

*BITTER CANDY takes you on a world-wide journey after Adrian Drost's son is kidnapped. Adrian employs the resources of his billion dollar empire to pursue him through the Darren Gap, a hellish jungle that is lawless with death lurking everywhere, a swamp filled with Jaguars, deadly snakes and flesh-eating insects.*

## **Bitter Candy**

by Dan Gordan

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# Bitter

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DAN GORDAN

READER DISCRETION ADVISED

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## CHAPTER 1

Screams of a boy echoed off the African-mahogany paneled walls from Adrian Drost's private office in his Florida mansion. He and two of his most trusted confidants listened with concealed shock to a small recorder.

"Stop burning me!" cried the angry teenager.

The screams from young Christian Drost had the effect of chalk screeching across a blackboard.

"There is a simple solution to your problem," said an electronically-modified voice from the recorder. "Your son will be safely released if you wire us ten million dollars. Tell no one about this, and you will be contacted in two hours."

A click signaled the end of the message.

Adrian Drost sat quietly for a moment at his modern desk trying to absorb the terrifying message. The Drost family had been in banking for over century and Adrian had been head of the organization most of his adult life. Under his leadership, he had transformed it into an international banking empire. Along the way, he had been faced with many pressure situations. But, damn, this was his son in harm's way. Fear and rage from deep within his being threatened to erupt at any instant. He knew instinctively that the best course of action was to keep these emotions chained and exhibit a cool resolve.

"Bryan, Danny, who else knows about this tape?"

"Jonathan is the only other person. He was in the kitchen getting the staff lined up for the day when the doorbell rang. When he got to the door, he found the package but no one was in sight. He doesn't move that fast anymore, so whoever left the package had plenty of time to disappear. Jonathan gave the package to me as I was heading to your office," answered Bryan.

"Danny, I want you to check the video tape covering the front door and driveway. Let's check the homing device that Christian wears in his school uniform. Bryan, get Philip Rickman from Drost Banking in Bern, Switzerland, on the phone. Dagan will be returning from an early business meeting at our office in Tampa. Ask her to come straight to my office when she returns. I'll explain to her what's happened. I don't want to tell Christian's mother that I don't know a damn thing, so get me as much information as you can. Christian's life is in our hands. Let's act accordingly!"

Danny headed out the door while Bryan moved to the smaller desk near a wall of books on the far side of the office. Bryan and Danny O'Farrell were identical twins in their mid-thirties from Wicklow, Ireland. Bryan was the more serious of the two, while Danny made one smile when he walked into a room. They were not only Adrian's bodyguards but his closest confidants. Both had been with him for the past four years, and it was hard to tell their six-foot, four-inch 220 pound frames apart. Their hair was black as a raven's wing and flopped down toward pairs of arctic-blue eyes. A coat of arms with a green shield and a golden lion standing erect was tattooed on the inside of Bryan's lower left arm. Danny had the same body art on his lower right arm.

"I've got Philip on the phone," said Bryan.

Adrian picked up the phone from his desk.

"Philip, I need your help with a grave problem. Don't ask any questions. I need you to make ten million available to wire somewhere at a moment's notice. I'll need it in less than two hours. What time is it there?"

"It's almost two o'clock, Adrian. I should have the funds available in an hour."

"Good. Make it happen."

"I'm on it."

Philip hung up the phone and removed his wire-rim glasses, while rubbing his eyes. Ten million dollars on short notice? He slouched down in his chair, plunged in deep thought. Absent mindedly, he reached down and picked a speck of lint from his English-leather

shoe. His cerulean-blue, French-cuffed shirt contrasted nicely with his tan custom-made, three-piece suit and burnt orange tie.

He'd come from a working-class family and had earned his way up in the banking business. He had known Adrian and Dagan several years before going to work for Drost Banking as their Vice President. He thoroughly enjoyed being the man in charge and was a bit of tyrant where his staff was concerned. He could project many moods with a pair of intense green eyes, set in a serious-looking face framed with reddish brown hair. He might have been considered handsome except for a very large, bulbous nose.

The rain spattering against his office window brought his focus back to the present and the task at hand--arranging for ten million dollars in two hours. He reached for the phone.

\*

"Got any ideas how this happened, Bryan?"

"Not yet. Christian never got to school. Danny should have something for us to look at on the video shortly. I thought that you might need me close at hand right now."

"Do you know anything about this kind of thing from your days with the IRA?"

Bryan squinted for a moment before focusing back on his friend and boss.

"There's nothing good about it except that they might be somewhat afraid because of your wealth and world-wide connections. They might think that the ten million dollars won't mean much to you. If I were them, I'd feel like a dead man. You know, like running from the Mafia. Danny and I will get a line on it soon."

Danny shut the doors behind him as he entered and said, "Adrian, I've had the tape fed through to your computer. Just open the new email."

The brothers stepped around behind Adrian so that they could view the screen together. It showed a uniformed driver stepping out of the black Rolls and walking to the front door with a package in hand.

"That's not Sloan?" said Danny.

"It's hard to say with the hat pulled down low on his forehead," answered Adrian.

"No, Sloan is bigger and walks with a slight limp."

"Have we got a read on the homing devise with Christian?"

"Yes, sir. I've already dispatched our people to head for it. I've instructed them to report before taking any action."

"Danny, get our helicopter in play right now!"

"Good idea! I'm on it."

Adrian pulled a side drawer open and stared at the pack of stale cigarettes.

"Damn, it has been two years and I still want one!" He thought to himself.

He knew that he was cursed with wanting a cigarette for the rest of his life. Adrian slammed the drawer shut, stood and walked over to the window. The stone-constructed mansion was located some thirty miles north of Tampa in the middle of a one-hundred-acre estate. The home had an Olympic-sized swimming pool with a clear overhead retractable dome that extended out from a recreational area within the home. To the east, a waterfall plunged thirty feet from a man-made plateau into a large pond surrounded by beautiful flowers and fruit trees. This was the only time in his memory that looking out at the waterfall and surrounding gardens didn't act as a calming influence.

At forty-two, with premature gray hair, Adrian was still a handsome man with bluish-gray eyes in a square-set, tanned face. He swam laps daily in the pool which helped maintain an athletic build.

He knew that he had to maintain a calm resolve in front of his people, but underneath raged a fiery volcano that wanted a blood eruption from the kidnapers.

\*

Thirty minutes earlier Christian had sat on the floor of the van, gagged with hands tied. The kidnapers had removed his school uniform and dressed him in jeans, a Buccaneers t-shirt, and deck shoes, before removing him from the Rolls. A man named LaRue had slipped into Sloan's uniform while the other man had held a curling iron next to Christian's face without touching him. It burned

nevertheless, and Christian screamed out in anger and pain, the sound of which was captured in a small recorder. LaRue dashed off in the Rolls with the recorded message, while the other man sat in the driver's seat of the van grinning back at his young captive.

"Keep quiet, you little crumb snatcher, or I'll really give you something to scream about."

Christian just glared up at him, wishing he could find away to kick out his rotten, yellow teeth.

LaRue was back in a few minutes and slipped into his own jeans and t-shirt as the van headed for the freeway.

"How's the kid doing?" asked LaRue.

"He's tough for a sixteen-year-old. He's got a lot of hate in those eyes; I think they taught him some karate. He kicked me so hard that I thought my rib was broke. That curling iron did a good job of burning him without really hurting him. You should see the other ways I've used it to loosen a person up. Do you think that they might let me play with him some?" the driver asked LaRue.

"I think you're dead if you touch him. He's worth a lot of money."

\*

The sleek *Koala helicopter* rose quickly over the grounds from the helipad behind the mansion. As the copter made its way from the estate, one could see that the mansion looked like an oasis in the middle of a forest. On all sides, rows of orange trees stretched as far as one could see. It was only a matter of minutes before they spotted the Rolls.

"There it is!" called the co-pilot over the roar of the copter's engine. The pilot brought the copter back around and hovered over the Rolls. The car had been pulled off the road and about twenty yards into a row of orange trees.

"Call our guys in the car and tell them that the Rolls is right below us."

\*



"Adrian, we've found Sloan. He's alive. He was stripped, but his uniform was lying beside him. We found the dart that he's been shot with. It looks like the kind they use to bring down large animals."

"Bring him to my office, and get the Rolls back on our grounds. Don't touch anything unless you're wearing gloves. We might get lucky finding finger prints."

"I need some concrete answers for Dagan, guys. Push hard to help me get a quick handle on this. I can't just tell her that our son's been kidnapped, and we don't know a damn thing. Bryan, call and get Dr. Coats over here right away. Tell him to bring whatever he needs to deal with a drugged dart hit. Also, call our attorney Jason Lee and tell him to get over here right now. Don't brief him till he gets here."

\*

Dr. Coats was between patients in his busy clinic when he got the call from Bryan. Dr. Gene Coats was fifty-years old, twenty-pounds overweight and somewhat introverted. He was tall and muscular and looked as if he had played football at one time. Brown eyes peered out from a clean-shaven face and everyone paid attention when they heard the low rumble of his voice. His forehead seemed larger than average and gave the impression that a lot of knowledge was stored there. He was often asked to lecture at medical schools because of the great respect he commanded as a doctor of internal medicine. He had become close friends with the Drost family years ago when he delivered Christian.

"Nurse Jansen, call Dr. Berry Barnes and ask him to look after my patients this morning. I have an emergency! I'll be back as soon as I can," he said, throwing his coat over his shoulder as he rushed out of the office.

\*

Al LaRue surveyed the docking area on Davis Island to make sure it was clear. Davis Island was located not far from downtown Tampa. The residents of the island were made up of old wealth. The houses were older, but well maintained. The van drove past modern boats and small yachts till they pulled alongside the moorings of a *Fountain*

*Mercury 48 Express Cruiser*. It was just another sleek-looking vessel along side the other yachts, in an area where each neighbor tried to outdo the other.

"Look, we're going to board that boat. Don't give me any trouble because I don't want to hurt you, but I will if you make me," said LaRue.

He untied Christian's hands and removed his gag. The two were out of the van and on deck of the cruiser in a matter of moments.

"Shove off!" ordered LaRue.

"I'll put him below."

The craft pulled away from its moorings and headed towards the Gulf. LaRue didn't even look back at the van. He was glad that the low-life with whom he had committed the crime didn't know him, and they would never see one another again. LaRue thought how crafty it was of the mastermind to prevent all the players from knowing each other, or for that matter, even knowing how many were involved, or what each one was doing. Everyone did their job, took the cash, and there were no dots to connect.

Once below, he was careful to watch Christian's legs.

LaRue handed Christian a ham sandwich and a Coke he'd picked up as they walked through the refined galley. LaRue watched the young teenager as he took a gulp of his Coke. He was a good-looking kid about five-foot, ten-inches tall with a powerful build. His steely-gray eyes peered out from an attractive face framed with neatly cut, sandy hair.

"Mister, my dad is rich. He'll pay you a lot of money if you help me escape."

"Sorry, kid, can't do that. Once your Dad pays the ransom, they will release you," LaRue added, without much conviction.

"Where are you taking me?"

"No idea. Finish your sandwich, and get some rest. You've had a tough morning. I heard that you've got a mean kick. You must have learned some karate."

"Savate, I've had lessons in French kickboxing. I would have broken his ribs if he hadn't grabbed me so close."

A smile emerged from under LaRue's thin mustache. He winked as he shook his head from side to side. His face was long and thin with dark hooded eyes. His shiny black hair was pulled back into a ponytail. Christian watched his thin, but strong looking frame exit the cabin and heard the click of a door lock behind him. The only way out was that door. Christian finished the sandwich and Coke and opened the port hole as he tried to listen for conversations from on deck. His eyes became heavy, and he lay back on the pillow wondering if they had put something in the food to make him sleep. He smiled as he thought about the sore ribs he'd given his captor.

\*

"Adrian, I've got the money ready to wire at your direction. Are you sure that we don't need to talk this over? Perhaps I can help."

"No, Philip, not now but stay close. I'm going to need you soon."

The phone rang a few minutes after he'd hung up. Bryan answered, and shot a look at Adrian.

"It's them."

"Yes, this is Adrian Drost," he said as he pushed the record button on his phone.

"This is the number of the Swiss bank account where you are to wire the money. Fifteen minutes after the money is there, we will call and tell you where to pick up your son."

A click followed the metallic-sounding voice and Adrian dialed Philip.

"Philip, Christian's been kidnapped. I want you to use every means at our disposal to track this deposit and find out where the money goes. We have contacts with all the banks. Use them! This is the account number."

"I'm on it."

Click.

"Sloan's all right. He's groggy, but doesn't remember a thing. Dr. Coats has given him a shot of adrenalin that might help," said Danny.

Fifteen minutes passed slowly. Then it was twenty! Then twenty-five and the phone did not ring again.

"We've briefed Jason and he thinks that we should call the police. He's waiting in the next room. It's past the time that the kidnappers said they'd call. What do you want us to do?" asked Bryan.

"Have Jason call the police."

Dagan stood in the doorway dressed in a charcoal-gray suit that looked good with her black sable hair falling naturally to just below her shoulders. Her tall frame leaned gracefully against the door opening.

The memory of when he first met her, as she interviewed for a vice-president's position at his bank in England, flashed across his mind. She had entered his office exuding confidence, tall and elegant, a classic beauty. Then she had worn her dark hair in a simple chignon which contrasted strikingly with her flawless, pale skin. Adrian had never ceased to be awed by her beauty.

"What's going on? Bryan said it was important that I come right in."

"Christian's been kidnapped," answered Adrian.

She stared back silently for a moment before her eyelids slid closed as she crumpled to the floor.

## CHAPTER 2

"Captain, where are they taking this kid?" asked LaRue.

"I don't know. We are cruising to a location off the coast of Cancun where around four this afternoon, a twin-engine Cessna will pick him up on the water. I don't want to know anymore than that. These people pay well and play hard, so to you, I'm the captain and you're a guy without a name."

"So be it," said LaRue.

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Jason Lee had alerted the partners that their major account, the Drost Organization, requested his presence at the Drost mansion. He didn't have details yet, but he wanted his partners on notice and ready to respond to whatever might be needed. The Rogers, Lee and Audrey Law firm was a large and respected firm, but the Drost account had taken them international, and when Adrian Drost called, everything else moved to the back burner.

Jason adjusted his red tie and straightened the coat of his black suit as he stepped from his red BMW SO Roadster. He was a small-framed man with pleasant looks. But his intense brown eyes dominated his face. His black hair had receded to a short crop just above the ears. As Jason checked his reflection in the car mirror he thought, "The good thing about being almost bald is that I don't need to worry about messy hair."

\*

"Have Jason brief the police when they get here and clear the room while I have a few minutes with my wife."

The lighting in the office was soft and restful. Adrian moved silently across the plush carpet to fill a glass with cold water. He

returned to the couch where Dagan was regaining consciousness. As her eyes fluttered open, he leaned over and kissed her on the forehead.

"Relax, darling, and take a sip of water."

"Did you say that Christian has been kidnapped?"

"Yes. They demanded ten million dollars and said they would release him if I paid. I did and they haven't! The police will be here in minutes, and I've already got our people on it."

Dagan had a strong personality. This was the first time she had ever fainted. Now her eyes had turned to icy blue as she sat up and asked in a cold voice, filled with hate.

"How long has he been gone? Did they take him from the house?"

"As Sloan was driving him to school, they forced the Rolls over and into the orange groves. Then they shot Sloan with a dart that knocked him out, forced Christian to change clothes, leaving his uniform and homing device in the Rolls.

"I should have let them put the device in his neck like they wanted too," said Dagan as she shook her head.

"Hell, for all we know they may have cut it out of him. You did the right thing. The only ones to blame here are the kidnappers," he said, as he cradled her in his arms.

"Do we have the power to get him back?"

"If anyone on earth does, we do! Now I need you to pull yourself together. Christian will need both of us thinking clearly. Please stay by my side as we go over everything with the police. The sooner they start doing their thing, the sooner I can unleash all of our power to find Christian."

Bryan knocked on the door before opening it.

"Detective Day is asking for you."

"Has Jason filled him in on the details?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ask both of them to join us. And Bryan, have Danny check with Philip in Switzerland to see what he's come up with on the wired money."

Bryan closed the door, and Adrian pulled Dagan up to hold her in his arms.

He whispered. "Are you strong enough to stand with me on this?"

"Damn right! Let's get Christian back and then find those bastards."

\*

"Are you feeling better, young man? Can I get you something to eat or drink?"

"I'd like another Coke."

"Give me a minute."

LaRue returned with the Coke and said, "I'd let you go top side but I can't. Why don't you try walking around the cabin? It will help keep your legs from cramping. This evening we can get you out of here."

"Where are you taking me?"

"I don't know. Now relax and get a little exercise."

Cold anger tinged with fear washed through Christian as he watched LaRue leave the cabin. "You'll pay for this," he vowed silently.

\*

After going over the details of the morning's events and listening to Detective Day's response, Adrian knew that Christian's best chance was the Drost organization.

Detective Day was a thin, scholarly-looking man with thinning hair.

"You have a feeling that this might be the work of a pedophile ring or an enemy of mine?" asked Adrian.

"Or both, Mr. Drost. If I were you, I'd make a list of my enemies. It could be a good place to start. In addition, I know that you are a man of considerable power, but you need to leave this to the police. This calls for professionals. Here is my card. Call me if you or your people can think of anything else."

\*

Jonathan wheeled trays loaded with sandwiches and drinks into Adrian's office, as no one had yet taken time for lunch. Philip

Rickman, Adrian's second in command and manager of the Drost Banking Empire, was on the speakerphone, listening as Adrian spoke.

"Each of you has a particular expertise. I need you to draw up a plan on how you can help us get Christian back. I want your thoughts on what you think happened and what can be done."

Adrian stood from behind his desk, walked over to the window, and pulled open the draperies, as he continued speaking.

"We need for all of you to shed as much light on this as possible. No item is too small or too strange to consider. I want to hear everything he continued.

"Philip, I know with our resources that you can find out where the money went, but don't just confine your thoughts to the money. Everyone needs to think outside the box. In addition, make a list of people who could be enemies of mine and give me a background check on each of them."

He turned towards where the twins, "Danny, obtain a list of pedophile groups and check if any of their members have dealt with us."

Philip's voice came over the speaker phone. "I found that the money was wired to the Credit Suisse Group in Switzerland. It was a numbered account and set up to immediately wire the money to a couple of locations--one is in Madrid, Spain, and one in Bogotá, Columbia. Our people at the Drost Academy in Columbia can handle the one in Bogotá within the hour. I've already begun a search in Madrid to stay ahead of their closing time."

"Good work Philip. Get in touch with Interpol and have an inspector ready to work with Dagan. Also, open an account with a million dollars that we can use to pay for information.

"Dagan, I need you to follow up with the banks in Europe on this. I'll have our plane ready to go within the hour. I'll keep you posted on developments over the phone."

He turned and looked at Jason, "I need for you to appoint a couple of your brightest attorneys to deal with what ever legal problems may come up. Don't forget to use the power of our international contacts for lawyers in other countries. I want ideas on who, how, when, where and why on this from you and your staff as well. Keep us as legal as



you can. I want the police informed about what we discover, but we will push forward with or without them.”

Dr. Coats, I want you to find out where the drug they used on Sloan came from. Then give the information to Bryan.

Adrian walked over and opened the door. “That’s it. Let’s all get to work. I want a report from each of you by eight this evening. All of you have my private number. I’m available 24/7 for anything concerning my son. Bryan, Danny, I need you to stay so that we can go over a few things.”

Adrian walked over to Dagan and took her by the hand. Together they stood looking out the window at the sun-drenched gardens outside.

“It just doesn’t seem real. It’s such a bright, cheery day for something so dark and evil to be going on,” whispered Dagan.

“You’re right, but something very evil is going on, and I may have to combat evil with evil in order for us to save Christian. Leave me alone with Bryan and Danny. We are going to talk about things that you don’t need to know. I’m going to use every weapon that I have, and I won’t put you at risk. Now leave us and get everything ready for your journey.”

Bryan and Danny sat in the desk chairs facing Adrian.

“We’ve spent four years training you in preparation for challenges like this. I don’t know anybody I’d rather go back to back with in a dangerous situation than the two of you. How do you say it in Gallic *bac to bac*?”

Bryan and Danny both nodded as they replied in unison. “Close enough.”

“The martial-arts discipline that we trained you and Christian in should have you ready to handle personal encounters with these people.”

“Savate, or as the French say, *boxed-franchise*. We are *savateurs*,” said Bryan.

“That ‘box’, whatever sounds like something I might order in a French restaurant.”

“Don’t! That could be harmful,” said Danny.

"*Savate de rue* is what we were trained in. It comes from the ancient form of French-street fighting. We believe it to be one of the lesser-known forms of martial arts, and we achieved silver glove ranking."

"That's the highest rank that one can achieve," added Bryan.

"Your background from the IRA makes the two of you ideal for what lies ahead. Are you up for this?"

"Damn right we are!" both of them replied together.

"How many men do we have in security, trained at your level right now?"

"We have another two dozen men in the Paladin Rangers from the Drost academy in Bogotá trained to a serious level," offered Danny.

"What about your contacts in the IRA? If we needed more men, could you get them?"

"Yes, sir, but their training is quite different. They know how to kill and blow things up, and yes, we can call upon our old mates. Sir, if I may ask, have you considered using more of the people from the Drost Academy in *Bogotá*? We've rescued some very dangerous young men from the streets down there, and Commander Duvall is very experienced in military matters. The Ranger-training program he's set up down there is as good as any military operation."

"No, I hadn't thought of that. My main purpose with the Academy was to pull those young people out of that kind of life. However, nothing is off the table that can help get Christian back. Why don't you look the Ranger operation over and see if anything helpful jumps out."

"Bryan, I want you to head this up for me. Danny, you're next in command. Be sure and check any contacts you may have on the other side of the law. There is no limit on finances. Let's get my son back."

"We won't let you down. We'll find the bastards, and they'll wish that they had booked a vacation to hell in place of this."

There was a strange feeling to the day as Adrian looked at the peaceful scene outside his office. He kept wondering if it was all some kind of nightmare. The Jamaican Blue Mountain Coffee felt smooth going down as it nudged him back to reality. He turned as he heard the door open to find Dagan standing there.

"What time is it?" he asked.

"It's time to leave for the airport," she answered, as she walked over and put her head on his chest.

"Have a cup of coffee with me before you leave."

She looked up at him. Her eyes were mysterious pools of blue that he still found irresistible. He knew that he should be careful when he looked into them. It was a little like the song of the sirens that the Grecian sailors were drawn to. If he looked too long, he'd feared he might be forever lost in their depths.

She sat crossing her legs in the chair facing his desk. She flipped her head back and her black sable hair parted to reveal a classical face, once again reminding him of a Grecian goddess.

"What are we going to do, my darling?" she asked with a slight tremble in her voice.

## CHAPTER 3

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"I don't know. We are cruising to a location off the coast of Cancun where around four this afternoon, a twin-engine Cessna will pick him up on the water. I don't want to know anymore than that. These people pay well and play hard, so to you, I'm the captain and you're a guy without a name."

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\*

After going over the details of the morning's events and listening to Detective Day's response, Adrian knew that Christian's best chance was the Drost organization.

Detective Day was a thin, scholarly-looking man with thinning hair.

"You have a feeling that this might be the work of a pedophile ring or an enemy of mine?" asked Adrian.

"Or both, Mr. Drost. If I were you, I'd make a list of my enemies. It could be a good place to start. In addition, I know that you are a man of considerable power, but you need to leave this to the police. This calls for professionals. Here is my card. Call me if you or your people can think of anything else."

\*

Jonathan wheeled trays loaded with sandwiches and drinks into Adrian's office, as no one had yet taken time for lunch. Philip

Rickman, Adrian's second in command and manager of the Drost Banking Empire, was on the speakerphone, listening as Adrian spoke.

"Each of you has a particular expertise. I need you to draw up a plan on how you can help us get Christian back. I want your thoughts on what you think happened and what can be done."

Adrian stood from behind his desk, walked over to the window, and pulled open the draperies, as he continued speaking.

"We need for all of you to shed as much light on this as possible. No item is too small or too strange to consider. I want to hear everything he continued.

"Philip, I know with our resources that you can find out where the money went, but don't just confine your thoughts to the money. Everyone needs to think outside the box. In addition, make a list of people who could be enemies of mine and give me a background check on each of them."

He turned towards where the twins, "Danny, obtain a list of pedophile groups and check if any of their members have dealt with us."

Philip's voice came over the speaker phone. "I found that the money was wired to the Credit Suisse Group in Switzerland. It was a numbered account and set up to immediately wire the money to a couple of locations--one is in Madrid, Spain, and one in Bogotá, Columbia. Our people at the Drost Academy in Columbia can handle the one in Bogotá within the hour. I've already begun a search in Madrid to stay ahead of their closing time."

"Good work Philip. Get in touch with Interpol and have an inspector ready to work with Dagan. Also, open an account with a million dollars that we can use to pay for information.

"Dagan, I need you to follow up with the banks in Europe on this. I'll have our plane ready to go within the hour. I'll keep you posted on developments over the phone."

He turned and looked at Jason, "I need for you to appoint a couple of your brightest attorneys to deal with whatever legal problems may come up. Don't forget to use the power of our international contacts for lawyers in other countries. I want ideas on who, how, when, where and why on this from you and your staff as well. Keep us as legal as

you can. I want the police informed about what we discover, but we will push forward with or without them.”

Dr. Coats, I want you to find out where the drug they used on Sloan came from. Then give the information to Bryan.

Adrian walked over and opened the door. “That’s it. Let’s all get to work. I want a report from each of you by eight this evening. All of you have my private number. I’m available 24/7 for anything concerning my son. Bryan, Danny, I need you to stay so that we can go over a few things.”

Adrian walked over to Dagan and took her by the hand. Together they stood looking out the window at the sun-drenched gardens outside.

"It just doesn’t seem real. It’s such a bright, cheery day for something so dark and evil to be going on," whispered Dagan.

"You’re right, but something very evil is going on, and I may have to combat evil with evil in order for us to save Christian. Leave me alone with Bryan and Danny. We are going to talk about things that you don’t need to know. I’m going to use every weapon that I have, and I won’t put you at risk. Now leave us and get everything ready for your journey."

Bryan and Danny sat in the desk chairs facing Adrian.

"We’ve spent four years training you in preparation for challenges like this. I don’t know anybody I’d rather go back to back within a dangerous situation than the two of you. How do you say it in Gallic *bac to bac*?"

Bryan and Danny both nodded as they replied in unison. "Close enough."

"The martial-arts discipline that we trained you and Christian in should have you ready to handle personal encounters with these people."

"Savate, or as the French say, *boxed-franchise*. We are *savateurs*," said Bryan.

"That 'box', whatever sounds like something I might order in a French restaurant."

"Don’t! That could be harmful," said Danny.



"*Savate de rue* is what we were trained in. It comes from the ancient form of French-street fighting. We believe it to be one of the lesser-known forms of martial arts, and we achieved silver glove ranking."

"That's the highest rank that one can achieve," added Bryan.

"Your background from the IRA makes the two of you ideal for what lies ahead. Are you up for this?"

"Damn right we are!" both of them replied together.

"How many men do we have in security, trained at your level right now?"

"We have another two dozen men in the Paladin Rangers from the Drost academy in Bogotá trained to a serious level," offered Danny.

"What about your contacts in the IRA? If we needed more men, could you get them?"

"Yes, sir, but their training is quite different. They know how to kill and blow things up, and yes, we can call upon our old mates. Sir, if I may ask, have you considered using more of the people from the Drost Academy in *Bogotá*? We've rescued some very dangerous young men from the streets down there, and Commander Duvall is very experienced in military matters. The Ranger-training program he's set up down there is as good as any military operation."

"No, I hadn't thought of that. My main purpose with the Academy was to pull those young people out of that kind of life. However, nothing is off the table that can help get Christian back. Why don't you look the Ranger operation over and see if anything helpful jumps out."

"Bryan, I want you to head this up for me. Danny, you're next in command. Be sure and check any contacts you may have on the other side of the law. There is no limit on finances. Let's get my son back."

"We won't let you down. We'll find the bastards, and they'll wish that they had booked a vacation to hell in place of this."

There was a strange feeling to the day as Adrian looked at the peaceful scene outside his office. He kept wondering if it was all some kind of nightmare. The Jamaican Blue Mountain Coffee felt smooth going down as it nudged him back to reality. He turned as he heard the door open to find Dagan standing there.

"What time is it?" he asked.

"It's time to leave for the airport," she answered, as she walked over and put her head on his chest.

"Have a cup of coffee with me before you leave."

She looked up at him. Her eyes were mysterious pools of blue that he still found irresistible. He knew that he should be careful when he looked into them. It was a little like the song of the sirens that the Grecian sailors were drawn to. If he looked too long, he'd feared he might be forever lost in their depths.

She sat crossing her legs in the chair facing his desk. She flipped her head back and her black sable hair parted to reveal a classical face, once again reminding him of a Grecian goddess.

"What are we going to do, my darling?" she asked with a slight tremble in her voice.



*Dan Gordan*

Dan Gordan began acquiring information about interesting characters to add textures to his writing as a musician much as Hemingway did by listening to people in Cuban bars. Rock and Roll was exploding on the world scene as his sax took his band from performing on a weekly TV show in high school in Tampa Florida, to performing in colleges and night clubs as the most exciting decade in the twentieth century was emerging.

As a boy while lying back on a rooftop gazing at the stars one night, the age-old questions of who we are, where we come from and where life will take him invaded his mind and continued to call out to him in the future.

Several years later an interest in religious and philosophical disciplines took him on an investigative journey that led to an exploratory adventure into the deep woods. Gordan spent six months alone conducting a purification exercise and studying philosophical and religious works. His explorations for life's answers took him on a trip to England where he was introduced to a philosophical group back in America where his studies included The Kabbalah.

These diverse life experiences provided fertile ground for future novels and writing for a nationally distributed business publication helped hone Gordans skills.

Dan has employed a different style of writing by not outlining his stories. Difficult life challenges are created for each of his characters and he joins them each day to find out where the adventures will take them.

The thought that life is often like navigating in a mine field helped create the path that each of his characters take on their journeys into the future.

**BITTER CANDY** will take you on a journey around the world to the most exotic locations on earth. Christian, Adrian Drost's son is kidnapped by mysterious villains. Adrian will employ the vast resources of his billion dollar international banking empire backed by The Paladin Rangers, his private police force created and saved from the streets of Bogota, Columbia.

They will pursue a Panamanian cartel through the Darren Gap, the most hellish jungle on earth. The gap is completely lawless with death lurking in every direction. The jungle is a swamp filled with jaguars, deadly snakes and flesh-eating insects.

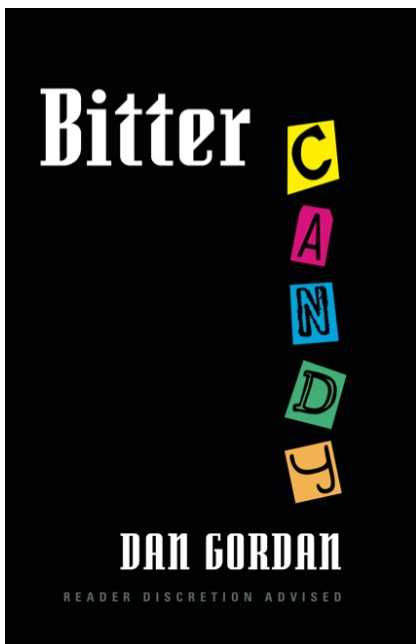
Christian will experience one adventure after another as he rescues a young girl named Angel. He survives a plane crash back into the jungle only to be overcome with amnesia before stumbling into a fierce tribe of blue-eyed natives with long golden hair. The tribe's history goes back for centuries that includes annihilating entire regiments of Spanish Conquistadors and the warriors of Montezuma. No man has ever returned from entering their domain, but their prophet's have foretold of a young man emerging from the jungle to lead their people. They believe that Christian is that young man.

You will become part of the adventure that will take you from the forbidden jungles of the Darren Gap to the ski slopes of the French Alps and sail the high seas on a palatial yacht, The Banshee. You will experience Lord Howe Island located off the coast of Australia where mushrooms glow bright enough after a rain to read by at night.

If you want to experience an adventure seasoned with romance for young and old, read **BITTER CANDY**.

*Straight Ahead!*

*Dan Jordan*



*BITTER CANDY takes you on a world-wide journey after Adrian Drost's son is kidnapped. Adrian employs the resources of his billion dollar empire to pursue him through the Darren Gap, a hellish jungle that is lawless with death lurking everywhere, a swamp filled with Jaguars, deadly snakes and flesh-eating insects.*

## **Bitter Candy**

by Dan Gordan

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