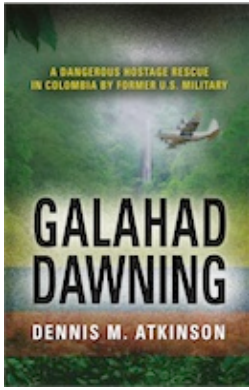


**A DANGEROUS HOSTAGE RESCUE  
IN COLOMBIA BY FORMER U.S. MILITARY**



# **GALAHAD DAWNING**

**DENNIS M. ATKINSON**



*Former U.S. military volunteers attempt to rescue the daughter of a wealthy South American businessman who has been kidnapped by a vengeful criminal gang and is being held at a fortified compound in the rain forested mountains of Colombia. The gang leader threatens to torture and mutilate the young woman as the rescue group hastily organizes and arms up as the clock is ticking.*

## **Galahad Dawning**

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# **Galahad Dawning**

**By**

**Dennis M. Atkinson**

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ISBN 978-1-62646-709-5

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Bradenton, Florida.

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper.

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2014

## **Dedication**

To all members of the military and intelligence field officers who go in harm's way to safeguard the people of the world from terrorists.



## **Chapter 1**

### **The Taking**

Tucuman Province, Northwest Argentine Republic  
Tuesday, November 3, 1998, Day 1

Julio Rodríguez was worried. They had been told the riders would be passing the blocking point at about 9:00 AM and his recently acquired Timex watch indicated 10:15. Maybe the time piece was fast, after all it didn't come with a warranty. Few of Julio's possessions came with warranties due to the manner in which they had been acquired. The early morning cool of the dense grove of mature cedars was being rapidly replaced with the heat of the late November spring sun. Just when he began to think the deal was a complete bust he heard the ring of feminine laughter and moments later soft voices and the thud of hooves on the rough track that wound through the hills of rolling grassland and stands of Salta Cedars.

With adrenaline pumping, cocking and loading a .177 cal. pellet in the Gamo air rifle was noticeably easier than it had been in practice. Charging an air rifle capable of producing over 300 meters per second muzzle velocity required substantial force to break open the barrel to a 90 degree position and allow the shooter to insert a pellet into the chamber. He returned the barrel to the shooting position and placed the rifle in his shoulder, aiming down the twenty meter firing lane that he had previously cut through the thick brush and lower tree limbs. His shooting position was eight meters

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off the trail and the firing lane angled up the trail to his right toward the approaching riders. Another alternate shooting lane angled back down the trail to his left in the event the formation of riders did not offer a clear frontal shot as they approached. Julio and Hector had theorized that the ladies would be riding side by side to facilitate conversation and the target might be masked by the other rider. If that were so, Julio would have to allow the riders to pass by and take the shot from a rear angle. A rear shot was fraught with the risk of having to run past the target area after shooting to reach the tree and also the possibility that the trailing armed escort would see and shoot at movement in the brush. However, good fortune smiled on Julio Rodriguez. The tall blond was riding on the left, providing a clear shot.

Marti and Maria had intended to be on the trail immediately after breakfast, but had lingered over coffee, becoming so involved in discussing Maria's recently discovered pregnancy that they were unaware of the passage of time. Although at twenty seven, Maria was four years older than Marti, they had known each other all of their lives and recently, as young women, had become much closer. Marti was secretly a bit envious of Maria's recent marriage to an American and her approaching motherhood. Although as a tall, very attractive blond, Marti had no reason to despair for her own future with so many eager suitors.

Riding their favorite trail to the northeast of the cattle ranch, Estancia Famaila Tucuman, the ladies, followed by the faithful Rodolfo as escort, were enjoying a bright, warm spring morning that promised a hot afternoon. The clear skies were especially welcome after two days of wind and rain brought on by warm moisture laden air sweeping in from the South Atlantic and meeting cold air of the Andes.



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Rodolfo, age fifty nine, was a thirty plus years employee of the family estancia and very devoted to Señorita Martha (Marti) Victoria Carillo. Rodolfo was well armed with his usual double barrel gauge shotgun loaded with double ought buck shot and backed up with a 9 mm Beretta automatic pistol. There was absolutely no doubt in the mind of Señorita Martha's father, Don Luis Simón Carillo Guerra that Rodolfo would shoot to kill anyone who would even imply a threat to Martha or her best friend, Señora Maria Elana Baragán Jordan. As was his custom, Rodolfo trailed the young women by about fifteen meters to allow them private conversation. The lead riders were briefly out of his sight as they rounded a bend to the right.

Marti heard a mechanical sounding crack at the same time a volcano of horse flesh exploded under her. A less experienced rider would have been jerked from the saddle and dragged, as her mount, a high spirited mare, bolted forward as if lashed with a whip.

Maria's twelve year old gelding reared up on his hind quarters and then began a panicked bucking and neighing. By the time Maria had gained control of her mount, Marti was far down the trail and around a turn to the left. As Maria started to follow, Rodolfo dashed by her and they were both at a full run. A loud snap, crackle and crash echoed through the cedar grove as they approached the turn.

With the air rifle in his left hand and a machete in his right, Julio ran down the freshly cut lane in the undergrowth. He had not run so fast in quite some time; not since the provincial police had chased him from a freshly burgled residence in San Miguel de Tucuman. He prayed that his legs wouldn't pull up on him. As he passed under the rope that suspended the almost cut through blocking tree, he swung the

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machete at the rope with all of his strength and was rewarded with the, “spung!” of parting fibers, the crack of the remaining trunk wood breaking, and the swish and crackling of the large cedar as it fell through the surrounding tree branches and crashed across the riding trail. Julio swung to his left and started down slope, lengthening his stride, eager to put as much distance from the ambush site as he could. He was aided by the thinning of the undergrowth as he departed the more dense vegetation along the trail.

Julio reached the bottom of the slope and a rough track beside a small stream. He used a short bunji cord to quickly secure the rifle across the handlebars of his 90 cc trail bike, slid the machete into a canvas sheath tied to the gas tank, cranked the kick starter and started down the trail, the well muffled engine producing only a soft “put-put-put.”

Marti heard a loud crash behind her as she struggled to bring the mare under control. She cleared a turn to the left and the track straightened, but her vision was filled with a white van blocking the trail. The van was positioned at an angle across the trail so that the mare had no opening to get around it. As the mare slid to a stop on her haunches, strong hands roughly jerked Marti from the saddle. A towel was clapped on her nose and mouth, and she was aware of a cloyingly sweet chemical smell as she fell into darkness.

Rodolfo leaped from the saddle as the stallion slid to a stop and reared up on his back legs. A large cedar tree had fallen across the trail, totally blocking any passage or view as to what was happening further down the track. Making a quick decision, Rodolfo turned to the left and dragging the hesitant stallion by the reins crashed his way through the underbrush and overhanging limbs toward the butt of the tree.

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As he rounded the stump at a trot, he noted the expert logger's cut of the stump, the severed rope, and his heart was filled with fear and mounting rage. Rodolfo pushed through the remaining growth like a man possessed, ignoring the stinging cuts and lashings of bushes and limbs. He turned to his mount, grabbed the saddle horn with both hands, screamed a savage, "Heeyah!" and pulled himself up and into the saddle of the surging stallion. Racing through the turn to the left at a dead run, Rodolfo caught a glimpse of a white van disappearing around a bend to the right, the riderless mare galloping after it with reins dragging in the dust. He stood there for a moment, severely stricken at his failure to protect Senorita Marti and dreaded the moment when he would have to tell Don Luis.

Hector Renteria was very relieved to see his partner astride the light trail bike, nervously looking back up the trail behind him. Hector quickly swung his leg over the back of the bike and set his rump on the passenger pad and in a low tense voice excitedly urged Julio, "Go! Go!" They coasted down the trail, gathering speed, the idling engine hardly making a sound. The partners had done it! No one had seen their faces. Hector had been wearing a black balaclava, covering almost all of his head and face as he helped pull the tall, pretty blonde from the saddle. Now, all they had to do was to reach the old pickup truck, three kilometers down the trail, load the bike, wrap the rifle in a large garbage bag and suspend it under the bed of the truck.

They had been directed by the Colombians to throw the air rifle in the river. But, screw that. They had paid a lot of money for the Gamo and would sell it to a business associate who knew how to bury it in a pawn shop in San Miguel de Tucuman. Their disobedience to instructions would not be

limited to selling the rifle to their fence. The Colombian jefe (boss) had also insisted that they leave Tucuman Province after the kidnapping, a directive they had no intention of following. The Colombians would be flying out with their package and what they didn't know, they couldn't be upset about. Hector was sweet on a waitress at "La Gato Negra" (The Black Cat) and thought that he was close to an ego enhancing conquest. Now, Julio and Hector had more money in their jeans than they could ever remember and were eagerly looking forward to a big night at The Black Cat Taverna in La Reduccion, fifteen miles north of the district headquarters town of Famaila.

Julio and Hector were jacks of all trades, manual and illegal, such as tending cattle, logging, construction labor, burglary, thievery, and mugging, but certainly masters of none. Their activities were dictated by the volatile Argentine economy, which had recently been in decline, forcing them to employ their darker talents. The Black Cat, their favorite watering hole when they had money, was a source of information on available work and potential victims. Miguel, one of several bartenders, had a wealth of knowledge of local work opportunities and had been helpful in the past. Two weeks before, Miguel had asked if the partners were available for a short logging engagement, which would require "discretion." Since they were experienced in stealing high value timber from remote forest areas, they had made arrangements through Miguel to meet with their potential employer.

Following Miguel's directions, Julio and Hector rode their motor bike south through Famailla and turned west on Provincial Route 307, crossed the second bridge and took the first right onto a back road that switch backed up the side of a foothill. A burned out pickup truck on the side of the road

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signaled them to turn left into a partially overgrown dead end track. Rounding a bend, they came nose to nose with an aging, dented dark green Ford Bronco liberally decorated with spots of rust. Julio braked to a stop. The driver of the vehicle climbed out and approached the bike riders as four men appeared out of the brush and surrounded the bike. Although no weapons were visible, all of the men wore loose fitting shirts outside their trousers which undoubtedly concealed hand guns. Three of the men warily faced Julio and Hector, and the fourth walked back down the track to the bend to take up a watch position. There was no question that the Bronco driver was in charge. The others said nothing, waiting for the jefe to carry out the business at hand. Although not a big man, the jefe carried himself with assurance and his cold eyes made them both very uncomfortable. Obviously, this man was not one to take lightly.

No words were wasted. The deal was straight forward. The job was to set up the kidnapping of a young woman. Funds were provided to procure equipment and, if the arrangements met with the approval of the boss, half of their pay would be given to them on the morning of the kidnapping; the remainder would be handed over after Julio and Hector did their part. They were not to discuss the job with anyone and if they did, the consequences would be harsh and final. After the action, all of the equipment was to be disposed of so that it could never be found and the pair were then to leave Tucuman Province immediately.

Later, Julio and Hector agreed that the jefe definitely spoke with a Colombian accent and further agreed that he meant what he had said about the consequences of compromising the operation. It was obvious that the man had seen his share of violence for half of his left ear was missing

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and a knife scar ran from his right ear down to his lower right jaw. Julio and Hector were accustomed to associating with criminal elements, men who were primarily interested in taking other people's money and property, by force if necessary. Violence was also a part of settling turf infringements and misunderstandings. Julio and Hector were not shrinking violets. However, these hard eyed Colombians reflected a very different type of lawless hombres; men to whom violence was not incidental, but a constant. This job would require great care, failure was not an option.

The jefe sketched out what was going to go down and the part that Julio and Hector would play. The victim consistently rode her horse along a secluded riding trail, almost every morning. The key to success was to separate the subject from her escort long enough to make the snatch. The jefe had selected a series of turns in the trail that facilitated separation of the escort. The Colombians had no experience in falling large trees, and especially lacked the skill to partially cut a tree so that it could be put down between the target and her escort. Julio and Hector's responsibility was to carry out the means of separation. A visiting friend accompanying the subject further complicated the operation. The jefe asked how Hector and Julio would prepare the tree and seemed satisfied that the pair knew what they were doing. He gave them instructions on how to contact him through the bartender, Miguel, and handed them an envelope containing equipment funds. As they exited the dead end track, Julio and Hector experienced a sense of relief in escaping the menacing glare of the scar faced Colombian.

A noisy chainsaw was out of the question. Finding an old two meter, two-man crosscut handsaw without attracting much notice required a week. Julio passed himself off as a logger gathering old logging equipment for a logging

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museum in San Miguel de Tucuman. He found a saw at a small engine repair business. The owner and only mechanic was a man in his seventies who was a former logger and sawyer who guaranteed that the saw was sharp and the teeth properly set. Since Julio had never used such a large hand saw, a ten minute demonstration and instruction on pulling and not pushing (the saw only cut on the draw and pushing would cause the saw to bend and bind in the cut) was very helpful. It also proved that the saw was as advertised and actually impressed Julio as to its speed in cutting through a small log behind the shop.

A local farm supply store carried two models of pump air rifles that patrons purchased to kill rodents and snakes without alarming or endangering neighbors with firearms. Hector selected the Spanish made Gamo when the salesman stated that the 305 meters per second muzzle velocity would kill a rabbit at a range of 30 meters. Hector theorized that the pellet would not penetrate thick horse hide, but would produce a sharp, painful sting that would stampede the target's horse.

Working only during the first hour of morning light for two days, Julio and Hector quietly prepared the blocking tree. The Cedar was thirty meters tall and over sixty centimeters in diameter at the base of the trunk. The upper part of the tree was thick with many large limbs and foliage. Hector climbed about ten meters up into the tree and tied one end of the rope to the trunk of the tree. Julio wrapped the other end around a tree twenty paces behind the blocking tree and low enough for him to reach with a machete. He then wrapped it once around a second tree and tied it off on a low branch. The loggers then began to pull the two man crosscut back and forth into the trunk of the blocking tree on the side toward the trail. They made a second cut to converge with the first cut.

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When they had cut out the deep wedge that reached more than halfway through the tree, they stopped for the day. They were satisfied that no one could hear the soft purr of the crosscut strokes more than fifty meters away, but they could not risk discovery by an unexpected hiker, mountain biker, or horse rider.

The second morning required a much more tense procedure, making a controlled back-cut. They positioned the saw behind the tree, slightly above and parallel to the undercut of the previous day and began to cut through the tree toward the undercut. Julio, the more experienced of the two, had studied the tree for any possible lean away from the direction that they wanted the tree to fall. He had estimated that there was no adverse lean, but, because of the heavy upper foliage of the tree and nearby trees blocking his view, Julio was not absolutely certain that that was so. As the saw approached the undercut, Julio kept an eye on the upper branches, looking for the slightest movement. Several times they stopped cutting and untied the rope from the branch of the restraining tree and carefully gave the rope some slack to check for movement. They could not allow the tree to get away from them and prematurely crash across the trail. There was no doubt that if they screwed this up, the Colombians would hunt them down and kill them, slowly.

When Julio finally detected some tremor in the upper branches, they quickly untied the restraining rope and took another wrap around the second tree to increase the friction, enabling them to control the amount of lean of the blocking tree. Both of them were now drenched with nervous sweat. It required several more cuts and tries before they could see a noticeable lean. Several more passes with the saw allowed them to increase the lean considerably. That's when disaster struck!



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Both of them had been holding the rope and slowly letting out more line a few centimeters at a time. Julio tried to estimate in his mind the amount of uncut tree trunk remaining as they paid out the restraining rope. He was concerned that the tree would not fall quickly enough. Thinking out loud, Julio said, "Check the back cut!" Assuming that Hector had the rope, he started toward the blocking tree and immediately was aware that Hector had dropped the rope and was also starting to move. They both realized at the same time what they had done and lunged for the rope that was starting to slowly snake around the restraining tree. They braked the rope against the restraining tree just before it reached the point of no return, took another wrap around the restraining tree and tied off on a branch.

Hector glared at Julio, cursed and spat at him, "I thought you were telling me to check the back-cut!"

Julio hissed back at him, "Idiot!" His eyes were wide and he was trembling. He was very tempted to punch his partner, but was so overcome with relief that they had saved the tree that he relaxed his shoulders, exhaled loudly, and muttered, "Never mind."

The rope was now as taut as a steel rod. They were assured that when the restraining rope was cut, the tree would immediately crash down on the trail. There would be no majestic, slow gathering of speed associated with the typical falling of a large tree. The blocking tree had to be on the ground in less than two seconds.

Marti woke to the thrum of engines, the hiss of air and vibration that told her she was on an airplane, but she could not remember boarding or where she was going. Her throat was dry and she felt nauseated. She attempted to brush her hair from her face and realized that her wrists were bound.

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Then it all came rushing back to her, the bolting horse and seizure by strange men and the towel with a sweet chemical pressed and held over her nose and mouth. Kidnapped! Fear jolted through her and her mind was overwhelmed with wild scenes of captivity, abuse and death. Her heart pounded and her breath came in small gasps.

Marti's seat was in a semi-reclined position and she was not blindfolded. She checked her surroundings. The aircraft was an older propeller driven twin engine business model that had seen plenty of use. Five seats lined each side of the aisle. She was in the next to the last right hand seat and could see a man across the aisle from her and another man behind him. Several other men were in seats further forward and on both sides of the aisle.

The man across from her was looking at her with dark eyes that seemed more curious than threatening. He appeared to be rather tall, in his forties. His black hair was long and combed straight back and over his ears. His face was clean shaven except for a well-trimmed mustache and he was beginning to show some receding hairline. As their eyes met, the man behind him leaned forward and said something to him. He responded with a negative shake of his head.

The man in the rear seat turned his head to look at her and she felt a jolt of terror and desperation deep inside her. His eyes were intense and cold. A long scar ran down the right side of his face, a face totally devoid of any expression. Marti realized that the man across the aisle was the boss and the evil looking one behind him was his number one. The others were just hired help.

Bernardo Omar Arenas was very pleased with recent developments and thoroughly enjoyed the sweet taste of vengeance. Now, he would make that bastard, Carillo, pay

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and when repeated ransom payments finally stopped coming, he would send Don Carillo's only child back to him in pieces. In the meantime, he would have his way with dear Martha and when he tired of her he would hand her over to his faithful longtime assistant, Alvaro Salazar, who would make her wish she had never existed.

Two on-duty security men and several hired hands stared with amazement as Maria and Rodolfo thundered past the stable yard at a full run followed by the mare with an empty saddle. The riders slid to a halt in front of the hacienda, flung themselves from their mounts before the animals were completely stopped and ran through the front doors. The horses were heavily lathered and winded. The security men noticed the riderless mare and yelled at the gauchos to saddle up eight horses and to come to the security building to draw weapons. They turned and ran to grab their own rifles.

Rodolfo called the provincial police from the office phone while Maria called her father from the study. Unfortunately, the police, who were undermanned, underpaid and under-equipped were not going to be of much help. A four car injury accident north of San Miguel de Tucuman and the requirement to provide protective escort to a visiting official from Buenos Aires had tied up the entire shift. No units were available to set up road blocks. Cursing in frustration and dread, he dialed Don Luis in Costa Rica.

Maria had better luck. "Baragan Investigations. How may I help you?" The syrupy almost erotic voice of Tina, the receptionist, was infuriating. How could she be so sweet and courteous at a time like this?

"This is Maria! I need to speak with my father right now!" Maria failed to choke back a sob.

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After several moments, Cesar Alfonso Baragan's quiet voice came on the line and Maria found it difficult to describe the kidnapping of her best friend. Cesar finally settled her down enough that he could understand what she was trying to say. He was filled with cold dread as she started to relate the tragedy of the morning's event. He became aware of someone entering the outer office and saw Kent Jordan approaching his open door. "Wait a minute, Dear. Kent just walked in. I want him to hear this; I'm switching to speaker phone."

Kent Jordan had just arrived on the fourth floor from the basement pistol range and was about to enter Baragan's large and well-appointed office. As he neared the receptionist's desk, Tina looked up at him with wide eyes and troubled brow. With a sense of mounting unease he lengthened his stride and entered his father-in-law's office.

Cesar Baragan was in his middle fifties, five foot seven, stocky and still physically fit. Cesar had long ago given up on trying to disguise his hair loss and had taken to shaving his head totally bald. At the moment he was obviously very upset, his eyes filled with concern and one hand on his naked scalp. He leaped up from his desk and his leather upholstered executive chair rolled back to crash into the wall behind the desk. As Maria began to relate the story of the kidnapping, Cesar stood with his arms folded across his chest, staring down at the papers on his desk. He shook his head back and forth and his chest seemed to be expanding as he listened to his daughter.

In the background, Kent could hear an angry male voice. Maria paused, "Just a minute, Dad." The muffled male voice sounded frustrated and close to a rage.

Maria came back on the line, "Rodolfo just talked to the Tucuman Provincial Police and requested police roadblocks on roads leaving the area, but they have no cars available.

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Papa, Rodolfo also tried to call Don Luis in San Jose. He wasn't in his office. He's at the ranch and out riding. Men have been sent to find him. We are waiting his call. I'll let you know when we talk to him."

While Cesar paced the office, Kent talked with Maria about her condition. She assured him that she was fine and, "No, the baby was not affected, I am not even showing yet, so don't worry about me, just get Marti back!"

Estancia Sierra Vista, Costa Rica

Don Luis' cook and manager of house staff, Teresa, a short rotund woman with a cheerful, jovial spirit, was just finishing the morning baking when the ringing of the phone summoned her into the office just off of the kitchen. She immediately recognized Rodolfo's voice and was about to inquire about his health and wellbeing when he abruptly cut her off.

"Teresa! I must speak to Don Luis, now! Please, call him to the phone!"

Teresa was shaken by Rodolfo's brusque manner and noted the stress in Rodolfo's voice. "Rodolfo, Don Luis is out riding. I don't know when he'll return."

"Teresa, listen carefully! Send out riders, trucks and the helicopter, if it's there. You've got to find him. He must call me just as soon as possible. This is extremely urgent, it's about Señorita Martha. For God's sake, find him, now!"

Teresa was filled with a deep sense of foreboding as she dispatched vaqueros and drivers to various locations. What could have happened to her precious Marti, whom she had cared for since the poor dear had lost her mother. Whatever had occurred must be terrible. Although she had never met Rodolfo, she had talked to him many times on the phone and

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was impressed with his quiet, steady and unflappable nature. Rodolfo had not raised his voice, but he had omitted the usual social niceties and had spoken more slowly and more distinctly than usual, as if it was important that she understand every word. Marti must have been injured or worse. *¡ Dios mío ! Qué podría pasar a mi Marti? (My God! What has happened to my Marti?)*

Cesar Baragan, not bothering to use the intercom bellowed, “Tina, find Heinie and tell him I must see him here immediately!” He gave Kent a long look that reflected anguish and concentration. It occurred to Kent that his father-in-law was mulling decisions, running through his mind what should be done and who was best suited by experience and training to do it.

Several minutes later, a tall, well-muscled man in his mid-forties entered the office. His dark blond hair was cut in a short crew cut, very close on the sides. Kent had heard of Heinrich Reichmann shortly after joining the firm eight months ago, but had never met him. They each seemed to have been out on investigations when the other was in the headquarters doing paperwork. Heinrich (Heinie) was reputed to be Baragan Investigations’ best missing persons investigator. Despite his forty-five years, Heinie had not slowed much. At six foot, two inches and 230 pounds, his body showed no evidence of softness or paunch. His hands were exceptionally large and his forearms and biceps bulged and were well veined. Heinie worked out with weights and body bag several times a week. Younger investigators had tried to keep up with him in his grueling two hour workouts. None of them came close. The only signs of aging were a slightly receding hairline and developing crows-feet at the corner of his ice blue eyes.

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As Cesar introduced them, Kent steeled himself for an intimidating bone crushing handshake and was gratified to experience just a firm, friendly grip. Well, he thought, despite Heinie's reputation and physical presentation, he didn't display the expected overabundance of ego. Working with this guy may not be a problem.

Cesar invited his two investigators to pull up chairs and to take a seat. He quickly brought Reichmann up to date on the situation and hesitated for a second. "Let me make this clear to both of you. I have known Don Luis Carrillo Guerra for over twenty-five years. He was one of my first clients and became my best friend. Years ago, due to the ups and downs of this crazy Argentine economy, I was about to go bankrupt. Don Luis bailed me out and never asked for re-payment. Of course, I repaid him. But, my point is that Don Luis is like a brother to me. Martha is my God Child. No expense, no effort is to be spared in recovering Marti."

After a thoughtful pause, Cesar continued. "As you know, kidnapping is not unusual in Argentina. What is unusual is the taking of a family member of someone who is reputed to be so vigorous in his response to competition and challenges. Don Luis is also one of the wealthiest men in Latin America and has widespread business organizations and connections to various officials in governments throughout the hemisphere. This was a very stupid move by an exceptionally ignorant person, or by one who has considerable assets himself. One should always examine a worst case scenario; in this case, the perpetrator may have the assets to pull off the crime. If he has the assets, then he doesn't need the ransom. And that leaves vengeance as the only probable motivation for this kidnapping. If so, we are faced with a time constraint. The 'perp' will possibly ask for ransom and then for more ransom in order to humiliate Don

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Luis. When Don Luis tires of that game, then things could get nasty. Gentlemen, we need to pick up the trail of these scum just as fast as we can.”

Kent had developed a high regard for Cesar during the last several months, but he was even more impressed with the man’s analysis and quick insight of the kidnapping. It was right on the money. He gave Heinie a brief look and found Heinie looking at him. A slight nod of the head told him that Heinie agreed with him.

“Kent, Heinie, I realize that you two have never worked together, but you’re the best that I have. I’m sure you’ll work it out. I want you to leave for Tucuman just as soon as possible, take the King Air. These are very dangerous people, so go loaded for any contingency. When you get there, start to develop leads. I’ll send several more men to help track what you come up with. I’ll stay here and try to get help from the Argentine Federal Police (AFP). Don’t expect too much assistance from the provincial police. Don Luis and the top cop don’t get along. It’s been a longstanding disagreement. Report frequently anything you come up with and I’ll feed that to the AFP. The AFP has access to national and international data bases. Now, if you feel the need for extreme measures, be careful not to leave a trail. Understood? Keep me informed so I can let Luis know what’s happening. Any questions? ----- If not, then good hunting! Bring our Marti home!”



## **Chapter 2**

### **The Hunt**

Buenos Aires, Argentine Republic  
Tuesday, November 3, 1237 hours

Kent Jordan leveled the Beechcraft King Air B200GT twin at the flight plan altitude of 25,000 feet, set the auto pilot at 308 knts and on course for Tucuman Field, southeast of San Miguel de Tucuman. Although 308 knts (over 350 mph), was not the big twin engine turboprop's top speed, it was faster than the recommended economical cruising speed. He was concerned that the trail was growing cold and was anxious to get to the scene as quickly as possible. Scanning the instrument panel for problems and finding none, he relaxed for a few moments and considered what had been a very hectic day.

That morning Jordan had just returned from a successful search for the missing wife of a prominent Buenos Aires business executive. The husband, after reading the report, probably wished she had never been found. In the Baragan building basement firing range, Kent had fired his usual two hundred rounds (twice a week) through his Springfield .45 cal. automatic, cleaned the pistol and took the elevator to the top floor. He had just entered the executive offices when the kidnapping of Marti was reported by his wife, Maria. This case promised to be way outside anything he had experienced since he had joined Baragan. Where this chase might lead was anybody's guess. If events of the last four years were any

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indication, it was certainly going to be interesting. His life had been chaotic and it all started in Colombia.

Having been declared an embarrassment to the U.S. Embassy in Bogotá, Colombia, Jordan had been ordered to return to the U.S. and was made to understand that if he did not resign from the U.S. Army he would be subject to an Article 32 investigation and a possible court martial. In the end he was allowed to take a lump sum retirement, two years short of twenty years and a lifelong pension. As he thought back to those events, he once again felt burning resentment. Resentment for having been set up in Medellín and thrown out of the country, and the intense disgust for the colonel who had given him the assignment in Colombia and then did not back him up when he had been screwed. He felt little regret on leaving an army in which commanders, in order to protect their careers, threw their subordinates under the wheels of the bus.

Humiliated and angry at the unfairness of the Army that he had served so faithfully, and for which he had endured many dangers and sacrifices, Jordan quickly changed direction and set out for a career in law enforcement. He had saved up a substantial amount of money through his many years of overseas assignments, and with the retirement lump sum he had the funds to attend the University of Pennsylvania and complete his degree in Criminal Justice Administration.

When Kent had checked with the Philadelphia Police Department for information about a possible career, he discovered that they were shorthanded and were looking for experienced officers. The P.D. considered his years with the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command to be appropriate experience. Upon completing several correspondence courses, physical fitness and skills tests, he was hired on. Working the graveyard shift at the Philadelphia

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Police Department enabled him to attend classes at the university during the day. He had been promoted to detective during his last year in school. Although, by that time he had to complete only two courses to earn his degree, the pace of work and study was strenuous. It was during that last year that he met the lovely Maria Elana Baragan.

Kent had been working for Leroy Thurston, a stout, mild mannered and very professional black lieutenant, second in command of the Major Violent Crimes Unit. Part of Jordan's job was to monitor reports of violent altercations for descriptions of the parties involved that matched up with wanted violent offenders.

Kent had finished his last class of the day at the university and thought to check on a report of an assault at a nearby coffee shop the previous night. He would show employees of the Java Bean Coffee Shop a number of photos of wanted suspects that generally fit the description given in the incident report. As he approached the Java Bean, his cop antennae went up. Two young white males were loitering outside the shop. It wasn't the manner of dress that grabbed his attention; some students celebrated their arrival at adulthood by dressing like teenage thugs. It was the body language and general behavior that caught his eye. Most students were busy and on the go, but these two guys were just hanging out and looked like they were waiting for something to happen. Since there were no metro bus stop signs in sight, there was no reason for them to be just standing around a business frequented by comely co-eds.

From the suspicious characters' perspective, Kent did not look like the typical cop. His jeans, button down shirt, crew neck pull over sweater, sport coat and a brief case projected an image of, perhaps an assistant professor. As a matter of procedure, Jordan intended to check on the pair after he

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finished in the shop. He would badge them and observe their reaction and, at the least, cause them to move out of the university area.

Kent had just finished his last employee interview and was heading for the door when he noticed a beautiful dark haired young co-ed walking out the door ahead of him. As she exited the shop, she turned to the left toward the two bozos. Jordan stopped at the door and watched through the door glass. Not surprisingly, the two thugs separated to let the young lady pass. The taller one, on the curbside, suddenly grabbed her arm. As she instinctively pulled away, she was seized by the shorter, heavyset scumbag on the other side and found herself being pulled into the alley beside the shop.

Jordan exploded out of the shop entryway, dropped his briefcase and was on them like a large cat. The thug on the right was turning left toward the alley and detected the sudden movement behind him over his left shoulder. As he continued to rotate to the left, he shoved the girl with his right forearm. The move put him slightly off balance and delayed his squaring up to face Jordan. His attempt to block Jordan's savage right cross to the jaw was only marginally effective and he folded to the sidewalk.

As the short one on the left spun around, Jordan stepped into him and delivered a left elbow smash to the side of his head followed by a right uppercut to the solar plexus which took him out of the action. As Kent reached for his cuffs and started to bend down, the girl screamed, "¡Cuidado!" (look out!).

The other thug had shaken off the effects of the partially blocked blow and came up from the pavement, driving at Kent with a four inch folding knife in his right hand. Kent did the unexpected. Instead of backing up, he leaned into the attack, slapped the knife hand away from his body with his

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left hand, spun to his right, catching the knife hand with his right, pulled it in the direction of the lunge and took his assailant off balance. Bringing his right knee up sharply, he drove the extended arm down onto his knee at the elbow with all the force he could muster. There was a horrible crunch and snap accompanied by a howl of pain. The man collapsed on the pavement clutching his arm.

“¡Dios mio! Oh! Oh, my God!” Jordan turned around to find the beautiful student sitting on the pavement, staring at him with the most stunning big brown eyes he had ever seen. A very disturbing feeling welled up deep inside of him and he knew his life would never be the same.

Jordan had necessarily experienced a lonely life filled with long, intense training courses and many overseas assignments, some involving covert operations. He had had no time for involved romantic relationships and was thirty-eight years old. A lifelong partnership had always been somewhere out in front of him. It was a future that he had come to desire more intensely as the years rolled by. Now, as he looked into those gorgeous eyes and took in her full lips and glossy dark hair, he knew with all his heart that “someday” had arrived. His physical reaction to her was unprecedented; it shook him to his core.

Two units, a patrol sergeant and an ambulance had responded to his call for assistance. Kent escorted the young lady to the local precinct to fill out reports and to initiate charges. Afterward, he dropped her off at her apartment in a very well appointed and secure high rise.

Jordan thought it would be unprofessional to call her phone number that he had accessed from the victim report, so he frequently dropped in at the coffee shop to just “coincidentally” run into Maria. It was on his third visit that

she entered the shop, saw him sitting in the corner and smiled at him.

At their first meeting, she had been rather shaken and frightened. Therefore he had not previously experienced the thrall of Maria Elana's smile. Jordan had observed that many beautiful women know they have an effective smile and are in the habit of flashing their teeth at the slightest provocation. Practiced smiles were superficial acts involving the mouth.

When Maria smiled at Kent, he took in the perfect teeth, the generous mouth, the pronounced dimples and the sparkle of her eyes. But more than that, there was an undefinable, overall effect that seemed to light up his whole being like a fantastic brilliant sunrise, a gift just for him. Her entire soul smiled at him in a way that caused his heart to race and his head to pound. He felt himself flushing like an adolescent schoolboy. Later, Maria admitted to him that she had been coming into the Java Bean every afternoon at various times, hoping to see him again.

Maria Elana Baragan needed an additional year to complete requirements for a Master's Degree in International Finance at the University, after which she would return to Latin America to work for a friend of her father. Kent and Maria were married in Buenos Aires three weeks after her graduation. Kent resigned from the Philadelphia P.D. and went to work for his newly acquired father-in-law at Baragan Investigations. Spanish had been his primary foreign language as a Green Beret and he had enjoyed two assignments in South America. Kent Jordan had no problem adjusting to life in Buenos Aires.

Jordan did a quick scan of the partly cloudy skies, expecting an increase in traffic as they approached Tucuman airport. As he scanned, he reflected on what he had learned

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about the man sitting next to him in the co-pilot's seat. Back at the office, after a few details had been discussed with Cesar, Heinie Reichmann had departed the administration offices to draw additional weapons and investigation kits from the armory/equipment room. Heinie then went to his apartment to pack personal things and proceeded to meet Kent at Jorge Newbery Airpark.

Jordan had strolled down the hall from the executive suite to the administration office. As Vice President and Director of Major Investigations at Baragan Investigations, Kent had access to the confidential personnel files. He knew that Heinie was well respected at the firm, but he had never worked with Reichmann and knew little of his background. He dialed in the combination of the locked heavy steel filing cabinet, drew Heinie's file and sat at a nearby desk.

Heinrich Karl Reichmann was born in Hamburg, Federal Republic of Germany in 1953. He was orphaned at the age of two and was bounced from one orphanage to another until he ran away at age seventeen. After two years of surviving life on the crime ridden streets of Hamburg, Heinie had signed on for six years with the French Foreign Legion. He served with the elite Parachute Regiment and was selected for very demanding training in deep reconnaissance and counter terror operations. After completing his six year enlistment, he emigrated to Argentina in 1978. Reichmann was accepted into the Buenos Aires Police Academy, from which he graduated number one in his class. Selected for detective in 1984 and promoted to sergeant in 1986, Heinie had earned a considerable reputation in the Major Crimes Unit and was forecast for promotion to lieutenant when he ran afoul of the mayor. Heinrich Karl's Teutonic stubbornness and Legionnaire sense of honor would not allow him to back off a

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case when ordered by his unit chief. The drug related murder of a prostitute had involved the mayor's nephew. Shortly thereafter, Heinie, seeing a very limited future with the BAPD, went to work for Baragan Investigations.

Kent was impressed with Reichmann's investigative skills. He had taken some time to look through several cases that Heinie had successfully completed and noted that the investigator showed a shrewd instinct for exposing human misbehavior and a flair for innovation. One case which stood out involved an entertaining ruse. He had uncovered an injury fraud for an insurance company by using a honey trap. A hired call girl persuaded the egotistic gentleman, who claimed to be disabled, to show off his physical prowess during a walk in the park and later in the bedroom, all caught on camera.

One question nibbled at the back of Kent's mind. Was Heinie resentful of the newly arrived son in-law's quick promotion to Director of Major Investigations? Several long time investigators at Baragan seemed uncomfortable with the elevation of a new and untried man to the top supervisory position. So far, he had detected no animosity from Heinie. Kent had demonstrated a respectable level of investigative skills and knowledge, and much of the prior resentment of his fellow investigators was on the wane. Reichmann was the only one with which he had had no contact. Jordan could not help but notice that during his preflight inspection of the King Air and completion of the take-off checklist, Heinie hardly said a word. Initially, Kent assigned the silence to a respect for the all-important preparations for flight. However, after the plane had attained cruising altitude and Kent had engaged the auto-pilot Heinie had not uttered as much as a grunt. Well, Cesar had proven to be a very wise and capable manager. He must have figured that the two of them could



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work together. Whatever was bugging Reichmann should become clear shortly.

As he thought about arriving at Tucuman, he felt a flush and excitement in anticipation of reuniting with his beautiful bride and mother to be of his child. But first, he had to get the King Air on the ground.

“Tucuman Approach Control, this is King Air LVCNU, 120 kilometers southeast, flight level 200. Request landing instructions.”

“Roger King Air LVCNU, squawk 3752 and ident.”

“Roger, King Air LVCNU, ident.”

Air traffic was light and the controller quickly directed him to the airfield and handed him off to the tower. “Roger, CNU, cleared for visual approach runway 19, left traffic, contact tower on 135.5.”

Kent switched to the tower frequency.

“Tucuman Tower, King Air LVCNU left traffic for runway 19.”

“King Air LVCNU, Tucuman Tower, you are cleared to land runway 19, winds 210 at 7 knots.”

“Roger, cleared to land.” Kent put the King Air into a left turning bank and lined up with the runway.

Rodolfo was familiar with the Baragan aircraft, as he had previously, on occasion, accompanied Senorita Martha to the airport to pick up her friend, Maria. As he watched the twin engine craft set down smoothly, he was impressed with how much the pilot had improved his skill at landing since the last visit. When two men exited the plane and began to tie it down and chalk the wheels, Rodolfo realized that the regular pilot had not been at the controls. Neither man was Pepe, the Baragan Investigation’s pilot.

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Both men wore shirts, slacks, and windbreakers and each carried two bags. As they crossed the tarmac and approached Rodolfo, standing beside the Chevy Suburban, Rodolfo noted that both men moved with an athletic intensity and casually surveyed their surroundings as if they were curious tourists. The shorter man appeared to be in his late thirties, about five foot ten inches, broad shoulders, sandy hair, intense deep set grey eyes and a lean face. He introduced himself as Kent Jordan. The taller, muscular man with pale blue eyes appeared to be about ten years older than Jordan and identified himself as Heinrich Reichmann.

For the first time since the morning's tragic trail ride, Rodolfo felt some hope that the situation was looking better. These men exuded a strong quiet confidence that was reassuring. Rodolfo was in great need of that reassurance for he was suffering an excruciating sense of guilt for allowing his ward to be taken by persons unknown, persons unknown as to their motive and as to the level of evil acts of which they were capable. Later that day, he would have to face his patron, the man who had entrusted him with the safety of his daughter and a very good man who paid a comfortable salary, medical care and retirement; a man for whom Rodolfo would gladly lay down his life. Rodolfo had failed Don Luis in the worst possible manner.

Maria, moving at a rapid walk, rounded the corner of a hangar and saw Kent and Heinie talking to Rodolfo beside the Suburban. She emitted a cry that reflected both joy at seeing her husband and relief that someone had finally arrived who could start the hunt to recover Marti. As she ran to him and flew into his arms, she began to sob uncontrollably. Heinie and Rodolfo endured several uncomfortable moments as Kent held Maria, stroking her back and assuring her that he and

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Heinie would do everything possible to bring Marti back. He finally held her out away from him to look at her.

“I didn’t see you with Rodolfo and was beginning to worry.”

“I was talking to Don Luis on a sat phone, but these buildings were interfering with the transmission. I had to walk out a ways. Uncle Luis is on the way and should be here by 2000. I thought that you and Heinie would want to see the crime site before dark so I rented a four wheel drive SUV for you. I’ll wait here for Don Luis and drive him to the Estancia in the Suburban.”

Kent noticed that as Maria began to talk of arrangements, she regained control of her emotions and wiped her tears away. She was very much her father’s daughter.

“Good job, Maria! Now, do another favor for me while you wait for Don Luis? Four more investigators will fly in tomorrow and they’ll need wheels. So, if you would, return to the car rental desk and reserve two more SUVs, four wheel drive, if possible.”

“Of course, Dear. Will I see you at the Estancia tonight?”

“Yes, we’ll use the Estancia as our operations center and I’ll need to talk to Don Luis about who might be involved with this outrage. Heinie and I will lay out an initial plan as to what must be looked into and who will pursue which leads.”

The four bags were loaded into the rented Range Rover, Rodolfo drove with Jordan in the front passenger seat, Reichmann in the rear. As they started to roll, Heinie reviewed the scene at the airport. He was impressed that Jordan had already organized in his mind a rough plan and that his wife, despite her emotional trauma, had begun to gather assets. His favorable observations however, did little to dispel the discontent eating at Heinie’s guts.

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Eight years of hard work to become the top investigator at Baragan had raised some expectations for Heinrich Karl Reichmann and his future. He had hoped to work his way into management and perhaps someday to become a junior partner as Cesar approached retirement. Jordan's arrival and appointment as the newly established Director of Major Investigations had crushed Heinie's vision of his future at Baragan. He had begun to think about resigning and moving to another major city to open his own operation. Maybe he would do that after they recovered Marti. He probably had enough in savings to do so and he knew some detectives at the Buenos Aeries Police Department who were sick of the politics in and around the Department. His ruminations were suddenly interrupted by Jordan.

"Rodolfo, pull into that grove of trees over on the right. Heinie, I don't know about you, but I feel kind of naked. We have no idea what we are getting into here. Sometimes things develop faster than you're prepared for."

Heinie immediately understood. As the car braked to a stop he climbed out and quickly walked around to the rear door where he was joined by Jordan. Each opened one of their duffle bags and withdrew an M-4, 5.56 mm carbine, a cut down semi-automatic version of the U.S. M-16 rifle with 20 round magazines. They also retrieved their personal weapons. Kent checked his Springfield Armory Professional 45 Cal. 1911 Browning automatic with an extended eight round single stack magazine. He had paid \$2400 for this civilian model of the FBI SWAT weapon, the most thoroughly tested handgun in history. Reichmann press checked his Heckler & Koch USP 40 to assure himself that a round was in the chamber and that it was de-cocked. The USP 40 was also a well proven and reliable .40 Cal. pistol with a ten round magazine. Both men slipped their pistols into

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shoulder holsters under their windbreakers. Now that they were prepared for any contingency, they returned to their positions in the Range Rover, placing the M-4's on the floorboards.

Rodolfo re-entered the exit road from the Benjamin Matienzo Airport Terminal and then turned west onto Avenida Juan Domingo Peron. Rodolfo felt very secure and confident that these two men would bring Marti home. Their almost silent agreement to arm themselves indicated that they had worked together frequently. They obviously shared a sense of caution and the practiced ease with which they checked their weapons projected a high level of professionalism.

Fifteen minutes later they intersected Avenida Circunvalcion, the beltway around San Miguel de Tucuman and headed southwest to AR 38, which took them south toward Famaila. This was Kent's first visit to the Northwest, although he was aware of the local history and economy. San Miguel de Tucuman had been the site of Argentina's declaration of independence from Spain in 1816. Plentiful rain and rich soil enabled the nation to produce bountiful harvests of sugar cane, orchard fruit and exports of beef and minerals.

At the turn of the century, Argentina was the second richest nation in the world. Some industry was developing, but was limited by the unpredictable Argentine economy, debilitating inflation and unstable political situation. As he watched the rich countryside roll by, he could not help but be depressed by similarities and contrasts with the United States. Both nations were blessed with copious amounts of natural resources and hard-working people. However, one was guided by a strong constitution and political tradition, the other was torn by class warfare and lack of direction.

Recent events had not been kind to Tucuman Province. A faltering economy and the presence of four universities combined to create a violent revolutionary stew which in the last three decades had resulted in major support for the ERP, the armed branch of the Workers Revolutionary Party that sought to overthrow the Argentine Government and to establish proletarian rule. The situation finally required a military operation of more than five thousand troops to quell the insurgency in the late 1970's. Some unhappiness and unrest continued to this day.

Jordan contemplated the possibility that remnants of the ERP had kidnapped the daughter of the local big land owner and international capitalist. In the 1970's kidnapping as well as bank robberies was a major source of funds for the attempted revolution.

Jordan looked over at the driver. "Rodolfo, is the ERP still active in the Tucuman area?"

Rodolfo thought about the question for just a moment. "No, Senior Jordan, there're still leftist political organizations, meetings and a few demonstrations, but no violence connected to those activities, that I know of."

"What do you know about the effectiveness of the provincial police?"

"Well, the Tucuman economy has not been good, although it is getting better. Many men are not working, so they turn to stealing. The police do not catch very many because they are busy looking for opportunities to add to their low salaries."

"Do you think the police will cooperate or hinder our investigation?"

Rodolfo paused as he passed a truck load of cattle. "Captain Marin won't care, as long as you don't interfere with his unofficial "business activities" or cause him

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inconvenience or political embarrassment. Lieutenant Cadiz may be helpful if you defer to him. He is earnest and a very proud man. He is uncomfortable with the role and reputation of the police in the community. He takes his job seriously and is more capable than most police officials.”

Estancia Sierra Vista, Costa Rica, 1247 hours

Don Luis had been contacted by a rider and notified of an urgent request that he return to Estancia Sierra Vista immediately. He came close to abusing his mount as he cut over to a ranch road and then put the horse into a full run. He turned his heaving and lathered animal over to a stable hand and ran into the main house to be confronted by his obviously disturbed house overseer, Teresa. She was even more upset when she saw Don Luis turn pale and gasp as he talked to Rodolfo on the phone.

Luis felt like he had been struck by a terrible ailment, suffering a mix of nausea, fear and anger that almost brought him to his knees. Having lost his beautiful, Ulrica to cervical cancer when Martha was only six years of age, he was now faced with losing his only remaining family, a lovely and talented daughter that he loved beyond description. What would he do without his precious Marti? He fought the paralysis of his emotional attack. He had to get control of himself and start to function. He called his pilot and directed him to prep the plane and file a flight plan.

Luis hesitated as his mind began to clear. Of course! He dialed his Director of Security, Hiram Foster, at SCI Holding headquarters in San Jose and informed him of Marti's kidnapping. Foster was a former sergeant of the British Special Air Service 22<sup>nd</sup> Regiment, the highly respected elite

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commando unit, and had also several years of experience working for an executive protection service.

Hiram paused for a moment. “Don Luis, we must be cautious; you may be the actual target. They may have seized Marti just to maneuver you to a certain place within a particular time frame. I’ll direct the security shift supervisor to dispatch a driver and three armed men to accompany you to the airport and on to Tucuman. I’ll meet you at the plane with additional weapons.”

Don Luis rushed to his bedroom suite to throw together what he would need, thinking to himself, as he charged up the stairs, that hiring a man like Foster was one of his better decisions. He needed not only Foster’s experience and skills, but also his detached coolness at a time when his own judgment was deeply affected by his emotional state.

The Astra business jet climbed rapidly to its cruising altitude of eleven thousand meters after refueling at Lima, Peru. Although Don Luis, in the right seat, was not a licensed pilot, he had enough stick time to control the aircraft if he had to, and he handled the radio for the pilot, Major Fabio Gaitán, Argentine Air Force, retired. Luis was very pleased with his recent purchase of the twin engine jet from Gulfstream, a new manufacturer located outside of Savannah, Georgia. The aircraft was designed by an Israeli company and licensed to Gulfstream.

Don Luis waited until the Astra was well over the Andes Mountains before he attempted to contact Cesar Baragan in Buenos Aires on the radio telephone. His effusive thanks for Cesar responding so quickly were waved off by Cesar who declared that this outrage was not a matter of business. Marti was his godchild and Luis his best friend. This was a personal



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matter. Baragan would have liked to come to Tucuman, but he felt he could do more by coordinating with the federal law enforcement agencies at the capitol. Cesar had cultivated personal relationships within the Ministry of Justice, Security and Human Rights which oversaw the Secretariat for Domestic Security (SSI) and the Argentine Federal Police (equivalent to the FBI). Federal agencies had a limited presence in Tucuman. Therefore, as Baragan's investigators developed leads that would best be pursued through the federal databases, Cesar would pass the information to those agencies. In previous investigations, Cesar had been generous with certain information that he uncovered and passed on to the Feds that aided their efforts to track organized crime in Argentina. To him, such generosity was an investment that could now pay off. Cesar signed off with, "My heart goes out to you, my friend. Be assured that I will move heaven and earth to find our Marti!"

Luis unbuckled, climbed out of the co-pilot's seat and entered the passenger cabin. Foster and three very fit looking young men were dozing in the comfortable club chairs of the six passenger luxury compartment. He woke them and briefed them into the situation. The Estancia Famaila Tucuman would be the headquarters for the hunt. His Costa Rican security team would join six armed men from the Estancia to secure the Estancia and to escort Don Luis and others as required. Hiram Foster would supervise the security force. When the site where Marti was being held was located, the team would also assist in recovering her. That would most likely involve a violent forced entry or assault. Don Luis looked intensely at each man and continued in a soft baritone.

"Your present contracts are for protective services only. If you wish not to participate in an offensive armed confrontation, let Señor Foster know by tomorrow at noon.

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There will be a substantial bonus for those who elect to join the effort. The size of the bonus will be commensurate with the difficulty of the recovery. The life insurance provided by my company does not cover such activities. I'm personally insuring all team members for \$500,000 US. Wounded members will receive \$50,000 for ambulatory wounds and \$100,000 for non-ambulatory wounds. I'll pay for all medical expenses. If you need further clarification, bring your questions to Señor Foster. I sincerely thank you for your help in this most difficult time."

Don Luis once again looked into the eyes of each man, nodded, then turned and re-entered the flight deck.

Hiram Foster let his steady gaze travel over each man. "I've never worked for a more honest and forthright employer. He appreciates the demanding service we provide. His word is gold, but I expect he'll have an attorney in San Jose draw up an additional contract and fax it to Famaila. Think it over. If you join us, I expect each one of you to do your duty without hesitation. Tomorrow, after a familiarization tour of the Estancia, we'll begin training for forced entry techniques. If you have any questions or suggestions, bring them to me, the sooner the better."

Rodolfo turned right off of AR 38 onto a narrow secondary road and after twelve kilometers, he turned right again into a rough, rutted track.

"This is the track that the matóns (thugs) used to escape. It becomes more difficult as it goes north and northwest toward the estancia. The road we just left goes nowhere, so they had to go back out to AR 38. I have no way to know if they then went north or south from there."

Rodolfo continued for about two kilometers passing the entrance of another track that went westward. "This track

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bends around to the north and back to the Estancia. They grabbed Señorita Martha about two hundred meters north of here.”

Rodolfo braked the Range Rover to a stop. As they left the truck and started walking up the track, Kent and Heinie carried their M-4's at the ready and Rodolfo pulled his Berretta from a belt holster. Kent noticed that Heinie took to the left side of the track and separated from Kent about seven meters. Okay, immediate tactical separation so that one burst would not take both of us down! I like the way this guy operates in the bush. Kent drifted right to the bordering underbrush. Rodolfo out in front by several meters was also on the right.

Jordan and Reichmann studied the tire tracks as they approached the snatch point. Although several horses had stirred up the dirt around the tire tracks, Kent was able to make out a footprint entering the bushes to the right. Forcing his way through thick underbrush bordering the track, he cast left and right until he found a scuff mark in the layer of dead vegetation and twigs covering the ground. As he continued to the east, and as the lower vegetation thinned he could look ahead and make out a trail of additional minor disturbances. Heinie and Rodolfo followed him as the tracks bore almost due east and down a slope to a foot path beside a small stream. Motorbike tire tracks on the path were fairly clear and Rodolfo said that the path ended at the secondary road to the south.

At the junction of the path with the road, they discovered fresh vehicle tire tracks in the soft dirt of the wide shoulder of the road and surmised that a pickup truck or van had been used to haul the bike and rider away.

The three men retraced their route back to the snatch point and then proceeded further up the track to the blocking tree to

examine the stump. Heinie and Kent assimilated the obvious evidence for a few moments.

Heinie queried Rodolfo, “Are these tracks and trails used very much? Wouldn’t someone hear the chainsaw and discover these preparations?”

Rodolfo looked at the stump. “The undercut and the back-cut are just the right depth and are on the same plane. Whoever did this was an experienced logger. The saw was sharp. Look at the shavings, they are long. But there is something very peculiar about these shavings.” He knelt down, picked up some shavings and examined them closely. “These are very narrow, not so wide. Most chainsaws make fatter shavings.” He paused for a few moments, deep in thought. “Maybe this explains why no one heard the saw. If a hand saw were used, it would not make much noise. It would have to be a two man crosscut saw like was used before we had chainsaws.”

Kent nodded his head in agreement. “So, two men to set up the tree and several to make the snatch. Let’s look around. Rodolfo, what do you think panicked Marti’s horse?”

“I don’t know, Señor Jordan. I was around the bend, behind the ladies. I usually am back about twenty meters to give them some privacy. I do recall an odd sound just before I heard Senorita Martha scream and her horse make a high pitched squeal. It was an almost mechanical bang.”

Heinie had started to walk through the brush paralleling the track. “Look here, Kent. Somebody did some cutting, made it easier to get through.” He continued with the other two following him. After some distance, Heinie stopped and exclaimed, “Ach, a firing lane!”

Kent came up behind Heinie. The rough cut passage had terminated and a shoulder high narrow tunnel cut through the undergrowth pointed at an angle back up the trail. “Rodolfo,

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were the ladies riding side by side, and who was on the left side?”

“Yes, side by side and Senorita Martha was on the left.”

“Did they always ride with Marti on the left?”

“No, Señor, sometimes after going around bad places in the track, they would be reversed.”

Kent walked back down the cut passage, stopped and called to the others, “Look here, plan ‘B’, in case he didn’t have the shot over there.” The others joined him to check out the firing lane in the other direction. “The shooter was in luck; he didn’t have to wait to take the shot from the rear to hit Marti’s horse. Maybe he used a small caliber suppressed rifle with low velocity sub-sonic ammo. Was the horse wounded?”

“A small gouge in the left flank, Señor Jordan.”

“It is possible that he used an air rifle to sting the horse.” Heinie added.

“Very possible, Heinie. Then his partner waited for the panicked horse to pass and cut the restraining rope and let the blocking tree fall across the track, separating Marti from Maria and Rodolfo. I think an examination of her mount’s wound will prove that.”

The investigators returned to the tree stump. Heinie looked at Kent. “Where did these two go after the tree went down?”

“Good question.” Jordan circled the tree area, studying the ground. On the east side, he discovered the trail. It was easy to follow. The length of the stride and the depth of the impressions told him that the man was running hard. “Pardon the pun, but this guy was really making tracks.”

Heinie grunted. “It appears to be only one man. Would you like to bet that if we follow these tracks that they will go

down to the footpath and there we will find motorbike tire tracks?”

Heinie was right. Kent observed. “Well three guys can’t ride one motor bike; we are looking for two men, a motor bike and a pickup truck or van, because the snatch van couldn’t wait to pick up the shooter.” He studied the area for a long moment, envisioning the operation. “One of the men was at the snatch site. Why didn’t he leave with the snatch party? Were he and the shooter partners? Hired contractors? Did he take the payoff and then join his buddy down on the footpath? If so, then maybe two vehicles were involved. The partners may have been hired solely for their logging skills. It’s possible then that the kidnappers may not have been locals.”

“Rodolfo, I want you to look down the track and think hard about what you saw as the van was turning and going out of sight. Was there anything about the van that could help us identify it?”

Rodolfo closed his eyes and squinted as he concentrated. After a long moment, he nodded his head and turned to Kent. “There was a shadow, maybe a large dent on the front passenger side door.”

The investigation team returned to the Range Rover at the secondary road, drove onto AR 38 and headed north. Eight kilometers north of the secondary road, Rodolfo swung left into a well maintained gravel road that wound through rolling hills toward a low ridge that ran from the northwest to southeast. The terrain was rich grassland dotted with stands of Salta Cedar.

Fifteen kilometers from AR 38, the Range Rover skirted the south side of a hill and descended to a picturesque valley that must have been several kilometers across. A large, fast flowing stream snaked down the valley from the northwest.

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On the far side of the stream a number of buildings were grouped on a slight rise. The SUV passed through a gate in a three strand barbed wire fence, rattled over a cattle barrier sunk into the ground and headed down toward the buildings. The road crossed a sturdy steel bridge over the stream, passed a roundabout that circled in front of the large main house and continued around to a two story garage in back. The six car garage connected to the house via a covered breezeway. There appeared to be living quarters over the garage.

The ground floor of the large main house was constructed of stone and timbers and had been built many decades ago, although it showed no appreciable wear. Stone and cedar could survive the test of time for centuries. The smaller second story had been built of massive cedar timbers and a goodly number of large windows offered views of the surrounding valley. The entire house was rimmed with wide covered stone verandas elevated three feet above the ground with wide stairs on each side providing access to the house.

After dropping his gear in an upstairs bedroom, Kent was escorted to the stables by Rodolfo to inspect the wounded mare. The projectile had entered the flank of the animal at an angle, as he had expected and was evident as a small lump under the surface of the hide. Jordan had very little experience in treating large animals and deferred to Rodolfo for a means to extract the slug without being kicked to death. Rodolfo disappeared into the stables office and returned with a large hypodermic needle. They had to wait about twenty minutes for the anesthetic to become effective.

As they waited, Rodolfo paced, deep in thought and obviously unsettled. "Señor Jordan, I-----."

"Look Rodolfo, I am just a working guy like you. I'd be grateful if you would address me by my given name. Actually

my given name is Robert, but people have a tendency to use, 'Bob', which I can't stand. I prefer, 'Kent'."

Rodolfo nodded and locked eyes with Kent. "Kent, you seem to have much experience with crime and violent criminals. I have failed Don Luis and I have struggled with what I might have done to protect Señorita Martha. If I'd been riding closer to the ladies, I might've stopped them. Do you think so?"

Kent paused briefly, considering Rodolfo's question. "I'm pretty sure, Rodolfo, had that been the case, those people would've had to kill you and Maria. You and Maria survived and have given us valuable information. If you had died, we would have very little information to develop and pursue. I understand your anguish, but you have to understand that Heinie and I need your continued assistance. So, please clear your mind of such guilt."

Rodolfo stared at Kent for a long moment and then exhaled, his shoulders relaxed and his eyes moistened. "Thank you, Kent. I will do all that I can to bring her back. Even if I die doing it!"

Kent shook his head and in a determined but quiet voice stated, "Someone's going to die, Rodolfo; it won't be you. Bet on it!"

Rodolfo looked into Kent's hard eyes and felt a chill. It occurred to him that the statement was not bluster. This man was very capable of killing, when needed.

Don Luis' study and library was spacious and elegant, but not to the point of being luxurious. While there were no bookcases, built-in wet-bar or credenza, one could admire rich dark wood paneling and paintings of gauchos, horses and landscapes of mountainous northwest Argentina. Luis elected not to sit behind his large desk in the role of a wealthy,



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powerful international tycoon that he was. He sat in a comfortable overstuffed leather armchair facing Jordan, Reichmann and Foster, similarly ensconced. All present had been served double shots of twenty-four year old single malt scotch in heavy cut crystal glasses. Luis was impressed with the hard to define similarity of the three men who presented a scale of size, large, medium and small. Although they also spanned an age range of early, middle and late forties, they all projected unusual physical fitness, competence and a hardness that was encouraging. Don Luis asked Kent Jordan, as the evident leader, to relate what had been discovered, so far.

Kent laid out their findings and conclusions. He then added, "I feel that we're fortunate that Rodolfo was back far enough to enable the perpetrators to separate him from the women. If that had not been so, they would've had to kill Rodolfo and Maria as witnesses who could've provided too much information about them."

Don Luis took a sip of his scotch and considered that observation. "Do you really think they're that ruthless?" Although he appeared to be calm and very much in control of his emotions, inside he was roiling and on the verge of panic. Kent's evaluation of the criminals didn't help. My God, what will these animals be capable of in their treatment of Marti?

Kent noticed Don Luis' eyes widen slightly and his face turn pale and realized what his last statement had done to Luis. He immediately explained and hoped that he could get the man thinking again and reduce his fears. "This operation was well planned, organized and executed professionally. The person or persons behind this crime have considerable assets. Money and expertise were evident in abundance. I know you've probably, at times, caused business competitors major damage as your company has grown. Do you have any idea if

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one of them is sufficiently bitter to do this to you? At any time, did competitive friction lead to physical damage and or injury of a competitor or his employees?"

Don Luis shook his head negatively. "Not that I am aware of. I gave some thought to that possibility while we were in the air." Don Luis hesitated for a moment and then asked, "What do you plan to do tomorrow?"

"Heinie, Rodolfo and I'll talk to the police about businesses that might have sold an air rifle and a two man crosscut saw. Could you provide guides for two investigation teams that will arrive mid-day? We will call here with the names and addresses of businesses for them to check out. They'll have rental vehicles. Heinie and I'll also ask the police for help in determining local criminal patterns, behavior and hangouts."

Tucuman Provincial Police Headquarters, San Miguel de Tucuman, Wednesday, 0935 hours, Day Two

An appropriate amount of ego stroking and deferment to Lt. Cadiz's exalted position produced the needed cooperation. Cadiz would check with his patrol sergeants and promised to have most of the information on the businesses by middle afternoon. Fifteen minutes of further discussion gave the investigators a feel for crime in the area and the names and locations of several watering holes that catered to rougher elements of the population.

Kent, Heinie and Rodolfo ate an early and leisurely lunch at a nearby sidewalk café and then checked on two bars to get a feel for the clientele. They were back at police headquarters by 1:30. Lt. Cadiz was as good as his word, providing the names and addresses of five businesses that sold air rifles and three that sold and serviced logging equipment. Kent called

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the Estancia and talked to the just arrived senior investigator. He passed the information to him, emphasizing the critical need for speed. He informed the man that he and Heinie would check two of the air rifle stores in the north part of San Miguel. The two other teams would cover the rest. Kent wanted descriptions of possible suspects called into police headquarters by evening. Then the trio would go hunting.

The silence inside the Range Rover, as it sped south on AR 38, was a reflection of fatigue, disappointment and desperation. It was approaching 2300 hours (11:00 PM). The day had been long and stressful and they had turned up nothing regarding the hypothetical two local tree cutters. Interviews with three employees or owners of businesses had produced a composite description of the two culprits. One was short and rather stocky, the other of medium height and build. The taller man had dark hair long enough to cover his ears and his collar. The shorter one wore his hair short and showed the beginning of a receding hairline.

The hunters had executed their planned entrapment scheme in four different bars, to no avail. Each of them was very aware of the ticking clock and imagined the terror the hostage must be experiencing. However, pursuit of their only lead was going to require patience and determination. The four other investigators would patronize the watering holes each evening until the described partners showed up. Kent and company were returning to the Estancia to get some much needed sleep and to try to come up with another approach. Jordan needed to discuss what they had learned so far with Don Luis and with Cesar by phone.

La Reduccion was a small town north of Famaila, which at that time of night showed few lights. There was one exception: an old cantina that displayed a well-lighted sign,

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“La Gato Negra.” As the Range Rover passed the brightly lighted establishment, Kent asked Rodolfo to stop. “What kind of joint is the Black Cat, Rodolfo?”

“I have not been in there for several years, Kent. I think that most of the customers are laborers and some who may not be employed, who take what they can get, if you know what I mean.”

“Shit, I haven’t been thinking straight! I assumed that our boys were hanging out in an urban setting, because that’s been my experience, working in cities. The police concentrate on the greatest gathering of criminals, the city, and that’s what the police gave us when we asked about behaviors, patterns and hangouts. We’re looking for two loggers who committed a crime in the area they know and applied skills that one doesn’t need in a city! Right here!”

Heinie snorted in disgust. “You’re right, Kent. We’ve been in the cities too long. We have to free up our thinking. Rodolfo, are there any other bars in this area?”

“There’re several in Famaila, but they’re higher class places that cater to businessmen, landowners and officials. It’s the district seat of government.”

“Well, let’s see what we find in here. Turn around. We’ll gear up and then, Rodolfo you drive into the parking lot. We’ll walk from here and be in later.”

Miguel, the bartender noted the entry of a tall middle aged man with graying but well-trimmed hair. Although the man was dressed better than most of his customers, the hands that accepted the bottled beer were the hands of a working man. Miguel introduced himself and expected the man to respond; which he did. Rodolfo Morantes did not ring any bells. Miguel was part owner and manager of the “Black Cat”. He was also a dealer, a dealer in information. He filed the name

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in the back of his mind and went down the bar to serve a customer.

Ten minutes later, two unusual men entered the cantina. They were either Norte Americanos or Europeans and one of them had a small camera hanging from his shoulder. Probably American tourists; Miguel did not see many in his establishment.

As Miguel came back down the bar, Rodolfo asked him if he knew of a pair of loggers that may have recently been hired to do a confidential job. Miguel looked at Rodolfo as if he was thinking about it; then shook his head and walked away. Rodolfo finished his beer, walked to the back of the bar and entered the restroom. Miguel immediately skirted the end of the bar and quickly made his way to a table where two men were about to finish a pitcher of draft beer. He bent over close to them and spoke in a low voice, straightened up and asked if he could get them another. They declined and Miguel turned about and proceeded back to the far end of the bar, entered a door to the storeroom and shut the door behind him. The business of being an information broker required an unusual level of discretion. He did not want to be a witness to whatever was going to happen.

Julio muttered an oath and told Hector to go out to the parking lot, find any vehicle that was not part of the normal collection of old cars and trucks and to wait for the man to come out. Julio would follow the curious one out and they would have him trapped between them.

Kent and Heinie, who had surveyed the crowd when they entered the bar, recognized Julio and Hector as their possible quarry and kept watch with peripheral vision and unfocused glances so as not to call attention to their interest. They witnessed the bartender's maneuver and Kent muttered, "Bingo!"

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As the short stocky one pushed back his chair and started to walk to the door, Kent felt his heart jump and a rush of adrenalin. "Oh Christ! Damn, this is not good!"

Heinie nodded his head in agreement, "Ja, sheise! Rodolfo will have to deal with that one by himself."

Their planning had assumed that both targets would follow Rodolfo out to the parking lot and that Rodolfo would turn and distract the pair as Kent and Heinie came up behind them.

Keeping his face and eyes straight forward, totally unaware that the plan had been blown, Rodolfo crossed the bar room to the open front door. As he casually walked to the Range Rover, he heard footsteps crunching in the gravel behind him and felt a surge of excitement. The plan was working! A figure suddenly stepped out from between a small rusting flatbed truck and a beat up old Toyota and confronted him. At the same time, he heard the footsteps behind him quicken. Rodolfo put his back against the bed of the flatbed truck so that one of them could not get behind him. As the two closed on him he caught the glint of metal in the right hand of the one on his left. His heart beating like a trip hammer gone mad, Rodolfo had a picture flash across his mind of lying on the ground with his entrails in his hands! He was so focused on his assailants that he didn't see or hear the arrival of help.

Julio and Hector also were experiencing the tunnel vision brought on by mortal combat and were unaware of the destruction bearing down on them. Hector caught movement out of the corner of his eye and started to turn back to his right to face the new threat.

Kent and Heinie sprinted to the beleaguered Rodolfo. Kent, on the right, reached past Julio and delivered a vicious chop to his right forearm, numbing it and causing the knife to

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fall to the gravel. He grabbed the back of Julio's collar and quickly pulled backward and downward, sharply bringing his left knee up into Julio's left kidney causing paralyzing pain and finished him off with a well-placed chop to the right side of his neck.

Heinie didn't slow his rush at all. He simply drove right through Hector like a truck running over a child. As Hector was slammed to the ground with Heinie on top of him, his head whipped back and smacked into the gravel, putting him out.

Julio was the first to regain consciousness. He had been vaguely aware of being carried from a vehicle, his hands restrained behind his back and a terrible pain in his head and neck. When he was fully awake, he found himself sitting on a concrete floor, his back to a wall in what appeared to be an abandoned warehouse. He heard a moan and discovered Hector lying beside him. There was movement to his front followed by the splashing of water. Someone intoned, "Come on, asshole, time to wake up!"

A few minutes later, Hector was sitting up beside him. A shadowy figure looked down at them. "Are we all back with the living, now? I want an answer. I want to know that you understand what I'm saying and that you know what's going on here. Do you?"

Julio could feel a rapidly rising dread. The Colombians had come back and found that their orders had been ignored. He and Hector were about to suffer a painful death. He could barely speak through his fear as he nodded.

"And you there, son of a whore, are you with us?"

Hector croaked out an affirmative and Julio knew that he too was terrified.

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“Let me introduce myself and my partner. A brief resume is in order. We are not police and are not constrained by regulations that prevent us from determining the truth. My friend and I have both served in special military units and have several years of experience with North African Arab counterinsurgency units. We are very familiar with effective interrogation techniques. We can do this one of two ways. It’s your choice. First choice; you tell us what you know and we turn you over to the provincial police. You do several years in prison and then are released. Second choice; we force you to tell us what you know in a very painful manner. Then, because you’ll be a terrible bloody mess, we’ll have to kill you so that you can’t testify against us for brutalizing you.”

There was a moment of silence that was disturbing. What was happening? Then the cold unemotional voice again. “Now, a light please.”

A flashlight beam was directed to two hands; one held Julio’s razor sharp knife, the other a pair of large needle nose pliers. “This is how we are going to do this. We’re going to work on---- let’s see, his ID says his name is Hector, first. But I want you, Julio, to fully appreciate what Hector is going through. There will be no shutting your eyes, Julio, because you won’t have any eyelids.” The man pushed the knife and pliers toward Julio and pantomimed trapping something with pliers and slicing it with the knife. There was no mistaking the intention, he would grab Julio’s eyelids with the pliers, pull them out from his eyes and slice them off.

Julio heard a long terror stricken wail from Hector. His head spun and he thought he was going to faint. His gorge rose and he gagged. Beer and bile cascaded down his shirt.

“Well, I see I have your attention. Time to make your choice. I must caution you, though. If you tell a lie, we automatically revert to choice number two. You should know



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that we already know much of what you did. We also have many years of experience in interrogation and detection of lies. Be very careful what you decide to say. Julio, choice one or two?”

“*¡Maria, Madre de Dios! ¡El primera, Por favor, el primero!*” (“Mary! Mother of God! One, please, one!”)

“Hector?”

“*¡Dios mío, El primero, el primero!*” (“My God, one! one!”)

“Julio, who dropped the tree, you or Hector?”

Although Julio was in a panic to answer, he also realized that these animals were not sent by the Colombians. But these were the devils he had to deal with now. He had no doubt the man meant what he said he would do. “I shot the horse and cut the rope. Hector helped the Colombians grab the girl and collected the second payment. We left on a motorbike.”

Twenty minutes later, Kent knew everything that Julio and Hector knew.

An hour after contacting the provincial police, two jeeps with light racks drove up. Kent presented the sergeant with a hastily written brief of the highlights of what they had learned and retrieved the cuffs that he and Heinie had used on the less than dynamic duo. By then the pair had somewhat recovered and were trying to put up a façade of insolence and bravado. Kent reached out with both hands and gathered a handful of shirt front on each of them. As he glowered at them, his face less than a foot away, he commented to the Sergeant, “If these two give you any problems, call me and I will return to adjust their attitudes!” Julio and Hector could not hold his cold penetrating stare; both looked down and started to tremble.

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On the way back to the Black Cat, Rodolfo was quiet and deep into his own thoughts. Would Jordan really have tortured the two matóns if they had not talked? He was thankful that he did not have to find out. Rodolfo was not a stranger to violence. He had served in the army and experienced firefights with revolutionary elements and had had his share of using his fists to convince troublesome gauchos that they should obey his directions. However, he had never experienced anything like what he had just witnessed. Jordan's threat had been so believable, that it was disturbing. Kent and Heinie were very hard men.

Miguel had just locked up when he was approached in the parking lot by the three men he had seen earlier. They blocked the path to his car. Miguel was past his prime, very overweight, balding and sported a large handlebar mustache. He had no illusions concerning his ability to escape or to resist their demands for information about the Colombians who had hired Julio and Hector. He readily gave them a description of the mean, scar faced man and related the man's questions concerning airfields north of Famaila. Miguel then requested that they not tell anyone of his role in assisting the Colombians. He swore he had no idea what their intentions had been and would not have become involved if he had known. Heinie, in return warned Miguel not to talk to anyone about the whole affair.

Dawn was only two hours off when the weary trio trudged up the stairs of the main house of the estancia. Maria had retired shortly after midnight and Don Luis was dozing in his leather recliner. Luis woke the cook and asked her to prepare sandwiches for the three hunters. Kent gave Don Luis a briefing on their activities and the information they had

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extracted from the two culprits and the bartender. As Kent entered the office to type up a detailed report to be faxed to Cesar Baragan, he heard Don Luis ask Rodolfo if he thought the information was reliable.

Estancia Famaila, Thursday, 1053 hours, Day Three

When Kent awoke, Maria's side of the bed was empty. He looked at the alarm clock and was surprised that it was close to 11:00 AM. He felt like he had just put his head down on the pillow a few minutes before. With a tired sigh and a groan, he rolled out of bed, showered and shaved, put on his last set of clean trousers and polo shirt and went down stairs to the small informal dining area just off of the kitchen. Heinie and Rodolfo were finishing a breakfast of ham, eggs, potatoes and toast. As Kent sat down, Heinie handed him a fax from Cesar.

Kent and Heinie,

Good work! My friends at the Argentine Federal Police (AFP) are checking all private aircraft arrivals from Colombia within 500 kilometers of Famaila. Per your analysis indicating six bad guys and one hostage, they are concentrating on 8 passenger plus twin engine aircraft arrivals up to 24 hours prior to the taking. I agree that the query as to airfields to the north was probably an attempt at misdirection. When I have the data, I will direct your other search teams plus one additional which is in transit. This will free you to check out the few airfields to the south. I should have any hits for you by early this afternoon. Standby and get some rest.

Cesar

*Dennis M. Atkinson*

Kent finished a large, tasty breakfast and was sipping an excellent cup of Tucuman roast coffee. Heinie and Rodolfo were working with Hiram Foster to coordinate forced entry drills with the combined security personnel. All of the security men had accepted Don Luis' generous offer of compensation and insurance. Most of them probably would have signed on without the added inducements. They worshipped the lovely Señorita Martha who had always had a kind word for them and had taken personal interest in their wellbeing. After the drills, Foster was rotating them through some shooting schemes and marksmanship practice. Forced entry into a hostage situation was the most challenging of shooting scenarios and required a high level of practiced coordination and accurate shooting skills.

Don Luis entered the dining area and poured himself a cup of coffee from the large carafe sitting on the side board. As he sat down at the table, he gave Kent a rather searching look. "I talked to Rodolfo last night about how you questioned the two locals. Pardon me, I don't mean to imply any criticism, but I'm curious regarding the usefulness of the technique." He took a sip of coffee and shifted in his chair, showing some hesitation as to what he was about to say. "I recently read an article that examined forceful interrogation techniques employed by the Israelis. The writer was a federal prosecutor from the federal district in New York and claimed that information derived from physical duress is not reliable. A subject overcome by fear or pain will say anything he thinks the interrogator wants to know, regardless if he knows anything about the situation. He will say anything to make the pain stop. Can we trust that the information you got is good information?"

Kent looked at Luis and noted the pronounced circles under his eyes and his haunted, haggard appearance. It was

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clear that the Don was not sleeping well. It was the measure of the man that he could still think about such matters and to actually question the proceedings. Don Luis must have great inner strength and self-discipline.

Jordan studied his coffee cup and thought for a moment. “This is a very interesting question that will become more controversial as civilized nations try to grapple with the increasing problem of terrorism. It might be helpful if I share an experience I suffered through in college. I had occasion to participate in a very spirited discussion of this topic at the University of Pennsylvania in a class on questioning suspects. The professor was a former FBI agent and retired prosecutor. Most of the students in the class had no experience in the field of law enforcement or counter-terror operations. There were a half a dozen serving police officers and one former military intelligence type. The instructor emphasized the illegality of coercive interrogation and the inadmissibility of evidence or confessions obtained from such for trials under U.S. law.”

“The professor then queried the class about interrogations outside of U.S. jurisdiction. Many of the students in the class were concerned about the inhumanness of rough treatment of a subject, and noted, of course, that Americans are the good guys and should not employ harsh methods. The military intelligence student made the point that counter-terror operations outside of the U.S. were not only governed by U.S. law but also came under international law which prohibits causing ‘severe’ pain and suffering.”

Luis nodded his head as he followed Kent’s tale. Kent continued, “A young woman brought up the matter of the efficacy of forceful interrogation in much the same manner as in the article you read. As the end of the class period approached, the professor made the observation that several

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members of the class probably had some actual experience in the topic, but were not contributing to the discussion. He called on me for comment. I knew that I was about to step in deep excrement, but just thought, oh well, somebody should expose these people to the real world.”

“So, I then pointed out, ‘Police questioning seeks lawful information for the conviction of a criminal suspect in a court of law concerning alleged acts already committed by the accused, emphasis on acts already committed. Conversely, questioning of terrorist suspects seeks information concerning individuals, organizations, planned terrorist operations and terror targets in order to prevent horrific mass casualties. Criminal justice involves convicting and punishing for past acts and counter-terror involves preventing outrageous acts.’ At that point I couldn’t stop myself.”

‘Until several decades ago, international law recognized that irregular forces that did not display uniforms or obvious identifying insignia, and were not associated with a recognized and responsible political entity, and were not controlled by officers to be held accountable for the acts of the members, were not to be accorded the protection of international law!’ “I then opined, ‘Ironically, during the same period that international law was extending more protections to such stateless terrorists, there seemed to be more and more acts of terror.’

‘Conducting counter-terror operations to stop these acts is difficult because the terrorists hide in the population and move frequently and quickly, thereby making information obtained very perishable. Satellite imagery is of little assistance and monitoring communications is useless if intelligence agents are required to obtain warrants before listening to terrorist communications. Human Intelligence (HUMINT) activities are the only really effective means of

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collecting good information in a timely manner. HUMINT includes penetration of terrorist cells with spies, which is almost impossible, and interrogation of prisoners.’

“I then had the temerity to point out, ‘When questioning a terrorist, one does not have the luxury of taking time to convert the seventh century subject to twentieth century civilized thinking and persuading him to tell all. In preventing mass murder about to occur, one has to have the information, now!’

“I also shared with the class. ‘No professional interrogator would coerce a subject for information about which the questioner was not knowledgeable to some degree. As with a polygraph, the interrogator uses test questions (questions to which the interrogator knows the answers) to evaluate the subject’s veracity. When the interrogator finds the subject is lying, he applies some force and threatens an increasing level of coercion. This conditions the subject to telling the truth.’

‘It is important that the terrorist have no knowledge of the limits under which the interrogator is operating. His imagination starts to go wild. Creating such a maximum state of anxiety induces the subject to answer questions truthfully. Under these conditions the interrogator can extract timely information and save lives. Yes, forceful interrogation is effective if done right. If it is done right, most subjects become cooperative and do not suffer injury or lasting psychological damage. Regarding those people who are more concerned with the civil rights of a terrorist than they are with protecting innocents from mass murder, they are usually opining from positions of relative safety.’

“When I finished, there was dead silence in the classroom. The professor’s mouth was partially open and he was staring at me as if I was a new and terrible species of life. Several students looked at me as they would, had they just

*Dennis M. Atkinson*

stepped in dog shit. The “C” I was awarded for that course dropped my grade average out of the honors category.” Jordan paused and sighed. “I apologize for going on at such length. I guess I just had to get that out of my system! Hopefully, relating this incident has helped you to understand what is going on. The information we extracted from those two was corroborated by the bartender and Reichmann and I feel we are on the right track.”

Don Luis gave Jordan a long look. “It appears your experience actually dealing with terrorists and intelligence has created a pragmatism that is difficult to criticize in light of the threats. Are the views of people like your professor changing as U.S. forces are increasingly engaged by the terrorist enemy?”

Jordan frowned and shook his head. “On the contrary, it seems that their advocacy of the less than effective soft approach is building.”

“That is ridiculous! Why?”

“Don Luis, I’m a rather unsophisticated operational kind of guy. I don’t have sufficient knowledge of the history of the development of intellectual thought and idealism in my country to understand why there is such momentum to this way of thinking in the face of a growing and probably catastrophic threat. Maybe it’s a function of the unreality of observing the deadly conflict from a position of relative safety; if one is not directly exposed to the gore of the victims and grief of the survivors, one can be happy with being a superior ‘good’ person. But, in the end, I just can’t figure it out! But, I do know that the cost of tying both hands behind our backs is huge! I think that someday my country will suffer a catastrophic attack that will kill thousands of innocents. Perhaps the aftershock of such an assault will



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change this attitude and enable our national security agencies to operate more effectively.”

Don Luis slowly shook his head, gave a large sigh and declared, “Thank God, we don’t have to try to find and recover Martha under the legal conditions that exist in your country. The authorities would have taken many days or weeks to obtain the information that you gained last night. It is unthinkable what could be done to Marti during that time.”

Jordan joined the last forced entry drill in order to familiarize himself with the particular tactics, commands and hand signals to be employed. Then, taking advantage of a short break on the firing line, he donned his ear protectors and fired one hundred rounds at standard bull’s eye targets at fifteen meters. After shooting out the center of two targets, he went forward to put up a silhouette target. He turned to walk back to the firing line and realized the entire security group was gathered to watch him.

He paused five meters from the firing line, shrugged his shoulders, spun about into a combat crouch as he drew the Springfield and immediately commenced a double tap drill. Firing two shot bursts, one to the torso, one to the head, one to the torso, one to the head, Jordan emptied the eight round magazine in less than four seconds. The torso group was smaller than fist size and the head group was only slightly larger.

“I’ve heard that you were good, but that was impressive,” Heinie exclaimed as they were walking to the equipment shed to clean their weapons.

“It takes a lot of practice and I know a couple of special operators who are much better than I.”

“That, I would like to see.” Reichmann paused a moment and then asked, “Shouldn’t we hear from Cesar about now?”

*Dennis M. Atkinson*

Kent nodded. "He should have what we need, by now."

"If you trust me to do so, I'll clean your pistol and you can go to the office and call him."

Kent hesitated for a few seconds. He didn't like anyone else handling his piece. But on the other hand, Heinie was his partner. Heinie covered his back and he certainly was a pro. He was a bit uncomfortable that Heinie noticed his hesitation. "We do need to get moving on checking the airfields. I appreciate your taking care of that. I would like to leave within an hour. Thanks, Heinie." Kent was actually relieved. It seemed that the strained relationship was easing. Whatever was Heinie's problem, it seemed to be gone.

Kent held his wife close and stroked her back as they discussed the next step of the hunt for the kidnapers. After he had completed his call to Cesar, he found Maria in their bedroom. Maria stepped back away from him and looked up into his eyes. What came next should not have surprised him for he knew she was not a weak person. In fact, one of her traits that he loved so much was her spunk. Her brow was slightly furrowed, her eyes were full of concern and something he could not quite decipher.

"When you find those bastards, please don't bring them to the police. They're probably communist radicals who would love the opportunity to spout their hateful class warfare crap during a high profile trial. Just kill them, all of them!" With that, she collapsed back into his embrace, trembling and sobbing softly. Again, she looked up at him. "But be careful, my husband and father of my child, I need you, we need you!"

Jordan held her tightly and kissed her tenderly. "I'll be back, and with Marti, I promise!"

### *Galahad Dawning*

The three investigators checked out a small airfield twenty minutes south of Famaila and Jordan determined that the field was not capable of accepting a twin engine aircraft. Smaller airfields did not record flights and were not on the list of potential fields provided by the federal database. Most did not even have a manned control tower. Kent considered the possibility of covert operators using smaller fields and shared his analysis with Heinie and Rodolfo. “I don’t think they would use a marginal field. A twin would be unusual and light traffic at a field would call undue attention to a twin engine aircraft and its crew and passengers. I’d like to forget these smaller fields and go straight to Catamarca. What do you think?”

Heinie responded, “You’re the pilot here. It makes sense to me. Rodolfo, do you see anything we aren’t covering here?”

Rodolfo was pleased that the two veteran investigators referred to him in making a decision. “Catamarca is a busy airport and a twin engine aircraft wouldn’t be unusual. I think Kent is right.”

Darkness was descending and Rodolfo assured them that they could probably find hotel rooms in Aguilares, another twenty some minutes to the south.

### Catamarca, Friday, 0740 hours, Day Four

The next morning the three man team ate a quick breakfast in the café just off the lobby of the hotel, checked out and headed south on AR 38. It was still rather early when they entered Catamarca, capitol of Catamarca Province. Jordan spotted a provincial police unit parked on the side of the highway and pulled in behind it, but at a sufficient distance not to alarm the officers. Jordan pulled out his

Baragan Investigation's ID and federal license, and exited the SUV. He held out his credentials as he approached the patrol car. The officer riding shotgun quickly climbed out of the car and stepped to the right rear corner, his hand on the butt of his automatic, the retention strap snapped off. Jordan noticed that the officer was probably in his early thirties and appeared fit, no cop gut. His uniform was clean and recently pressed. Although the man was alert and prepared for potential threats, he did not appear tense or nervous. Kent was impressed. Quickly checking Kent's credentials, the officer enquired, "How may I help you, Sir?"

Jordan explained that he and his partners were investigating a kidnapping and needed directions to Catamarca Provincial Police Headquarters. The officer commented that he had seen a bulletin on the crime and then gave Kent directions to headquarters. Wishing him luck, the officer returned to his unit.

Ten minutes later the investigation team was shown into the office of the shift lieutenant and there they struck gold. Before getting to the business at hand, Jordan complimented the department on the appearance and conduct of the patrol officer who had given him directions. Lt. Anteguera was visibly pleased, but then apologized for a lapse in proper police procedure. A municipal officer had noticed a large white van parked on a residential side street, the morning of the day before. The van was still there in the late afternoon. The officer checked it out, saw nothing suspicious and queried the neighbors. Nobody knew who the van belonged to, so the officer called for a second officer to drive the van to the abandoned vehicle parking lot. It was at that point that a sergeant had connected the van to a BOLO (Be On the Look Out for) that was in response to Jordan's request to the

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Tucuman Provincial Police to locate a large white older van with a severely dented passenger door.

Jordan asked if he could check for fingerprints and if the lieutenant could provide the prints of the officer who had driven the vehicle. Lt. Anteguera, embarrassed at the spoiling of a potential crime scene, by driving rather than towing the van, was eager to cooperate.

As Heinie opened the van door, he and Kent detected a sweet medicinal odor. They looked at each other and nodded, both saying in unison, "Chloroform!"

Heinie's usual stoicism deserted him as he exclaimed, "No doubt about it, this is the van! Kent, we've found the trail!"

Thirty minutes later, Kent declared, "Well, I didn't expect much." He was mildly disappointed when he found only one set of prints, probably the police driver. Lt. Anteguera promised to follow up on the print comparison as soon as the officer's prints were available. The lieutenant also pointed out the location where the van was abandoned on a city map. It was about seven miles from the airfield. As the investigators were about to leave for the airfield, a sergeant handed Lt. Anteguera a bulletin that reported the van stolen from a party living in San Miguel de Tucuman, three days before.

Riding shotgun beside Rodolfo as they sped toward the airfield, Kent reviewed their progress and felt a gathering excitement. It had been several years since he had experienced such a challenging hunt, but none of the previous situations were so complex and so personal. Deep in his gut he felt a disturbing anxiety as to whether they could locate and recover Marti before the Colombians began to brutalize their hostage. He was also aware that he had missed some signs along the way that had cost them time, which was

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critical. Taking advantage of the landline telephone at police headquarters, he had updated Don Luis and requested that Luis pass the report to Cesar and to request that Cesar courier Kent and Heinie's passports to Famaila and to be ready to obtain special visas for entry into Colombia. It was now probable that the hunt would take them out of country.

While Jordan visited the Administrador Aeroporto Office to examine the flight logs, Heinie and Rodolfo circulated among refuelers, maintenance and ground guide personnel. Kent looked at aircraft registration numbers of four twin engine aircraft that had arrived the day before the kidnapping, expecting to see a Colombian number. Not finding one, he searched the logs for each day back to the previous week and came up empty handed. Most were Argentine, two were Chilean, one American, one Peruvian and one Bolivian. His heart sank as he pondered the possibility that the van had been a ruse, purposefully left to be found while the kidnapers changed vehicles and continued south to one of a dozen possible airfields. Or, had they doubled back to the north in the second unknown vehicle. As he contemplated the requirements of men and time to check out all of these possibilities, he felt a rising sense of panic.

Kent waited outside of the administration office for his two colleagues. Rodolfo returned first and had nothing of interest to report. Twenty minutes later, Heinie had not shown and Jordan was becoming frustrated, but hopeful that the delay might mean Heinie had turned up something to get them back on the trail of their quarry.

Finally, Heinie appeared around the corner of the building, walking with a purposeful stride that gave Kent some hope. One could not tell by the blank expression on the German's face whether he was bringing good news or bad.

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As Heinie approached, Kent looked at him intently and gave him a, “give it to me” gesture. “Well-----?”

“Very interesting, Kent. A refueler gassed up an arriving twin engine plane the evening before the taking of Marti. He recognized the plane as an Embraer 110 PI. It had two small connected extended range fuel tanks just behind the cockpit and seating for twelve. He had to access the aircraft through the left side boarding door to get to the added fuel tanks. The co-pilot was very concerned that he not spill any fuel inside the cabin. As he ran his hose back to the truck, the co-pilot stayed behind in the aircraft to check for spills. Returning to the truck, he happened to get closer to the rear of the Embraer and noticed that the registration number looked like it had been stuck on over another number.”

Jordan felt his pulse leap. “Was the registration all letters or letters and numbers?”

“In exchange for a small gift, he showed me the receipt copy in his receipt book. I took some notes.” Heinie referred to a small notebook in his hand. “The registration was ‘LVDPZ’ and the credit card was in the name of Carlos Puyo of Buenos Aires.”

Without a word Kent spun about and quickly re-entered the administration office. In a very short time he had the take-off time of the Embraer, 1509 hrs the following day, the day of the kidnapping and a flight plan to Sao Paulo, Brazil. Heinie agreed with him that Sao Paulo probably was another misdirection. Most likely the Colombians would fly almost due north to Colombia. Jordan was somewhat familiar with the twin turbo prop Embraer, but needed to refresh his mind on the performance data.

The airport manager was happy to provide a manual on Embraer Aircraft. The 110 PI was manufactured in the mid 1970’s, was a convertible passenger/freight model (the

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passenger seats were removable), cruised at about 230 knots, ceiling of 22,500 ft. and a range of just over 1,000 miles. The extended range fuel tanks increased the range to 1,200 miles.

The flight planning area of the office was decorated with a large wall map of South America and a long ruler lay on the chart table. Kent placed the ruler on the map scale, marked a thousand miles with his thumb, placed the end of the ruler at Catamarca and rotated the ruler due north. His thumb was in the middle of nowhere. No suitable airfields were indicated for several hundred miles north of his thumb. However Cochabamba, Bolivia was at a distance of 750 miles from Catamarca.



## **Chapter 3**

### **The Pursuit**

Jorge Wilsterman Airport, Cochabamba, Bolivia  
Saturday, November 7, 1130 hours, Day Five

Cleared by the tower, Kent Jordan taxied the King Air to the active runway, turned the aircraft to line up for takeoff, and increased the throttles to full power. All gauges were in the normal range. He released the brakes and enjoyed the powerful acceleration as the aircraft roared down the runway. When he felt the plane trying to fly, he pulled back on the stick and rotated the King up into the overcast, raised the landing gear, adjusted flaps and backed off the throttles. After setting the auto pilot for eight thousand meters and a heading of 348 degrees, he looked over at Heinie in the right seat and watched him visibly unwind, a look of profound relief on his normally stoic face.

Jordan couldn't resist. "What! You still think I don't know how to fly this thing?"

Reichmann, shook his head and said, "Nothing personal, I don't like to fly. In the Legion, we lost an engine on takeoff and crashed. I sweat every takeoff. I'm okay now that I know that everything is working." To demonstrate his relaxed state, Heinie put his head back and feigned sleep.

Kent observed that Heinie Reichmann was a very private man and he appreciated that the man had offered an explanation. That definitely was a sign of a warming relationship.

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Having reached flight plan altitude, Kent checked the instruments and heading, and then reviewed events of the last eight hours.

Although still concerned about the passage of time, Jordan was less anxious concerning their progress in picking up the trail of the kidnapers and was starting to feel the excitement of the tracker who knows he is on the trail of his quarry and closing. He could almost feel himself leaning forward with anticipation. However, he checked his rush with the realization that although the King had a speed advantage of over a hundred knots on the Embraer, they were more than four days behind.

The pursuers had arrived at Cochachamba shortly after 10:00 AM and checked tower records for arriving aircraft on the afternoon of the third of November. An earlier call from the Argentine Aviation Bureau in Buenos Aires had prepared the Bolivian officials for their inquiry. An Argentine Embraer with tail number LVDPZ had landed at Jorge Wilsterman at 1604, Tuesday, November 3. However, the tower log showed no departure.

Customs had recorded LVDPZ as a medical transport with a young woman in a coma. There was no inspection as passengers and crew had not left the area of the plane. The flight had refueled and departed shortly after 1700 hours. When queried, the customs inspector stated that he had noticed some activity around the back part of the aircraft but his view was obstructed by the fuel truck. The refueler's receipt copy showed the Argentine registration number, but he had not looked at the tail number after returning to his truck.

The tower log recorded the departure of a twin turboprop at 1712 hours, Colombian registration number HK2962L, destination Trujillo, northern Peru. Kent called Cesar and

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requested that the Aviation Bureau check arriving aircraft at Trujillo and also at Leticia, in the southern salient of Colombia which borders Brazil and Peru. Leticia was almost due north from Cochabamba and was in the upper reaches of the Amazon, deep in the rain forest. In the past, Leticia was the scene of Colombian and Peruvian border dispute battles.

Cesar's return call informed Kent that HK2962L had landed at Leticia at 2043 hours Tuesday evening, refueled and departed for Bogotá at 2138 hours. Bogotá's El Dorado International showed no arrival for that tail number. The Aviation Bureau was checking with major airports in central and northern Colombia. Maria and the investigation team were in Catamarca canvassing hotels in an attempt to get a physical description of the aircraft crew and any persons that might have been with the crew.

Leticia, Colombia, Saturday, November 7, 1422 hours

Jordan made an instrument landing at Leticia in a steady moderate rain, arranged for topping off the tanks and then proceeded with Heinie and Rodolfo to the administration office to call Cesar. The Aviation Bureau reported no luck in finding tail number HK2962L at any major airport. However, Colombian aviation officials reported that the registered owner of the Embraer was a Leon Cepeda of Barrancabermeja on the Magdalena River northeast of Medellín. Kent requested that the Aviation Bureau check all air facilities that recorded arrivals and departures for the area to the north of Medellín. He and Heinie then studied the office wall map that displayed most airfields in Colombia.

Heinie stabbed his thick index finger at a point on the map. "That looks good to me, Kent. If we head in that

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direction, by the time we get there Cesar may have better information.”

Heinie Reichmann pointed to Puerto Berrio, a river town upstream from Barrancabermeja on the Magdalena River and seventy miles northeast of Medellín. The field could easily accommodate a twin engine aircraft.

Kent nodded in agreement. Puerto Berrio was well positioned for carrying out the next stage of their search. He also wanted to keep moving toward their ultimate destination as the clock was ticking and Marti was suffering. He called Cesar and informed him of their plan. Cesar approved and then instructed Kent to check in with the Puerto Berrio Airport administration office for paperwork that Cesar was faxing to Kent.

Kent stopped at the customs office to declare Puerto Berrio as their port of entry and at 1503 hours the King Air was wheels up and climbing to eight thousand meters on a course of 340 degrees. Noting that Reichmann had unwound from his post takeoff anxiety and feeling the accumulation of several days of little sleep and frantic activity, Kent asked Heinie to watch the instruments and the radar, put his head back against the head rest and dozed. Heinie nudged him awake thirty minutes out of Puerto Berrio.

#### Puerto Berrio, Colombia, 1721 hours

Jordan greased the landing and was directed by the tower to the private aviation area where he and his colleagues prepared the aircraft for an overnight stay. After stopping by the customs office to fill out entry forms, Kent arranged for fuel and with Heinie and Rodolfo following, he set out for the administration offices and a telephone. Kent could hear the

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excitement in Cesar's voice; they had made great progress this day.

"Leon Cepeda operates a single plane charter service out of Puerto Berrio. His co-pilot is listed as Victor Devia. Tower log indicates he landed at 0120 hours early Wednesday; no takeoffs have been recorded since then. He should be there. Business registration is under the name of Magdalena Air Service. Do you have all that?"

"Got it! This should finally put us in contact with someone who knows who is behind this whole thing. Any descriptions of these people?"

"Yes, Maria sends her love and the following: man with aviation sun shades and flight bag, about six feet tall, thin, long hair combed straight back and an unusually large hawk nose; man with flight bag, sunshades, about five feet nine, medium build, medium short haircut parted on the left; third man, five ten to six feet, medium build, black hair straight back, receding hairline, neat mustache. The third man entered the hotel after the other two had registered for him, walked quickly to the elevator and the clerk did not get much of a look. The clerk did not see him at checkout. The registered names were all phony."

Jordan looked at the notes he had hastily scribbled on a borrowed tablet and verified several items to make sure he had it right. Cesar then told him to open the faxed document the clerk at the admin office had handed him.

"I thought that this might be helpful. If you haven't gone through customs inspection yet, show this warrant to the inspector. It may simplify the inspection." That was particularly helpful, considering the small armory hidden behind the upholstery of the aircraft cabin.

Kent thanked his father-in-law and signed off giving his love to pass on to Maria.

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The customs inspector read the warrant, stuck his head through the hatch, looked left and right and asked if there was anything to declare. Kent, Heinie and Rodolfo signed the forms, thanked the inspector and headed back to the main terminal. The inspector pocketed the \$100.00 US that Kent had slipped him and returned to his tiny but far from tidy office.

Many of the businesses associated with the airport were closing for the day. They were fortunate to catch the only car rental before it closed. Driving the rented four year old Chevy Suburban up and down the drive paralleling the runway, they spotted a small sign, "Magdalena Air Service" over the door of a very small office. A closed sign hung on the door knob.

Jordan knew what his next move would be, but decided to give Heinie an opportunity to contribute. Heinie thought that it was possible the co-pilot might not be as involved in the crime as the others, and if so, would be vulnerable to a plea bargain offer. Kent figured that a charter pilot would have to have a phone to be ordered in for a flight. The airfield administration office had a local directory and Kent copied down Devia's address. The investigators then drove into Puerto Berrio to find the hotel that the office clerk had recommended.

Sunday, November 8, 1017 hours, Day Six

Victor Devia had just finished breakfast and sat at a small table in his one room apartment, savoring a cup of Colombian coffee liberally dosed with cream and sugar. He was struggling with the means to make his next rental payment. He was probably going to have to sell his new motorcycle which he had enjoyed for only five months. Quitting his job at the air service may have been premature, but he didn't

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think he could continue after the trip to Argentina. His thoughts were interrupted as he was startled by an authoritative banging on his apartment door.

Police? A stab of fear rose up in his gut. The door was the only way out of his apartment. The back window overlooked an alley three stories down. As he made his way to the door, he could come up with only a weak response to any charge of participation in the nasty business: ignorance!

Filled with dread, his heart beating like a trip hammer, he opened the door, flinched and almost ducked from the very large fist that appeared to be aimed at him. But instead of destroying his face the huge hammer dropped down. He realized then that the large muscular man the fist belonged to had been about to knock again. Victor blinked several times at the three men standing in the hall. He was right, there was no doubt; the three men were policemen.

Devia stepped back as the three officers entered the apartment without invitation. All three were approaching middle age or older. The oldest hung back, the big one moved to the right and visually swept the apartment. The youngest officer transfixed Victor with cold eyes. Devia accepted the inevitable and decided the best course was cooperation.

“We are investigating a kidnapping, Mr. Devia. Read this, please!” The man’s tone was flat and direct, totally lacking in civility and causing Victor to breakout into a cold sweat. A vision of spending several years in a Colombian prison raced across his mind.

He took the paper thrust at him. With some effort he focused on the official document, a warrant from the Argentine Ministry of Justice, Security and Human Rights appointing Robert Kenton Jordan and Heinrich Karl Reichmann to investigate the kidnapping of one Martha Victoria Carillo in Tucuman Province, Argentine Republic on

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3 November, 1998. The appointed investigators were granted authority to take into custody and transport to proper police authorities of the Argentine Republic any persons directly involved in the crime. Powers to arrest and to transport were subject to authorization and oversight from Colombian police officials and in compliance with appropriate provisions of the Extradition Treaty of 1992.

Captain Raul Espinoza, a twenty-five year veteran of the Colombian National Police, was a very busy official. His district force was grossly undermanned and he found himself spending an inordinate amount of his time re-aligning his priorities and shuffling assets to cover the re-alignments. Therefore it was not unusual for Espinoza to visit District Subestacion Puerto Berrio on a Sunday.

Having just finished a less than appetizing plate of rice, beans and pulled pork, Espinoza was very much looking forward to a mid-day siesta on the battered sofa in the Lieutenant's Office when four men entered the station. The four projected a seriousness that told him that he probably would not be enjoying a siesta. The Puerto Berrio Substation Lieutenant was out investigating a multiple murder that smelled of an organized crime hit and the desk sergeant was busy catching up with a backlog of paper.

Espinoza examined their credentials, listened to a brief presentation of their business, and was certain that a siesta was out of the question. He ordered the desk sergeant to bring four folding chairs into the office and to close the door.

Espinoza impressed Kent Jordan as a professional law officer. The captain was not a very tall man, but his broad shoulders spoke of strength and a time when he had been physically fit. However, age and paperwork had taken a toll. His medium cut hair showed traces of gray and jowls were



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developing on his tired face. Gravity was winning the fight to keep his belly above his belt.

Espinoza did not waste time mulling over Jordan's request for assistance. "I'm sorry to tell you my district has no personnel available to investigate, let alone to conduct a hostage rescue operation in such remote, rugged terrain. The Departamento Antioquia Headquarters police force is equally short-handed as they're conducting two major operations, one of which has been mandated by Region de Policia No. 6 Headquarters. Therefore they can't put a force in the field for weeks, maybe months. I understand your need for haste and I'm terribly sorry that I can't be more helpful."

Captain Espinoza did confirm much of what young Devia had related to the investigators and he authorized them to continue the investigation.

"Now, I regret that I can't authorize you to apprehend and arrest anybody out of consideration of national sovereignty. If you can bring me evidence of the location of the victim, I will do what I can to galvanize higher headquarters to take action, but I can't promise the timeliness of any action. I will keep this matter confidential and again I apologize for my inability to assist you."

All of the great uplift that Kent had experienced several hours before was gone. He knew with considerable certainty where Marti was being held, but he could not do a thing about it. His frustration was enormous. He felt a rage building. He wanted to hit someone, to severely injure someone deserving. With anger dominating his entire being, he wasn't able to think. As they drove back to the hotel, Jordan struggled to get his emotions under control.

By the time they arrived at the Mi Casa Hotel, Jordan had regained his composure and some ideas were forming. There

were actions that they could take and it was also time to share the good and bad news with Don Luis and Cesar and get them working on the problem.

Kent purchased a dozen cans of beer and soda at the bar and they adjourned to their modest suite on the third floor. Heinie and Rodolfo slumped into two of the three straight back arm chairs in the living area between the two bedrooms. Jordan reversed and straddled the desk chair in front of the small writing desk and faced the others. Victor Devia stood uneasily, still rather uncomfortable in the company of older and experienced men who seemed to exude what he thought to be barely controlled violence.

Kent Jordan fixed Victor with a steady gaze. "Victor, you have a big decision to make. You've been very helpful and if things are left where they are, you may be subpoenaed to appear in an Argentine court to bear witness against the kidnappers. You won't be charged as you were not aware of the intentions of the others and of course you have assisted in the investigation. How do you feel about this?"

Victor shifted his weight from one foot to the other and studied the carpet. "I don't feel very good about my part in the crime, Señor Jordan. So, I'm happy to tell you what I know." He paused again and then looked directly at Jordan. "What's this decision I have to make?"

"I understand you're unemployed and we could use your assistance. I'll pay you much more than Magdalena Air was paying you."

Devia's posture straightened as he considered the proposal. "I am very young, Señor. I know nothing of police work. I've fired a gun only to hunt or to protect my father's cattle from wild animals. What could someone like me do to help someone like you, Señor Jordan?"

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Kent smiled slightly, gestured to the third armchair and softening his voice said, "Have a seat, Victor. We need someone who knows their way around Puerto Berrio, where to get things for us. But most of all I need a co-pilot to handle the aircraft while I observe the objective and to help in the event of an emergency. You're also familiar with the terrain and the compound. For us, Victor you're a gold mine. So, if you're part of the team, then I'm not Señor Jordan; I'm Kent, OK?"

"OK----- Kent," Victor responded after some hesitation. Finally he smiled as it occurred to him that he could keep his apartment and motorcycle for a while longer. He also felt a sense of relief knowing that he could do something to help recover the unfortunate victim.

After discovering that Victor Devia's hobby was photography, Kent gave him three thousand U.S. dollars and instructions to find the highest quality camera and super high speed, high resolution film as soon as the shops opened Monday morning. He then called the front desk to arrange for a call to San Jose, Costa Rica. He spent the next hour bringing the Don up to date. Don Luis taped the entire briefing and would relay the substance of it to Cesar.

Victor Devia's grandfather had tired of the conflicts endemic to Colombian society and had established a cattle ranch in the mountains north of Medellín. He had appropriately named his new home, Los Refugio (The Refuge). Victor's father continued to work the marginally profitable enterprise out of loyalty to his father. In time the ranch, being in a very remote and sparsely populated area had attracted some lawless elements connected to the drug trade and left wing revolutionaries. Four years earlier, his father had sold the ranch to a Bernardo Arenas, a man of doubtful character.

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Victor had seen the man only once during the cattle ranch sales negotiations, but recognized him immediately when he boarded the Embraer. Evidently the co-pilot was beneath Arenas' attention and Arenas did not recognize him as the son of the man who had sold him the ranch. Arenas' number one was Alvaro Salazar, a brutal thug. Captain Espinoza was aware of Arenas and the compound where he worked. Espinoza estimated that the total number of men at the site to be as many as two dozen, most of whom were sicarios (hired guns).

Jordan figured that it would require, at a minimum, forty well trained, experienced and appropriately equipped men to assault the objective and rescue Marti. The task was made even more difficult by the eight foot wall, topped with razor wire that encompassed the compound. An assault force would need breaching charges and a support element would probably require automatic weapons, depending of course on whether the terrain offered fields of fire into the compound.

Employment of Colombian forces was doubtful and it was apparent that an out of country unit would need to covertly enter, conduct the rescue and get out without becoming engaged with local authorities. Hopefully, aerial reconnaissance would reveal possibilities and challenges regarding insertion and extraction of the rescue force.

Jordan then shared his immediate plans with Don Luis. Initial aerial recon would be carried out by using the King Air and locally available photo equipment. However, he explained, the twin was a low wing aircraft which did not allow vertical shots of the objective and surrounding terrain. He planned to rent a Cessna high wing, single engine plane once he obtained a more capable camera with a stabilized lens, an infrared camera and powerful stabilized binoculars. Kent suggested that Don Luis' Chief of Security, Hiram

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Foster, formerly of the British Special Air Service, would have some idea of Kent's specific equipment requirements.

Jordan and Reichmann were the only logical choice to conduct a ground reconnaissance. Such a dangerous venture added to the requirements list: a cover for an overt entry into the general objective area to include a vehicle and equipment appropriate to the cover (geologists, botanists or government civil officials); camouflaged clothing, night vision devices, field gear and field rations.

Kent informed Don Luis that the \$20,000 U.S. Don Luis had given him was severely depleted and that he would need considerably more for fuel, housing, equipment, food and most important, facilitation funds (bribes).

Don Luis thought he would have information on Jordan's requests by 11:30, the next day, Monday, November 9.

Monday, November 9, 0840 hours, Day Seven

Jordan arrived at the airfield to perform a detailed check of the King Air, looking for damage, hydraulic and oil leaks. The river valley was fogged in and the damp air was heavy with the fetid smell of the river and decaying tropical vegetation. After running some systems checks, he walked to the flight office to purchase charts of the area of interest and to file a flight plan for the afternoon.

When Jordan returned to the hotel, Victor Devia proudly showed him a near top of the line Nikon with various lenses, filters and professional high speed film. The 400mm telephoto lens would probably work just fine for the first run over the objective and the 28mm to 200 mm zoom lens would provide coverage of the objective and surrounding terrain.

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Los Refugio Compound, 1000 hours

Marti woke from a stupor to face another day of terror and degradation. She had not really slept since she had been taken, just snatches of semiconscious dozing. The room she was confined to was on the second floor overlooking a vegetable garden and an eight foot wall. Watching the pattern of changing sunlight through the single barred window, she guessed that the room faced to the northwest.

She had recognized early on that she would never be released by her abductors. They had not drugged her again after landing at the final airfield, which smelled like it was on a river or close to a lake. What had alarmed her the most, was the fact that they had not blindfolded her as they loaded her into an older model SUV and started driving. More traumatically, the man in charge had raped her several times since they had arrived at the compound in the forest high in the mountains.

The implication was that the man was not concerned about her revealing the location of the hostage site, his identity and his sexual assaults on her. She could only conclude that regardless of ransom paid, when the evil bastard received what he wanted from her father, he would dispose of her. Her only hope was that somehow, someone would track down the gang, kill or arrest them and save her. She realized the likelihood of that happening was rather small.

Until this horrible ordeal, Marti had enjoyed a pleasant but stimulating life. Her father had been preparing her to someday take over the extensive international business he was building. He had sent her to the United States for her college degrees and to perfect her English language skills.

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Marti had enjoyed her five years at Texas Tech University, excelling at her studies, playing point guard on the women's basketball team and spending many great weekends with Uncle Steve and Aunt Penny at their ranch at Roaring Springs just fifty five miles east of Lubbock, the home of Texas Tech. Steve and Penny Carlyle actually were not related, but were old friends of her father.

Returning home to the estate north of San Jose, Costa Rica with a Master's Degree in Business and Social Science, Marti had begun to tour all of the businesses of Southern Cross Industries, Holding, analyzing the business model of each subsidiary or company in which her father held a majority interest.

Several times a year Marti visited the family estancia in Tucuman where she was frequently joined by her lifetime friend, Maria Baragan. Evidently, someone had been watching her for months and had devoted considerable time and money to set up the abduction.

Marti had a rare ability to focus her entire being toward goals that she had decided were important for her to accomplish. Although she was popular at Texas Tech and dated now and then, she had not let social activities distract her from her various pursuits. Somewhere off in the misty future she knew there would be a man and a family of her own.

When her friend, Maria had returned from Pennsylvania with her American, the picture of her personal future became more clear. She had met handsome young men at the university and in her travels in the world of international business. Few of them were worth a second look and many men at the businesses that she had visited were much in awe of Don Luis' daughter. She had been content with the lack of hassle that came with her position as the big boss' daughter.

*Dennis M. Atkinson*

Marti had never met any man like Kent Jordan. His quiet confidence and subtle strength; his apparent lack of inflated ego and need to sell himself was so unlike the men she had become acquainted with. He was not Hollywood handsome, more rugged than pretty and projected an aura of resolve tempered by challenging and perhaps terrible experiences. Marti did not envy Maria so much as she was pleased that Maria had found such a unique man. However, meeting and getting to know Kent had started her thinking more about the kind of man she wanted in her future. Now, it seemed that she would never know such a man, a reliable, strong and loving husband and father of her children.

Marti's ability to focus and to concentrate on an objective had always been directed to outward accomplishments such as grades and degrees or winning basketball games. Now, in order to preserve her sanity and self-respect, she turned her strength of character and intensity inward to completely control her emotions and the emotionally controlled physical responses of her body. Arenas could ravage her body and she could not prevent that. But Marti had disconnected her soul from her physical being so while the brute did his thing, her mind was in another place.

After several attempts to get his captive to respond to his sexual invasions of her body, Arenas became frustrated, it was certainly not satisfying to dominate and manipulate a woman who wasn't there. With the second failure to generate a response from the victim, Arenas complained to Alvaro Salazar, his foreman, "It's like fucking a damned artificially heated corpse! But, I will prevail and then I'll start sending pieces of her to that arrogant son of a bitch!"

"Before you start to carve her up, maybe you could let me get her attention. I don't care if she gets with it or not; it doesn't matter." Salazar stared at his boss, his face



*Galahad Dawning*

completely devoid of expression. Arenas felt a chill down his back.

“We’ll see. The first ransom letter goes out today.” Arenas had engaged an attorney in Chimpote, Peru to send prepared letters, when directed, to Estancia Famaila. The first of six letters demanded two million U.S. dollars for the safe return of Don Luis’ daughter. The second and third letters demanded an additional two million and one million dollars. Two other letters would accompany packages containing severed fingers packed in dry ice. The packages with letters attached would be couriered to Chimpote and deposited at a dead drop for the attorney to pick up and mail. Chimpote was just sixty miles south of Trujillo, the false destination revealed in the flight plan filed at Cochabamba, Bolivia, furthering the impression that the kidnappers were in central Peru.

Mi Casa Hotel, Puerto Berrio 1230 hours

By 1200, Kent was beginning to become impatient as he awaited the call from Don Luis. Of course, he realized that Don Luis was attempting to arrange purchases, transportation and to coordinate quite a few actions in just a few hours on a Monday morning in Latin America. He should not be surprised if Luis was not able to do it all in the time allotted. But he was very relieved when the telephone rang.

Puerto Berrio to Monteria 1423 Hours

Jordan was impressed with Victor Devia’s flying abilities as he monitored the young pilot checking navigation, aircraft systems and talking with the flight controller. The takeoff had been smooth, and the climb to three thousand meters and

*Dennis M. Atkinson*

setting the King Air on a course of 334 degrees was by the book. They would be over the objective in about twelve minutes.

Jordan screwed the telephoto lens onto the Nikon and set the speed and f-stop to compensate for the movement of the aircraft and unstable handheld shooting. The air was almost devoid of turbulence as he unstrapped his co-pilot seat harness and in a half crouch moved the camera to the wind screen. Looking through the single lens reflex he checked the view and movement. Kent was not sure of how much detail they would capture under these very unsatisfactory circumstances. However, with the clock ticking, he could not just sit in the hotel room waiting for better equipment. It was going to take considerable time to organize, equip and to plan a hostage rescue and most of those activities could not begin until pictures of the objective and surrounding terrain were available.

Victor throttled back to one hundred thirty knots and pointed to 11:00 o'clock as the compound came into view. Kent snapped half dozen shots through the windscreen and then moved from the cock pit back to the cabin where Heinie and Rodolfo were peering through the port side cabin windows. Rodolfo quickly shifted to the starboard side to make room for Kent who snapped several more photos as the compound drifted by.

The ranch was at an elevation of fifteen hundred meters and the aircraft at twelve hundred meters above ground. From what Kent could see through the lens, it appeared that the 400 mm lens had provided sufficient magnification to pick up details. A plus factor was the presence of two pickup trucks inside the compound and a larger truck outside the wall. An imagery interpreter could use the vehicles to scale the compound and objects in and around the compound. The

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question remained as to whether the speed and resolution of the film would offset the motion of the aircraft and Jordan's unsteady hand and provide something better than a fuzzy blur.

The flight plan called for a turnaround at Monteria where Victor continued his transition training in the King Air by conducting several touch and go landings. On the return flight, Kent used the 28mm to 200mm zoom lens to shoot pictures of the terrain surrounding the compound, with particular attention to an abandoned airstrip, a drug/rebel encampment and roads and trails.

As a pilot, Victor seemed to be a competent enough that Jordan could devote some of his attention to the information Don Luis had provided and what he needed to do to prepare for the next several days.

Puerto Berrio Tuesday, November 10, Day 8

Don Luis responded to Jordan's need for funds by establishing a line of credit at a bank in Puerto Berrio. Cesar had faxed Kent Jordan's signature to the bank and Don Luis' reputation was such that the bank president was only too happy to oblige his new customer. The equivalent of one million dollars U.S. deposited in the bank was also very helpful in establishing the business relationship. The only challenge for Kent was the exchange rate of 2,000 Colombian pesos to one dollar U.S. He could only carry so many bills. Five hundred twenty dollar bills and two hundred and fifty one thousand peso bills would have to be divided among the three of them.

Immediately upon their return on Monday, Victor dropped off the film to a friend of his who was a professional

*Dennis M. Atkinson*

photographer and who developed his own film. Five of the six copies would go out on the supply aircraft, Wednesday.

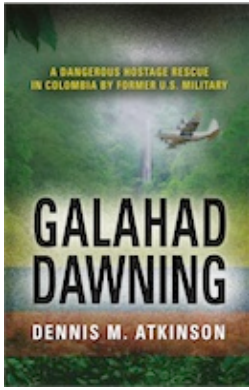
Rodolfo and Victor located an available villa to rent for their headquarters. They also found and moved to the villa a steel shipping container to securely store items that were en route to Puerto Berrio. Victor suggested that Jordan hire two security guards to watch the villa when the investigators were out and about. Victor stated that he knew a couple of dependable men and that his mother was a very good cook.

Kent wondered if he was putting too much trust in young Victor. He was very aware of his own tendency toward paranoia engendered by years of clandestine operations, and a cynicism that came as a part of police work. At the same time he knew he had no choice. Victor was a known resident of the town and would not attract as much attention as a stranger would as he began to gather supplies and equipment. Victor was also capable of providing much needed knowledge and services. However, Jordan intended to discuss his concerns with Heinie and Rodolfo and to caution them to keep a wary eye on the young man.

Don Luis had told Kent to expect two trucks to be delivered from Medellín by employees of BPC (Buscar Petroleo Colombia) a petroleum search company. Don Luis Carillo was the majority shareholder. In 1996, BPC had procured a five year survey permit in the area of the target compound and had carved a 2,000 foot airstrip out of the forest which could accommodate a C-130 four engine transport. Although the company had abandoned the strip two years previously, the permit had nine months remaining. As promised, the trucks arrived and one of the four-wheel drive trucks displayed BPC logos on the front doors. Oil exploration was their cover for being in the area.

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Tuesday afternoon, Kent and Victor flew to Medellín to lease a Cessna single engine, high wing aircraft for further aerial reconnaissance. Following a brief conference with the general manager of BPC, Victor flew the King Air back to Puerto Berrio and Kent trailed him in the Cessna U206. Now that plans and equipment were coming together, Kent Jordan was beginning to feel better.



*Former U.S. military volunteers attempt to rescue the daughter of a wealthy South American businessman who has been kidnapped by a vengeful criminal gang and is being held at a fortified compound in the rain forested mountains of Colombia. The gang leader threatens to torture and mutilate the young woman as the rescue group hastily organizes and arms up as the clock is ticking.*

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