minutes that seemed like an hour, the door opened slowly. The sight of Vonda in Vanguardia gear, including the M-18 and hair tied severely in back, did nothing to expunge the previous comforting memories. The green battle fatigue and red and black Vanguardia stripe could not hide her soft features.

Miyaro tried to engage Vonda's eyes. He could not; they were aimed to the side; evasive. She walked up to him very slowly.

“Hi Vonda,” he began, breaking the ice.

“Dr. Miyaro,” she said quietly, still looking away.

“Rene, remember?”

She finally looked at him directly. “When Eumir told me you were one of the detained envoys, my thoughts were on how you saved my life, and inspired Roackaseen Valley brothers and sisters in an era of oppression and suffering. I shall always cherish what you did for me and them---then the other event: you disappearing. No call, no letter. That question always comes back to me, with some pain.”

“First, let me answer Liccardi’s charge of cowardice. It was I who chased down and killed your father’s murderers.”

“I know. That’s what makes this all confusing.”

“I had no choice. I was ordered to leave right away. I did not agree with that decision.”

“Who ordered you?”

“The President of the United States. They paged me, and before I knew it, they put me on a helicopter and took me off the island. It was all in preparation for this assignment here. I could speak to nobody on this island during the preparation times. You must obey Liccardi. In the same way, I must obey the President because I work for him. You can verify everything I’m telling you. Liccardi has my badge as Special Envoy representing the US President.”

Her prominent Asian eyes engaged him for several seconds. Then she closed them, totally still. Finally she opened them again.

“I want to believe you.”

“During those weeks of preparation, I thought about you and prayed for you every day. As soon as I came back to the island, I looked all over for you. I went to Roackaseen Valley Coastal and spoke to the South Asian man there. I risked my life crossing the DMZ from Tyrene to visit the Naiad, praying to God that you would be there. I asked Angel Taveras about you. Vonda, I still care for you deeply. Check my back pocket.”

Vonda reached into his right pocket and found a small Bible. She set it on the chair next to the knife. Then she picked up the knife and aimed at at Miyaro from a distance.

She laughed quietly. “I’ve never used this, or any weapon. All Vanguardia persons are trained on them, though. After the Generals killed Papa, I transformed my anger into a deep love for the rebel movement. Why do so many people in the world hate us, when all we stand for is liberty and human rights for anyone facing political or economic abuse, or enslaved by traffickers? The armed Vanguardia is nothing but a self defense force for human rights, no different from the US Army fighting the Nazis or Jihadists. When Eumir found me and trained me, I recognized an extraordinary man; a complete dedication to the cause of the marginalized and mistreated, with a determination never to compromise on human rights standards in the name of the Revolution. There is no other world leader like Eumir, not even Davalillo, with all his Mendez baggage.

“Rene this is an honest question for you, the International expert.” Vonda added passion to her voice. “Just look at history, and all the decades, way before Papa’s time. Capitalism and socialism bring nothing but exploitation, oppression, unempowered peoples, wild economic calamities, and war to this planet. Can we, the 95% marginalized, be fooled forever? Please read encyclicals of some past Catholic Popes. We need the third way of both political and economic empowerment, so every one of God’s creations can chart their life’s destiny. Can you not see that?”

“Some merit, but it’s hard to reconcile that practically in this fallen world.”

“There is the faith aspect to the Vanguardia philosophy, Rene. In the Bible Jesus stood for the poor, the sick, the disabled, the shunned minorities.”

“But Jesus didn’t carry a gun, Vonda. Check my left pocket.”

“I shall never again be defined as a rich heiress. That’s why I am happy to let Davey run the enterprises,” Vonda said, as she took the photographs from Miyaro’s pants pocket. She gasped. “Rene, where did you find these? Do you carry them every day?”

“Yes, I look at them every day, too. In honor of my Princess.”

Vonda joyfully perused through them. “Here, this is me and my Mama. She was a very compassionate and caring person.—And look. You and I! Here, you can have them back.”

“Thank you. I would like that.”

Vonda picked up the Bible with interest. She sat on the floor, legs folded. She kept turning the pages.

“Any passage in particular?” Miyaro asked.

“The one about healing. I remember when you prayed for me. My sore wrist for several months suddenly felt better. It is still better. Thank you again.”

“There are several places you can look. Start with James 5, prayer.”

“Okay.” She found the verses, then closed the Bible and just sat there in a meditative state, eyes closed most of time, but opening briefly. The room was dead quiet.

The door opened for Liccardi and an armed guard. “Please step outside, sister Roackaseen.”

“So you heard everything,” Vonda rose, then shrugged. “I don’t care.”

“The delicious pineapple rice. That was you, Vonda?” Miyaro asked.

“Yes, it was. Glad you liked it.” Vonda smiled on her way out.

“Vonda has a soft heart,” Liccardi said. “This last conversation only proves the point I am making with you envoys. The Vanguardia liberation army is not about producing mean attack dogs.”

Liccardi unlocked Miyaro’s handcuffs.

“Thank you. This conference is making progress,” Miyaro said.

“Vonda’s verdict is in, and you get a pass. Dr. Miyaro, you have a special talent for just barely escaping the shark’s mouth—to prove my seriousness about tracking down Ruiz and those dangerous traitors, I am giving you your cell phone back. Come into my office with me. Maybe we can work these machines together, and try to find Ruiz and Pendergrass. That may be hard, because Ruiz has one of these, too.”

New York Coast

Evening in Tyrene equaled early morning dawn in New York City. The entire coastline was suddenly jolted by a flash in the Atlantic, several miles off the New York coastline, below Jones Beach. The proximate large cargo ships and fishing boats alike felt the sea tremble. The loud blast was unearthly, as if a giant leviathan or God himself was emerging from the ocean. After the flash came a big glow so bright that the sun seemingly landed on the water surface. The water churned, and white water gushed into the sky, as the ocean had morphed into a mammoth geyser. The nearby seamen and women

felt the water rise. Eyes grew wide at the great wall of water, lifting the boats precipitously, and then letting them slide back.

The blinding light above the water grew and grew; an unworldly supernatural force. The dome expanded like helium, quickly covering the featherly blue horizon. Air around the blast became scorching. Lining the bottom of the explosive dome was fiery film dancing on the water. Thick white clouds formed in the dome and grew thicker.

Frantic TV, radio and on-line broadcasts described the explosion of unknown origins in the North Atlantic. The pundits quickly grasped the terrible truth about a nuclear detonation just off of the US coastline.

Private hotlines of leaders lit up; all discussing the event, and disavowing any responsibility for it. Every population center in the world stopped as if time had stopped; its citizens captivated and frozen by photo images of the nuclear detonation, being played over and over.

Panic struck New York City. Emergency broadcasts overrode the commercial stations. The Mayor and New York State governor appealed for calm, emphasizing the absence of any evidence of additional bombs anywhere. Yet people still rushed to their cars, and the bridges and tunnels. New York City was in gridlock. City residents without cars walked into the long commuter tunnels, thus worsening the chaos. Subway lines were jammed with riders, and each platform was a sea of humanity, overwhelming crowd control measures by the NYPD. Troops by the hundreds were airlifted into the City, both to calm the chaos, and help ferret out any further bombs. High water assaulted the

beaches and damaged some property, but no one was killed.

Tyrene Highlands

The late night brought darkness to the Vanguardia Sindicalismo compound. Vonda knocked on the door of Liccardi's office. Inside she saw Liccardi and Miyaro rabidly working the long silver devices. Fascinated, she peered over their shoulders.

"I'm finished. In more ways than one," Liccardi said finally. "Ruiz is not bluffing. Nuclear pandemonium. Mayhem for innocent people. The armies of the entire UN blaming and attacking Aztlan and the Vanguardia. My name in the same breath with Stalin and Hitler."

"Wait, wait," Miyaro said. "Thank you, Jesus!—The shadow function on the Renland! A rogue Renland user can apply the malware to hide people; but they can't hide duplicate images. I am pulling up the photo image of the Roackseen Valley nuclear compound. There it is. Is there a duplicate, or close facsimile, anywhere in the world?"

Liccardi said, "Truth be told, to both of you. I was involved with the original nuke weapon program. But right before the Vanguardia started the Roackseen Valley Revolution, Davalillo took me completely off the nuke program and gave it to Ruiz. I've had nothing to do with it since."

"We have a possible match. What do you think?" Miyaro asked.

Vonda said, "Not twins. Sisters, maybe? Close."

"Let's get a closeup," Liccardi said.

“As we speak. Okay, exact coordinates—mountain area--private roadway. Looks like a manufacturing center from the outside.”

“Where?” Liccardi asked.

“Blakeslee, Pennsylvania.”

“With my many years studying and teaching about America, I should know where is Blakeslee,” Vonda said. “Close to Philadelphia, I think. No, Scranton.”

“Close, Vonda. We’re in the Poconos.—Okay closer images---logo in view---Weimar Industries.”

“That’s it!” Liccardi shouted. “As we say in Aztlan, goal! goal! As you say in America, touchdown!”

Liccardi summoned all of the envoys to the conference room. He announced, “Now we know this is World War III—all the civilized nations and the Vanguardia Sindicalismo fighting together against the nuclear terrorist madmen—you are free to leave and join your nations’ efforts. Vans will be outside in a half hour to drive you back to the hotel.”

Miyaro looked for Vonda, and found her in one of the side rooms. She sorted through bound pamphlets with two soldier colleagues. On the covers Miyaro saw the word syndicalism—for decades an obscure word—now spelled in 15 different languages. He beckoned to her.

“Sure,” Vonda answered. They found one of the vacated rooms. Miyaro closed the door.

Vonda set her M-18 down on a table, and took Miyaro’s hands in hers. “Before you go, Rene, many thanks to you, as always. You are life saver. We can never repay you.”

“Did your dolphin enjoy the emerald necklace?” Miyaro asked.

“Yes, Mako had a feast,” Vonda laughed. “I threw in four mangos for dessert.”

“We have one more Roackaseen wardrobe malfunction to address.” Miyaro snatched away her black beret, revealing her thick pinned-up brown hair. She gasped a little, but didn’t resist. Next, Miyaro placed his hands underneath the black and red Vanguardia diagonal stripe. He lifted it slowly toward her head.

Then he felt her hands firmly clutching his. “I cannot do this. I shall not dishonor Eumir, and all that he and our movement stand for. Syndicalism has brought great liberation glories, and many more people to be empowered in the future. Rene, I love you very much. But we have different world views. I am so sorry.”

Miyaro booked his flight out for Dulles Airport immediately.

Tyrene Highlands

The noise inside Dr. Laura Wagner’s basement got louder.

“Hold on! I’ll be right down!” Laura called from her polished den upstairs. Then to her cell phone, “Peter, are you sure you’re alright? Things are calming there in the Apple?—Good, everything is calm here. We don’t have to worry about the guy with the green pants anymore; all the soldiers outside have green pants now.” She laughed, “I

guess I'm safe, except for the remaining ones with the blue pants."

She went downstairs to the makeshift clinic. Johnny and the green pants patient alternatively pushed buttons on a silver device. There were images on a screen against the wall.

"Come on Lauro, pass it to me quick!"

"Oh no, I'm sorry, Johnny. Should have passed it. Now, go! go!—Goal!"

Johnny and the patient slapped hands.

"We're a great team, Lauro," Johnny said, dressed in lab gear and his long pony tail.

"You are well enough to shave now, Lauro," Laura said. "It's getting very raggy. And I've never seen a cell phone like that."

"It has nice games programmed in, Ma'am. Right Johnny?"

"Yeah, Mom, you should try one of these games," Johnny said.

The IVs were out of Davalillo's arms. He wore a rugby shirt that Johnny gave him. He noticed one of the patients trying to walk, so he stood up and encouraged her, and grabbed her hands when she stumbled.

"Lauro! You need sit down and rest," Doctor Laura rebuked.

"Sorry. When I can I go home?" Davalillo asked in his mild Spanish dialect.

"Maybe two more days," Laura answered.

"No, he needs to stay," the female patient said. "He is teaching me Spanish."

"Where will you go when you leave, Lauro?" Johnny asked.

Davalillo answered happily, “Well, they say I was born somewhere in Latin America, but I’ve been a world traveler all my life. I’ll follow the next adventure, since the rebels have won here.”

The nurse Marva took Davalillo’s red and black stripe and wrapped it around her waist.

“You can keep it,” Davalillo said.

“Really?—Oh thank you!”

Davalillo pocketed his Renland and walked up the stairs.

“Lauro, you’re not ready for strenuous exercise,” Laura rebuked.

“Just a walk, Ma’am.”

Laura and Johnny followed him upstairs. Davalillo reached for the front door.

“Wait!” Laura called.

Davalillo turned. “Thank you and good-bye. You cannot imagine the reward you are about to receive, you and your family, for your kindness.”

“Lauro, don’t leave!” Johnny called.

Davalillo ran outside and down the well-manicured streets with the ritzy gated homes. In the intersecting street he saw Rebel Alliance soldiers patrolling in jeeps. He pulled out the Renland.

“Eumir!”

“Davalillo? Is that you?”

“I barely survived a rocket attack, thanks to a nice American doctor who hid me and treated my wounds. What’s the update?”

“Carlos Ruiz has betrayed the Revolution and we are rushing to stop him, before he causes nuclear mayhem. I’m heading to the States. Angel Taveras is hole up at the Naiad and has plenty of hardware for you.”

New York Convergence

Davalillo and Angel Taveras approached the security checkpoint at the Hong Kong airport. Davalillo's black hair was cropped shorter. Taveras's dreads were gone; now his bald head was nice and shiny. They both wore expensive suits and sunglasses. Approaching the guard, they both produced laminated IDs and boarding passes reading Kennedy Airport, New York City. With help from a Renland app, they cruised easily through the scanner, to the airplane.

Eumir Liccardi—with active Renland—and Vonda Roackaseen, along with casually-dressed Maria and Delano approached security checkpoint at the Tokyo airport. Liccardi wore a red and white surf shirt with a medallion, and Vonda wore a New York Yankees T-shirt and a large red, white and blue bow behind her long brown hair. The guard accepted their cooked IDs and boarding passes indicating Kennedy Airport, New York City.

Everyone cleared the scanner except Vonda, who was stopped. The older Japanese guard said to her in accented English, “This type of hygiene material is not allowed on the flight. Stores at the New York airport sell it.”

Vonda smiled, turned over the materials and waved.

Several hours later, a yellow taxi stopped in front of a paint-worn tenement, among many, in the South Bronx. Davalillo and Taveras got out, jogged inside the building, and walked up two flights of steps. They knocked on the heavy door. Three brown-skinned men let them in. They all exchanged

Vanguardia clenched fist salutes, then the three khaki-clad men took Davalillo and Taveras to the back bedroom.

Taveras's eyes lit up at the sight of an assortment of weapons. Davalillo toyed with several, including an M-18, 152 mm and AK-47. For this assignment, it would be automatic pistols.

"Not a word about my visit," Davalillo said. "I am not yet ready to resurface."

Blakeslee, Pennsylvania

Two black sedans cruised slowly up the steep road toward a towering steel fortress with the huge high-up sign, WEIMAR INDUSTRIES. The building had huge steel doors for trucks. Surrounding the building were Pocono Mountain woodlands; the branches bare from the late autumn season. This bright sunny day was unseasonably warm; temperature in the high 50s.

The cars stopped 40 feet from the entrance. In the back seat of the lead car, an older lanky man with creeping baldness addressed a radio. "This is Jack Lynch, Special Agent in Charge, Wilkes Barre Office, calling in per your request, Madam Director." He spoke with a Boston Accent. "We've arrived at target location. Backup available."

He turned to Miyaro, seated beside him. "This is a deserted facility. No cars around. Either we were sent here by error, or the alleged perpetrators have already escaped."

"This is your last chance to get extra muscle before going in there," Miyaro said, parting his blue cotton shirt to reveal a bullet proof vest. "12 agents are needed at least. Welcome to hell."

“We are here to exercise a search warrant. That’s all the Judge authorized. There is no evidence of crimes.”

“You’ve been warned.”

Lynch said, “When this is over, I will ask the FBI Director why the President insisted that you tag along.—Now, you need to stay in the car.”

“Yes sir.” Miyaro said with a mock salute.

Lynch and two other FBI agents approached the fortress and rang the bell next to a tall steel entrance door.

Miyaro pulled out his Renland GPS.

“Bullock?”

“Yes, I heard the exchange, Viruet. We have telescopic visual from here, and to me it looks like an abandoned building. Your theory better not be a flipping false alarm, or else there will be an outcry about a waste of taxpayer money and a needless mobilization.”

“Bullock. There is jammed Renland surveillance within a mile radius of that building. That can only be the Vanguardia Top Three. With Davalillo dead and Liccardi in RV, that leaves about a 99.999% chance that Ruiz and his gang are here.”

There was no answer to the bell, so the agents pounded loudly. Finally, a burly man in overalls and red beard opened the door for the agents.

“FBI. We have a blanket search warrant. We also need to talk to Frederick Weimar. I need some ID, please,” Lynch said.

He produced a driver’s license: Robert Rousch. “I haven’t seen Mr. Weimar today. But

you're free to cruise around. We're just a multi-faceted fabrication, steel cutting and transportation company. Everything is up and up."

Inside was a like a huge hangar; about 40 feet high. It had an oily smell. Large trucks were lined up to the right. To the left of them was an open area with all kinds of industrial equipment, including vises, pulleys, hooks, chains, tools—all helter-skelter, but mostly piled in the back.

The FBI agents fanned out and searched between the trucks. They opened up truck hatches and looked inside. Empty.

"Check this out, Mr. Lynch," a young agent said quietly. He motioned to a wooden trap door with the same rust color as the cement floor.

"Mr. Rousch," Lynch called. "Did you say that this hangar area is all there is to this compound?"

"Yes sir," Rousch replied from the other side of the trucks. "We have other facilities, but this is it for this building."

Lynch said quietly to young agent, "Stay with him. Don't let him out of your sight."

Lynch and a Black agent opened the trap door. There was both a steel ladder and a 30 degree ramp leading to an underground factory of sorts, illuminated with dim lights. The agents were virtually frozen on the ladder from the sight of conveyor belts, trailers on wheels, steel tables, and debris everywhere—and equipment they couldn't describe. At closer look from the floor area, there were huge safes with red skull and crossbones warning signs in front. Three very large rectangular steel boxes sat in the middle of the room. A

makeshift elevator shaft connected to a larger trap door above.

To the left of the factory area were four doors leading to offices. Light shined behind the glazed glass of one of them. The agents drew their revolvers and knocked.

“Come in.”

Inside was a messy office with desks and computers. The short man with matted blonde hair and bow tie was surprised to see them.

“We’re FBI. I need some identification, sir.”

“Sure.” He fumbled nervously for his wallet. “I’m Frederick Weimar. I own this business. Is there a problem?”

Lynch produced the search warrant. “We need you to give us a tour of this facility. We’ll also need access to your computer files.”

Weimar pointed them to the bank of machines along the wall. As soon as the agents faced the computers, they heard a loud voice from the door.

“Nobody move!” The agents turned their heads to be greeted by two hairy men with green fatigues and aimed .380 caliber automatic pistols. “Lift your hands high. And don’t even think of resisting. We are battle-ready veterans from the Aztlan war.”

The agents warily raised their hands. One of the assailants patted them down and removed all the weapons. The second assailant applied handcuffs.

The agents were pushed outside. They came face to face with green-clad Carlos Ruiz, and Mario Pendergrass wearing a white jacket over black pants; his white hair kinked all over.

“Get them upstairs,” Ruiz ordered.

They all loaded on the makeshift elevator. As the elevator groaned upwards, Pendergrass hyperventilated from obvious anger. Ruiz hit a button, and the ceiling parted, giving them a large opening.

They stepped into an open area next to the last truck. Ruiz, Pendergrass and Weimar led the cuffed agents along the front of the trucks to the opposite-side open area.

The third FBI agent was also cuffed. Three more multi-ethnic assailants surrounded this agent, along with Rousch.

“Line these American pigs against the truck,” Ruiz ordered, lighting a cigar.

“Did your lips get diarrhea, Carlos?” Pendergrass asked.

“I told no one.”

“We are about to play a little game,” Pendergrass said with a giddy laugh. “It’s called Answer the Professor. It’s like TV. Guess the right answer, you get a reward. Wrong answer of course means penalty.” He took a bag of candy from his pocket. “If we really like your answer, we will put two pieces of candy in your mouth. Yummy!”

“We have backup; you won’t get away with this,” Lynch said.

“Ever smoke a cigar?” Ruiz yelled. “Ever feel one?” He crushed the lighted end against Lynch’s face. Lynch shrieked. “Wrong answer, pig!”

“One thing I forgot to mention.” Pendergrass smiled wildly. “Any answer to a question not asked is the wrong answer. Now,

question number one: Who told you about this compound?”

There was silence, so Ruiz slammed his pistol against the side of the young agent’s head. He fell, dazed.

“Rule number two,” Pendergrass said. “No answer is the wrong answer. So again: who told you about this compound?”

Lynch heaved with rage. “Here’s the right answer: the same people who will crush you rugrats!”

Pendergrass walked up to him, nose to nose. “I want you to remember the smell of my breath when you witness a spontaneous uprising of a nuclear-armed indigenous population from Aztlan to Africa to the Pacific, venting their centuries-old rage against oppression. Those wonderful bangs that will remove Harry Truman from history books by comparison, will be the spark of World War III: Have Nots against the Haves.”

Davalillo and other Vanguardia followers crept slowly through the woods behind the compound. The group included Liccardi, Taveras, Maria, Delano and Vonda; her hair loose to her shoulders. Their brown cotton fatigues blended in nicely with the surroundings. Similarly-colored thigh-long jackets hid automatic pistols on their hips.

Davalillo faced them and said lowly, “Blakeslee is a growing resort city with vacation homes and subdivisions—but this is rural. This device blinds us to government surveillance, and we got up here before any American agents arrived. So I think we’re undetected. The problem, is, we can’t see in that building, either. Let’s use the element of surprise, expunge this cancer, and get out.”

They ran to a rust-colored back door. It was locked. Davalillo took a cylindrical instrument from his backpack and inserted it into the lock.

Miyaro, sensing possible doom inside, got out of the sedan and ran to the back of the building. He saw the rusty back door cracked open. He drew a .380 automatic from his ankle holster, then peaked inside carefully.

Miyaro heard faint voices and scuffling sounds. A big hole and the first in a row of trucks stood in front of him. He darted inside, taking cover behind the truck. Then he peaked down the open space behind the trucks.

He saw two brown-shirted gunmen crouching low, close to the trucks. Then a woman darted from one truck to the other; Maria. When the coast was clear, he zigzagged between the trucks until he was closer to the voices.

He texted Bullock: "Inside the compound now. Proximate Renland audial and visual systems operable."

"Okay, good," came the text reply from Bullock.

"You think I'm funny?" Pendergrass screeched. "How is this for funny?" He punched the Black agent. All three FBI agents were on the ground, bloody gashes marking their faces.

"Carlos! Put your weapons down now!"

"Davalillo?—Impossible!"

Davalillo emerged from the cover of a truck, along with Taveras, Maria, Delano and Liccardi; automatic pistols taking deadly aim. Ruiz's gunmen looked on with shock and confusion. "Carlos! Disarm your men!"

One lifted his weapon—and the response was multiple echoing blasts from the guns of Davalillo, Taveras, Liccardi, Delano and Maria. Three of Ruiz’s gunmen lay instantly dead. Weimar turned quickly, and Liccardi drilled a bullet in his head. Rousch took off running, and Davalillo fired four shots into his back.

The guns of Ruiz and his remaining two gunmen found the floor. They raised their hands high. Vonda and the other two gunmen joined Davalillo, their pistols aimed also.

Davalillo said, “Ruiz, you are the worst traitor the world has ever seen. To bring International shame to our liberation movement by conspiring to murder thousands of innocents. And doing it in my name!”

“Davalillo, I thought you were dead. You gave me this assignment,” Ruiz said. “I had the authority. If a nuclear-armed America is fighting Aztlan, then a nuclear-armed Aztlan has the right to fight back.”

“Carlos. Where are the nuclear bombs?”

“Davalillo, you are lost relic,” Pendergrass said. “You will never find our arsenal.”

“Maria. Check every inch of this place.”

Miyaro heard Maria approach so he slid under one of the trucks.

Pendergrass chuckled as he reached into the pocket of his white coat.

“Pendergrass! Whatever is in your hand—drop it.”

“Shoot me, and you kill at least 50,000 people,” Pendergrass said. “This is a detonator. It will take me 15 hundreds of a second to jerk my thumb. Then the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia, and

America's birthplace historical relics, will float away in a mushroom cloud, along with countless thousands of people. Now, Davalillo, I want to see your weapon and all Vanguard weapons on the floor."

"Not a chance."

"You wouldn't dare call my bluff, because I am so excited about the idea of this historical explosion, I may make it a suicide job!"

"Dr. Pendergrass, if you wanted to blow up Philadelphia that badly, it would have happened by now," Vonda said softly but firmly. "What do you want from us?"

"Vonda Roackaseen! My, my," Pendergrass giggled. "Davalillo, why would you bring this pampered doll, your Asian Barbie, to your revolutionary adventure?"

Liccardi answered, "Vonda brings other human talents besides violence. You'll never understand that the Revolution is more than just guns and blowing people up."

"Come on, Eumir, the sight of Emile's pet with that gun is laughable," Pendergrass weazed. "Vonda, you've been shooting that thing? Now I know why the Tyrene dogs were howling. Keep that around too much, and you'll be counting your toes, darling."

Vonda marched firmly toward Pendergrass, her pistol aimed at Pendergrass's forehead. "If it saves innocent lives, I will use this weapon in a second." With martial arts precision, Vonda twirled rapidly to her left until her pistol was lodged against Ruiz's ear.

Ruiz calmly turned away. "Chill out, Vonda."

Pendergrass smiled widely, "As we chess players are wont to say frequently, it looks like we have a draw. We cannot force you to disarm. But you dare not try to stop us from leaving.—Carlos, get the keys to this truck."

Ruiz pulled a wide silver ring from Rousch's body and gave one of the keys to Pendergrass.

They locked the agents in the back of one of the trucks.

Pendergrass said, all smiles, "In case we get any additional resistance out there, we've got Philly in our palms, and extra insurance with these three prized American agents. Good day, everyone."

Liccardi fired his .380 pistol with a rapid volley. When the noise stopped, Ruiz's two remaining assassins lay dead, and Ruiz and Pendergrass were on the ground, bleeding, twisting and groaning.

Liccardi opened Pendergrass's hand and took out the device.

"Cigarette lighter," Liccardi said, and tossed it away. "Sorry, Davalillo, I missed. I wanted to wound, but only a little so they could talk."

Davalillo stooped down and aimed his pistol at Pendergrass's groin. "Where are all of the nuclear weapons?"

By the shaking and wheezing, everyone knew Pendergrass didn't have long.

"As I told you, Davalillo, you can never stop me. There will be a blast. The spontaneous Revolution is about to commence!" He forced a smile.

"He's lying, Davalillo," Ruiz said.

They died within seconds of each other.

Maria appeared. “No weapons up here. But down that shaft, there are five nuclear bombs.”

“Thank you, Maria,” Davalillo said. “If there are any other bombs out there, we’ll not solve it here. We need to execute those American agents and get out of here.”

“Execute the Americans?” Liccardi asked. “What for?”

“Nobody knows I am alive. I am waiting for a special moment to resurface. Those Americans will tell the world I’m alive, and destroy the effectiveness of the Aztlan liberation campaign.”

“We have plausible denial on your identity, Commander. There is no justification to kill those Americans,” Liccardi argued.

“Eumir! Those are not innocent civilians. They are armed combatants in a nation that is at war with us! The American government has shoot-to-kill orders—for me and you, Eumir. This is a legal and necessary enforcement action under Revolutionary law.”

Liccardi shook his finger. “Up to this point we have done nothing to harm the Americans. In fact, we have helped them prevent mass murder. If we kill those agents, then we have crossed the line into terrorism, and we can never go back!”

Miyaro felt the wave of urgency. His spectator role from the bottom of a truck was over. As Davalillo and Liccardi remained locked in confrontation, he had to act to save the FBI agents.

From the openings underneath the trucks he could see the bottom of Davalillo’s calfs. A leg shot would certainly disrupt Davalillo’s plans. Surely Liccardi’s minions, after finding him, would not take reprisals.

He pulled out his .380 pistol. From his claustrophobic position, Miyaro stretched his arm, and aimed the weapon sideways.

Click! He pulled the trigger again. Click!--
Jam!

Vonda confronted Davalillo. "We are not going to shoot those Americans. They have done nothing to harm us."

"As Commander of the Vanguardia Sindicalismo, I am ordering you, Eumir and Vonda. Both of you, stand down!"

Instead, both Liccardi and Vonda defiantly got in his face, only six inches away.

"Do I have to order you both arrested, and face Revolutionary discipline?"

"You disgust me, Lauro," Vonda said.

"I will give you one last order."

"No you won't." Vonda tossed her pistol to the ground. "Because I am out."

The other Vanguardia Officers exchanged glances, nervously fondling their pistols. They didn't know what to do.

"Taveras," Davalillo called. "I order you to open that truck and execute the American agents."

Liccardi and Vonda caught his eye with firm head shakes. Taveras just stood there.

"Okay, I will do it myself."

Vonda ran to the truck and stood defiantly by the door, arms folded. Davalillo stopped, hesitated, then clapped his hands.

"Attention everyone. We have just witnessed an exercise of syndicalist direct democracy applied to the Vanguardia leadership. As proof that

syndicalism works, I have revised my decision. We let the Americans live.”

“This is General John Charles of the United States Army!” A booming, amplified voice called from outside. “This message for all parties inside the Weimar Industries building. You are all to come out with your hands up, and surrender unconditionally. We have the building surrounded by hundreds of combat soldiers and other US officials, so there is no chance of escape. Come out peacefully within 5 minutes. After that, there will be an armed assault!”

Panic struck some of the Vanguardia warriors. Delano ran over to where Pendergrass and Ruiz lay, and picked up the key chain.

“The truck! It’s our only chance. Let’s see if they can stop this baby!” He climbed into the cockpit. “Come on! Our odds are zero in here!”

Two other warriors climbed up in the cockpit with Delano. Maria looked for the switch to open the door.

“Engaging the US Army on American soil is crazy!” Liccardi called to Delano. Liccardi tossed his pistol under the truck.

“Where is the Vanguardia leadership! Cowards, all of you!” Delano said.

Delano fired the truck up. Maria joined them in the truck.

Taveras ran to the back door, and opened it slowly. He stepped outside, hands raised high in the air. There was a row of US Army snipers along the edge of the woods. Several ran out and ordered Taveras to lay face down on the ground. He complied, and they put on the handcuffs, and hauled him quickly away.

Miyaro didn't want Vonda and the others to see him associated with such a blatant combat operation. So he said into his radio, "Bullock. I'm coming out the back. Please have General Charles alert the Army. Also, some assailants are preparing to escape by truck."

Miyaro darted, and stepped out the back door with hands raised high. Officers greeted him with pats on the back, and took him along the side of the building toward the front.

The tractor-trailer truck charged down the road. Military jeeps and personnel were positioned to block its exit down the hill. But the Vanguardia Officers didn't care; they fired their automatic pistols at the US soldiers.

About 100 feet from the roadblock a rocket hit the truck. It exploded, and a giant yellow and orange fireball, fueled by the gas inside, surged upwards of 30 feet. The news media helicopters circling above got video shots of the inferno.

Inside the compound Liccardi and Vonda ran to the rear of the building. Liccardi hoisted open the back of one of the trucks, in the middle. He and Vonda climbed inside, then closed the door behind them. Davalillo found a truck two rows away and also hid himself.

Within minutes the compound was bedlam. Hundreds of people, including Army personnel and civilian security officials, swarmed inside. Dozens of people crowded around the enclosed nuclear bombs in the basement; cameras flashing. The news media was barred from the building and could only access the outer perimeter. Soldiers smashed windows of the locked offices, and went inside with civilian investigators to examine the contents.

Davalillo used the Renland to give light to the inside of the truck. From his backpack he took out a fresh ID. He took off his brown pants and shirt, and replaced them with black pants and a shirt bearing the green white and red Mexican flag. The shirt also wore a bright badge. He also took out a notepad and pen. Finally, he found a jar of oily dye. He applied it to his hair, to give it a black and gray, salt and pepper hue.

Davalillo cracked the truck door open a couple of inches. When there was a brief lull in pedestrian traffic, he quickly sprung out, and immediately started peering down at the trucks, notepad in hand—just like many of the other officials around him.

Keeping his head low except for an occasional nod, Davalillo made his way toward the open area with the bodies, blood and stench. Elton Bullock was there, conferring with agents working to identify the dead.

He perked up at the sight of the Mexican shirt.

“Yo! Compadre!” Bullock shouted. “President Suarez sent you?”

“With the Aztlan threat we need to keep right on this, like you—I’m Oscar Alvarez, from the Centro de Investigacion y Seguridad Nacional.” He flashed his ID.

“Elton Bullock, National Intelligence Director here. We may have crushed these cotton pickin nuclear terrorists. We still got some work to do, and some answers we need. Jeepers creepers, who killed all these terrorists? It wasn’t our Army.”

“Anything we can do to help. We were on the terrorist hit list, too.”

“Great teamwork we’ve always had with President Suarez.”

“I go way back with you guys,” Davalillo said. “Jay Barnes, Special Ops man, top notch.”

“Yeah, Jeff is one of our best.” Bullock said. “Jay or Jeff—yes.”

“Our services have already identified Mario Pendergrass and Carlos Ruiz. We’re working on the rest. We’ll share with you what we can verify.”

“Likewise, Agent Alvarez,” Bullock said.

Liccardi and Vonda sat against the inner wall of the truck; the Renland providing dim light. They heard the voices outside, and braced for the inevitable.

Liccardi said, “I watched over and over again the images of that bomb exploding in the ocean. I saw the panic in the eyes of the New York people. I was trying to imagine myself there, how I would feel among real people with real lives and real struggles. Then, as if an act of God, I pictured myself right in Times Square, New York, and the bomb was not in the ocean. It was in Queens. The Devastation! The hardship that a hundred Sydenham PNRs couldn’t replicate! That bomb is a game changer for me, Vonda. Stopping Ruiz is my grand finale. I am tired of the killing.”

Vonda said, “I had a kind of a transformation, too; maybe different, maybe not. It’s when I met Rene Miyaro. This wave, a peaceful spirit, indescribable. I know he’s a man of great faith. It was so powerful when we detained the envoys in Tyrene; if you didn’t walk in, I could have been sitting there for two hours. I have been praying a lot since. I had a premonition that I would be tossing away my weapon. I did not know how or

why. Then it happened. I think the Bible calls it providence.”

“We are slow learners sometimes.”

“That miracle that Rene brought as a graceful messenger was something I kept fighting. All the attacks on our family kept me stumbling. It is so clear now! I am so much at peace. I don’t even care what happens today. Every minute is like—butterflies in a gentle Tyrene breeze.—Eumir, if we ever get out of here, what will you do?”

Liccardi laughed. “If I ever survive America, then I’ve got to survive Davalillo. He’s going in a different direction than me. If it’s my choice, I will go back to Aztlan, and try to make peace with our neighbors, and quit trying to force syndicalism on everyone. We need to strengthen Aztlan first, and see how we can make our citizen empowerment and human rights values so beneficial in an atmosphere of peace. All our talk about Jesus in the Vanguardia—guns and violence is the cheap Gospel. Let’s try the real Gospel.”

Vonda’s prominent Asian eyes grew instantly. “Yes. If I get back to Tyrene I shall pray for you, and help you with your vision. I can use Roackaseen resources, and try to engage Christian groups to help.”

Miyaro sat in the black FBI sedan entering into the Renland, summary notes about this remarkable encounter. He saw the three banged-up FBI agents walking out with Bullock.

Davalillo, graying hair and Mexican shirt, passed to the left of Miyaro’s driver side door by three feet, joking with some Army Noncoms. Miyaro looked up for a split second because of the conversation, then he resumed his report

preparation. Lynch approached the car about 20 feet behind Davalillo. He opened the car door.

“Thanks for the help and the warning, Professor Miyaro,” Lynch said. “Even in this business we’re not too old to learn.”

Liccardi and Vonda looked on passively as the door of their truck swung open. There were three Army Officers and a civilian investigator. Two of the Officers immediately aimed their M-18s as a middle aged Colonel and the Filipino investigator climbed into the truck.

“We need some identification,” the Colonel said.

No identification is necessary, Colonel,” the investigator said. “My, my look who we found: Eumir Liccardi, Commander of the Vanguardia Sindicalismo.”

The Colonel said, “Well, that explains all the carnage in this place. If either of these people moves an inch, shoot them.”

Liccardi and Vonda kept their hands held high.

The Colonel pulled IDs out of their pockets. “All fake, of course.”

He patted them down for weapons, and even examined inside their shirts for dart guns. “These two go into military isolation.”

By now a crowd of about fifty had gathered outside the truck.

Liccardi said, “I am the second ranking military official in the nation of Aztlan. As a high government official, I carry diplomatic immunity. According to International law, you must keep me in a hotel, not a prison. Your only recourse is to deport me.”

“Tell that to the judge,” the Colonel mocked. He placed on the handcuffs and led Liccardi and Vonda down into the crowd.

The two Officers with the M-18s slapped hands. “Hey, Cal, the biggest find since bin Laden!”

“You kidding? Bigger than bin Laden!”

Washington and Vicinity

The next day, Miyaro finished the Danish of his free breakfast at the Rosslyn, Virginia hotel. He placed a Renland call to Bullock; this was the call he’d been anticipating with racing heart all night.

“Where are Liccardi, Vonda and Angel being detained?”

“They were just transferred to isolation units at Fort Myer--less than a mile from where you are.”

“I want access to them.”

“There’s a consultation meeting involving all parties at 4:00. That’s not for anyone else’s consumption, Viruet.”

“And Davalillo. Are you keeping him at a separate location?”

“We don’t have Davalillo, Viruet. What are you talking about?”

“My Renland message from the Weimar compound said Davalillo is inside. His death report was premature.”

“Viruet, I know Davalillo was in there, don’t insult me!” Bullock yelled. “Davalillo and some of his men charged out of the compound in a truck. We blasted it, and there were no survivors.”

“Here’s the problem then,” Viruet said. “I saw four people get in that truck before I came out.

My Renland confirmed four charred bodies. If Davalillo was inside, there should be a fifth.”

“That gol-danged weasel. How’d this happen, Viruet?”

“I don’t know what to do with you, Bullock. Take consolation that Davalillo was trying to stop the terrorists. So he won’t be hiding any nukes from us. You can always tell the President you recovered two of the three missing Renlands.”

Vonda’s detention room in Fort Myer wasn’t that bad. 12 feet long, it had a bed, desk and bathroom facilities including shower. She sat in a military-issue blue jump suit reading through the Americana articles she had requested. Vonda fixated in particular on a series of news articles about a legendary CIA agent, Jude Viruet, who died in a plane crash. She was captivated by his photo but didn’t understand why.

The middle-aged Colonel who arrested her came in, uniform shiny and blazing.

“Enjoying the American studies program, Ms. Roackaseen? You’ll have plenty of time here in America--in these same types of quarters--that is, until they strap you and pump a lethal drug into your bloodstream.”

“Thank you very much for the Americana, Colonel,” she smiled.

The Colonel was jolted by her grace. He tossed her a newspaper.

“Here. Your day in the sun.”

Vonda saw the headline in the Times: **TERRORIST LEADERS APPREHENDED IN PENNSYLVANIA.** Right below were photos of her, Liccardi and Taveras.

Vonda covered her mouth and laughed.

“What’s so funny?” The Colonel asked.

“That’s not me. I never frown like that. They photoshopped by picture! The American media has perfected political correctness. We can’t have a smiling terrorist, right, Colonel?”

“Well, I can agree, the media can be twisted.”

“One more thing, Colonel. Could you please bring me a Bible?”

“A reasonable request. Consider it done, Ma’am.”

2:00 PM; two hours until the big meeting. Miyaro used his Presidential magic key for Fort Myer access. He waited in a conference room of the isolation unit. Two armed Army Officers brought out Liccardi, clad in brown cotton fatigues. Miyaro asked the Officers to wait outside.

Liccardi flashed his toothy smile. “Dr. Miyaro! What a surprise. I cannot thank you enough for helping the Vanguardia locate the nuclear terrorists.”

“The President asked me to follow through on the nuclear issue—that is, if you’re still willing to help us.”

“What’s the last thing we did together in Tyrene? What’s changed?”

“Good. When you and Davalillo first developed the nuclear project, did you have specific Vanguardia Officers assigned to that project?”

“Yes, just a few that we believed most suitable.”

“When Davalillo reassigned the nuke project from you to Ruiz, were those exact same people transferred?”

“Yes—I see where you are headed,” Liccardi said. “Pendergrass did threaten us with another bomb before he died. But Ruiz said it was a lie, just like the threat to blow up Philadelphia was a lie.”

“That’s probably true, with the nuclear terrorists all dead. But let’s make absolutely sure. Can you write down the names and nationalities of all people you assigned to the nuke project?”

“Yes.” Liccardi took the pen and paper from Viruet and wrote down the information. He handed his handwritten list to Miyaro, who compared it to the typed list in front of him.

Miyaro said, “We don’t have a match. Jorge Perez is on your list. He’s not on the list of people confirmed dead in the Blakeslee compound. It may be just an innocent loose end; someone who walked away.”

Liccardi pondered. “I helped create this monster, so blood could be on my hands. As I said in Tyrene, the more I see you, the more I like you. If Perez has got a bomb, get him. Any way you can.”

Later, Lansford sent Miyaro a text via the Renland. “I heard the great news. Congratulations! You came though again. If I have a son, I’ll name him Jude Rene. Or Rene Jude.”

Miyaro texted back, “Your help was very valuable, Belinda. But the victory parade may be premature.”

4:00 PM. The detainees Liccardi, Taveras and Vonda were brought into the conference room, and seated across a serious row of men.

“Let me introduce everyone,” said an older, silver haired man with upscale gray suit. “I’m Scott Townsell, Associate Assistant Attorney General. To my right is Stu Black, Associate Deputy Secretary of State.” The black suit, beard and hair matched the name. “Farther to my right are Elton Bullock, Director of National Intelligence, and Jack Lynch, FBI Special Agent-in-Charge.”

The door opened. A guard escorted in Miyaro.

“Also, we have, at the request of Mr. Bullock, Special Presidential Envoy Rene Miyaro.”

He chose to sit in a back chair, behind the inquisitors. Vonda’s face lit up like a candle; her eyes did not leave him. Miyaro held up a small black-marked sign: I’VE GOT YOUR BACK, PRINCESS.

Townsell said in a loud voice like lecturing a class, “Before any of you say a word, we have already verified through US Intelligence systems, that you are all members of the guerilla army Vanguardia Sindicalismo; Mr. Liccardi, you are the acknowledged leader. Your group has been associated with the violent revolution that established the current nation of Roackaseen Valley; violent suppression of people in several former sovereign nations; an invasion of the sovereign nation of Mexico, and other military adventures across the globe. Recently, your group was connected with the development of nuclear weapons, including one detonated near New York City. Our government considers you the most dangerous destabilizing International military cartel with the likelihood of committing mass murder and mayhem. We consider your entrance into the United States as no less than an invasion, especially considering the

violent military assault in that truck, against the US military in Pennsylvania. These facts will necessitate the most serious sanctions against all of you. The extent of the sanctions depend on how cooperative you are, describing the events that took place recently at the Weimar Industries building.”

“None of you have legal counsel?” Black asked. “The Officers did give you the opportunity.”

Vonda casually shook her head, but Liccardi punched the table. “The only representation I need is my exit papers, for me to board an airplane. The President of Aztlan expedited a letter to you, explaining my position as a high-level member of the Aztlan government with diplomatic immunity. Your keeping me hostage in this military prison and threatening me with prosecution are violations of International Law.”

“We did receive the letter from Aztlan President Juan Duarte,” Townsell said. “Mr. Black is in the best position to respond.”

“Congress last year passed a Federal diplomatic recognition law to harmonize better with International standards. Article III describes widespread diplomatic protections. But Article VI suggests exceptions for nations that the US considers hostile to its security, such as Aztlan. This is a gray area, and I think the lawyers need to examine the issue more.”

Townsell said, “Until we are advised otherwise, Mr. Liccardi will remain one of the defendants.”

Miyaro made a funny face and shook his head. Vonda laughed quietly with a shrug of her shoulders.

“Ms. Roackaseen, you find these proceedings humorous?” Townsell said. “Well, humor this. Right now, if you give us no evidence to the contrary, you and your associates will be indicted for multiple murders at the Blakeslee compound, including the business owner Frederick Weimar. We will seek the death penalty for each of you.”

“I didn’t kill anyone,” Vonda said.

“Vonda, don’t say nothin’,” Taveras said. “They don’t know what really happened, and they ain’t gonna believe you no matter what you say.”

Miyaro suddenly rose. “Finally some wise words in this conference! May I respond to some of your points, Mr. Townsell?”

“Dr. Miyaro, this is a high level Federal criminal proceeding, not one of your adventures to Tyrene,” Townsell said. “I cannot imagine what points of relevance you could add.”

“Great bells of Belfast, can you let the man speak?” Bullock said.

“Thank you, sir.” Miyaro continued, “I need to clarify some misinformation. Fact number one: Vonda Roackaseen shot no one. Fact number two: Mr. Liccardi and Mr. Taveras shot the men you found dead in there, only because those dead men threatened imminent nuclear mayhem against the United States, including a detonation in a major US city. Fact number three: Weimar was killed because he was a co-conspirator with the nuclear terrorists and funded the construction of nuclear bombs. Fact number four: There were two factions in the Vanguardia, one headed up by Mr. Liccardi, including the two persons here, the other faction headed by Carlos Ruiz. It was Ruiz’s faction that promoted the nuclear terror, and Mr. Liccardi’s

faction was opposed to it. Fact number five: The VERY REASON Mr. Liccardi's faction came to the USA was to stop the nuclear terrorists, and save the American homeland from nuclear mayhem. Fact number six: one of the Vanguard leaders wanted to execute the three cuffed FBI agents. Mr. Liccardi, Ms. Roackaseen and Mr. Taveras all risked their lives to oppose the shooting of the FBI agents, including Mr. Lynch sitting here, and ended up saving their lives. In your zeal, Mr. Townsell, to execute these three heroes for America, why don't you just dig up the graves of Patrick Henry, George Washington, Abe Lincoln and other American heroes, and execute them, too!"

Townsell rose, shaking. "Where do you get your facts, Professor?"

"I get my facts from facts, not ignorant assumptions."

"Where is the evidence for your fantasy, obviously driven by your subversive Harvard connections."

"I have aural and visual accounts of the Blakeslee event."

"That's preposterous. Show me the proof."

"Show yourself. I work for the President," Miyaro said.

The door creaked open. In stepped Terry Fowler, his black suit a virtual twin of Stu Black's.

"Sit down Scott," Fowler said to Townsell. "Well, in my position, I get to hear some extraordinary conversations. You all didn't disappoint. By the way, Rene Miyaro is right. These three detainees saved the lives of the FBI agents and countless other innocent Americans. I have those video and audio tapes, too."

“Terry, how in the world did you get that information?”

“That information is strictly classified, Scott. Now, President Velasquez is a man of impeccable fairness. He is preparing a Presidential Award for Syed Mohammed for exposing a dangerous arms cartel, and corruption of our nation’s Intelligence system; no further details on that. The President is also preparing a Presidential Award for Rene Miyaro for exposing the location of the nuclear terrorists, and other actions we’re not discussing. The President will go on live TV tonight to announce to the world the heroics of Ms. Roackaseen, Mr. Liccardi and Mr. Taveras and in service to our great nation. That is to counter the damaging news stories about these three wonderful human beings. At 9:00 this morning, the President named me his Chief of Staff, because of guilded guilt by association; the good fortune of being around the people I just named.

“Charges against Mr. Liccardi, Mr. Taveras and Ms. Roackaseen are dismissed, order of President Velasquez and the Attorney-General. You three are free to leave. Scott and Stu, you are free to leave, too—meaning I want you out of this room.”

After the two walked out, Bullock confronted Miyaro. “Boy, why did you throw that Justice official under the bus like that?”

Miyaro answered, “I didn’t like the way Townsell crowed on national TV about his success in stopping three vicious terrorists—after needlessly ordering them strip-searched. To quote the esteemed economic philosopher David Roebuck, the term is comeuppance.”

“Sounds good to me,” Lynch said with a chuckle. “Thank you again for everything, Dr. Miyaro. Great job.”

Bullock found himself laughing, too. “Yes, that was a cotton pickin masterpiece. Vir—uh, Miyaro, come over soon and taste my wife’s best pecan pie in all of Alabama. Bring your sweetie, too. Better, y’all come over, and we’ll celebrate.”

Vonda bowed several times. “Thank you, Mr. Bullock. Thank you, everyone.”

Fowler beckoned to Liccardi, Vonda and Taveras. “After you hear the President announce your heroism to the world, we’ll need to get you all on a plane out of the US right away. It’s not an act of hostility; the President just needs to move onto other issues and try to get our nation’s attention away from these scary events. You all staying on our soil just reminds people. Mr. Liccardi, you get a Diplomat’s sendoff to Cartagena, Aztlan. Ms. Roackaseen”—

“Vonda.”

“Yes, you will all be welcome back in the States in three months or so, after this all cools down a bit. We’d love to have you all come visit. We also hope and pray that you’ll build on your virtue, and influence your countries in a positive way for good relations with the USA. Mr. Liccardi, you are influential in Aztlan militarily; Vonda, you are influential in your country economically. And Angel—you’re just influential with your love of baseball. I heard the news. Who’s your team?”

“Tampa Rays.”

“Not my best, but I like them,” Fowler said.

Liccardi exchanged handshakes with all four men. “The decency I’ve seen coming from you real men in this room, restores my hope for your nation.”

Vonda said, “I promise I will be an advocate for peace when I go back to Roackaseen Valley. I look forward to our next meeting, Mr. Fowler.”

“Terry.”

“Yes, Terry.”

Everyone left except for Vonda and Miyaro. Vonda sat peacefully in the padded chair, and beckoned Miyaro into the adjacent chair. She took his hands gently into hers.

“Rene, could we just sit here for a while? You don’t have to say anything.”

The White House

The next morning Miyaro called Terry Fowler on the Renland.

“Terry, right before yesterday’s meeting I sent you coordinates and photo shots of Jorge Perez. Without Renland blackout I tracked him down within hours. Did you get the message?”

“First of all, I’m glad you shared that critical information with me rather than Bullock,” Fowler responded. “Great timing, because the President has finally decided Uncle Elton needs a transfer. Oh, the President won’t be harsh; in fact, Bullock is getting the same pay in his new position. Jaime just wants Bullock in a less sensitive position—now, about your intel. Meet me in an hour at the West Wing, just inside the gate.”

Fowler took Miyaro past the alert Secret Service officers and into a small, pristine side room.

He connected his Renland to a large computer screen.

“Video of action that occurred two hours ago,” Fowler said. A white wood-framed two story house appeared on the screen. Fowler continued, “Iowa farmhouse. We had to make sure Perez was there, and no one else was home, especially innocents. Two small nukes we found in the tornado shelter below—and we verified they were dormant; no active detonation.

“Now, President Velasquez is a strong supporter of human rights and due process. But when dealing with nuclear attacks against our homeland, bureaucratic niceties are not appropriate. Watch that screen and count backwards: five, four, three, two, one.”

There was a glimpse of a missile, and then an explosion, sending flames and smoke in the air, and obliterating the farmhouse.

“Drone in Iowa,” Miyaro said.

Fowler said, “What’s better: explaining an unknown explosion? Or announcing to the American people that we had to chase after more rogue nukes? Perez was Ruiz’s last loose screw, right?”

“Yes.”

“Then we are safe for now. I’ll walk you out now, Jude.”

Dulles Airport

Later that afternoon, Miyaro and Vonda sat together at a bar inside the International Departures area of Dulles Airport.

“Time for one more pineapple juice before you board?” Miyaro offered.

“Sure.”

Vonda had dressed up for him from a recent store excursion: gold knee length skirt, gold necklace and long brown hair fluffed a little more. She sipped on her second fruit drink. She gazed up at the TV over the bar, where a replay of a college football game aired.

“Okay, Miss Americana expert. Identify the team in white, on defense.”

“Mmmm—that would be the Miami Hurricanes.” She smiled widely in victory.

“And the team in red?”

“That’s so easy: Ohio State, one of Lauro’s favorite teams. Can you please ask me a hard question?” She slapped his shoulder.

“What’s the team with the ball going to do now?”

“Third and 17. Screen pass maybe.”

Miyaro laughed. “Where did you get such football insights from your Polynesian isle?”

“Remember, I studied American culture and history passionately for years. I want to be the very best college professor on Americana.—Rene, I got two fascinating communications at my hotel this morning. First, Davey Roebuck sent me an invitation over the Internet. He and Jing are getting married. I am invited, and he wanted me to invite you. Say yes?”

“What’s the second communication?”

It’s hilarious,” she laughed. “First President Carreon kicks me out of the country. Now, he wants me to run for President. Isn’t it amazing how

perceptions can turn on a whim, or an accident of nature—when we are the same person all along?”

Miyaro laughed, “Why not? My Tyrene Princess becomes a Tyrene Queen!—A lot easier, now that President Velasquez wants normal diplomatic relations with Roackaseen Valley.”

“No way. All the world needs is another rich politician, right? I may help Mr. Carreon as a consultant on education reforms. Mostly, I just want to return to Tyrene University and teach. Ohio State versus Miami.”

They left the bar and walked quietly toward the screening area. Vonda clutched his arm the entire way. Up ahead, there were people and lines everywhere. She turned and gave him a vice-grip hug. Facing him, she smiled over tears.

“So, you will fight for the Syndicalist Republic of Roackaseen Valley?” Miyaro asked.

“The people and the voters will decide our country’s direction, and I’m sure the people will make good choices, after seeing the alternative. Me, I’ll talk to Davey and make sure that all employees of Roackaseen Enterprises can share in the profits and key decision making. Call it micro-syndicalism. Most importantly, I want Roackaseen Valley to embrace Godly values.”

“I couldn’t have said it better.”

“One more thing, Rene. I found several articles on this amazing American secret agent named Jude Viruet. By all accounts he was selfless, and did spectacular things heroically for your nation and the world. He was a Christian, too. Sadly, he died in a freak airplane accident. He reminds me of someone else I know.”

“Yeah, President Velasquez briefed me about him. The dental records and DNA confirmed his tragic death. America will survive without him.”

“They say Mr. Viruet had many aliases, and could fool even his relatives. I read that American spy agencies have amazing ways of changing people’s identities—much more efficient than Lauro.”

“That’s interesting, Vonda. I’ll research that more at Harvard.”

“Rene, thank you, thank you. This is not goodbye, because I know we’ll see each other. That powerful spirit of yours will be with me in Tyrene.”

She turned with bag in left hand. She gave him a big wave of her right hand, and a smile. “I’ll see you at Davey’s wedding. And make sure your airplane does not crash.”

