

*A suspense thriller with a different twist - featuring a likable protagonist with a tortured soul - young Tim Kelly embarks on a young Indiana Jones adventure - by first surviving the mean streets of New Orleans and then enlisting in the Coast Guard at age 14 - setting off a roller coaster ride of danger and intrigue.*

## **DARK SIDE OF THE RIVER**

by Jim Gilliam

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# **DARK SIDE OF THE RIVER**

*"CONFRONT THEM WITH ANNIHILATION, AND THEY WILL SURVIVE;  
PLUNGE THEM INTO A DEADLY SITUATION, AND THEY WILL THEN LIVE.  
WHEN PEOPLE FALL INTO DANGER, THEY ARE THEN ABLE TO STRIVE  
FOR VICTORY."*

*— SUN TZU*

**JIM GILLIAM**

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First Edition

# ONE

**YOU HAVE NEVER LIVED** 'til you've almost died. For those who fight for it, life has a flavor the protected will never know. Deputy Sheriff Dave Holt had been asleep for almost five hours. It was by no means a restful sleep; what there was of it had been a fitful sleep, born of stress, fatigue and fear for his young partner, Tim Kelly's, life.

The question—always at the forefront of his mind—robbed him of sleep, *had he encouraged Tim's decision to go undercover, knowing he was possibly sending him to his death?*

At first Kelly had refused the undercover assignment. His personal code of honor would not allow him to betray a friend; especially one who had saved his life on more than one occasion and that might have been the end of it, but for subsequent events sealing his decision to enter the shadow world of drug and human trafficking as an undercover narcotics agent sponsored by his old friend and mentor, Rodolfo Guzman, a kingpin in the powerful and ruthless Campeche Drug Cartel.

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Rodolfo's restored seventeenth-century Spanish hacienda was located on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande, approximately fifteen miles inland from where the river's current collides with the tidal surge of the Gulf of Mexico and heavily fortified and reputed to be vulnerable only to an attack by an organized military force with air and artillery support.

The proximity of the hacienda to U.S. territory would be the crucial element for Kelly's backup rescue team, standing by around the clock to rescue him if he became a prisoner or recover his body if he was killed.

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Somewhere in the twilight-world between sleep and wakefulness, Holt's conscious mind began to stir and he wondered if he was dreaming. *What is that annoying buzzing sound? It can't be time to get up. I just got to sleep.*

He sat bolt upright in bed, staring in disbelief at the small beeper as it buzzed and vibrated its way across the top of his bedside table coming to rest against a half-empty bottle of Wild Turkey—his favorite brand of bourbon, taken neat without the muss and fuss of ice or mixers.

The device had been silent for fourteen months and Holt had almost forgotten why he wore the damn thing and that it was buzzing now disturbed him to the point of nausea.

He snatched the noisy device from the nightstand and silencing the annoying buzzer, he stared in shock and disbelief at the two-word message on the tiny screen:

## **NO JOY**

The universal meaning: “no show,” “not found,” “no luck.” Take your pick.

According to their prearranged plan, Kelly was supposed to contact Holt through a secure telephone at least every five days to pass on any new evidence and at the same time reassure his handler that his cover was still intact and allowing for a day of grace, a total of six days without contact would be taken to mean that Kelly's true identity had become known to the cartel and he was either a prisoner within the confines of Rodolfo's hacienda or he was dead. Neither possibility gave Holt a good feeling.

Picking up the bedside telephone, Holt dialed a number he had committed to memory fourteen months earlier, praying as he did so that his young partner was still alive.

The code number activated a volunteer team of Texas lawmen sworn to carry out a trifold mission that committed them to an illegal, clandestine, armed incursion onto Mexican sovereign territory from which some—possibly all—of them might not return. It was a bold and dangerous plan and not even the most elite units of the Mexican

federal police dared attack Rodolfo Guzman's hacienda representing a renegade state within a state, defying the corrupt Mexican government.

Six days prior to the rescue team's activation Rodolfo Guzman had angrily confronted Kelly with damning evidence of his deception, "I would be very interested in your explanation of these photos of you and Deputy Holt of the Cameron County Sheriff's Department," Rodolfo shouted as he attempted unsuccessfully to control his rising anger by wildly jabbing his right index finger at several grainy black and white photographs covering the top of his massive oak desk.

The photos Rodolfo was so excited about showed Kelly and his soon-to-be stepfather Dave Holt having a relaxed lunch at a local Mexican restaurant. There seemed to be no attempt by either of the men to conceal the encounter.

From the beginning, Kelly had realized that his dangerous double life in the violent shadow world of drug trafficking depended not only on guile but also on an essential communication lifeline to the civilized world and always a realist, he accepted the fact the life expectancy of an undercover narcotics agent was often measured in days.

He had been under for over fourteen months and it forced him to live moment to moment with the gut-wrenching fear that one day his real identity would be discovered. He thought *how much longer can I keep up the charade? I should get out now. That would be the better part of valor.*

But that was never going to happen. He was an adrenalin junkie pure and simple and like any addict—deep down he craved the high that living on the edge provided.

"That's simple," Kelly snapped back, adopting the indignant tone of one who has been falsely accused—at the same time fearing Rodolfo would see through his lies. Maintaining eye contact with Rodolfo and striving to keep his voice free of panic, Kelly continued, "Dave and my mother are getting married in a couple of months. I took my future stepfather to lunch. What's the big deal? Just because I work for you—do I have to get rid of all my old friends? Besides,

Rucho and I have been sworn enemies since junior high. He's had a strong motive to discredit me since I whipped his ass in front of his gang of schoolyard bullies back then."

Rucho moved menacingly toward Kelly, "Try to kick my ass now *cabron*."

Rodolfo checked Rucho's advance with a wave of his hand.

Although he lacked the polish and finesse of the fifteenth-century Italian diplomat, Rucho was extremely intelligent and possessed guile and cunning worthy of a twentieth-century Machiavelli.

The façade he allowed those around him to see was the part he played best—just another muscle-bound thug.

Nothing is ever what it seems especially in the dark world of drug peddlers and arms smugglers and the last person foolish enough to underestimate Rucho simply disappeared. Rucho, had coveted Rodolfo's piece of the Campeche Cartel for years and was patiently biding his time until he could safely make his move, *it will be soon*, he promised himself.

Kelly's entry into the Campeche Cartel under Rodolfo's sponsorship fourteen months earlier played an integral part in Rucho's plans to violently overthrow his boss. Rodolfo had grown soft over the years and was no longer hard enough or ruthless enough to survive in the violent world of drug trafficking and arms dealing—*this softness will be Rodolfo's downfall*, Rucho reasoned.

As Kelly was speaking, Rodolfo appeared lost in thought, as if recalling happier days and then suddenly he said, "Remember the first time we met? I saved your ass when that gang of older boys was preparing to attack you. We became friends that day and since then, I have treated you as if you were my own son. Have I not? That's why *Mijo* your betrayal of our friendship and my trust has broken my heart. At first, I didn't believe Rucho when he came to me with his what I thought to be trumped up charges of your treachery. I decided to give you a test that unfortunately you did not pass. I told you about a drug deal that was so big you couldn't resist passing the information on to your friend Deputy Holt if you were truly an undercover narcotics agent and evidently you didn't realize you were the only one, I confided in."

*DARK SIDE OF THE RIVER*

For the moment Kelly remained silent his mouth dry and his heart pounding. It appeared there was no possible escape. Only a quick death might release him from the pain of the torture he knew would come and as he listened to Rodolfo's angry words he broke into a cold sweat and a wave of nausea came over him—with great difficulty he managed to choke back the burning taste of bile coming up from his stomach into his bone-dry throat.

*I'm dead if I don't get out of here now but how? There's Rodolfo Rucho, and at least three enforcers between me and the door and even if I make it through the door I'm still in the compound,* he thought.



## FIVE

**I**T WAS THE MIDDLE of August and summer was rapidly coming to a close. On the sixteenth of September Kelly would celebrate his fourteenth birthday and while all his classmates were busy preparing to begin their freshman year of high school Kelly was busy packing to begin what he hoped would be the adventure of his life.

This would be his third—and hopefully last—attempt to run away from home furthering his quest for the adventures he had only read about until now.

He was twelve the first time he attempted to run away and join his dad in Freeport, Texas. Hitchhiking he made it as far as Harlingen where he was picked up by a pedophile who attempted to grope his genitals.

Tim pulled a dagger from his boot placed it against the man's rib cage and yelled, "Stop the car and let me out you sick pervert."

The man complied immediately and burned rubber as Kelly watched the car speed away. Stuffing his dagger deep into his duffel bag the boy started hitchhiking again. In retrospect he should have moved off the main road because about fifteen minutes later a police car pulled up next to him and stopped and two policemen got out of the car and motioned for Tim to join them, "What's your name son?" The older patrolman asked.

"Tim Kelly, sir."

"Well Tim Kelly what are you doing out here hitchhiking on the highway?"

"I'm trying to get to Freeport to join my dad."

After a few more minutes of questioning the two officers put him in the back of their police cruiser for transport to the main police station.

The younger officer patted him down before placing him in the back of the cruiser, "What did you do with the knife kid?"

Kelly thought, *if that doesn't beat all—that damn pervert turned me into the cops for pulling a knife on him.*

“What knife?” Kelly said.

“It’s going to be like that is it?” The younger patrolman said.

Neither of the policemen spoke again until they reached the station where in time Kelly’s mother showed up to take custody of her runaway son and the two of them had a protracted mother-son talk on the way back to Port Isabel with his mother doing most—if not all—of the talking.

Kelly’s thwarted attempt to leave home and join his father in Freeport had occurred on a Saturday in the middle of the school year and he was driven to school by his mother the following Monday.

Somehow everyone in school seemed to know all about his aborted attempt to run away from home and he felt ashamed—not that he had tried to run away from home but that the attempt had failed.

He kept pretty much to himself for the remainder of the school year and even though this attempt failed it taught him a valuable lesson. Next time he would make sure he had enough money to take the bus.

Finally, summer arrived and school was dismissed for three glorious months and two weeks later Kelly boarded a bus to Freeport.

His dad was living with his parents and working on a shrimp trawler in the Gulf of Mexico and only returned to Freeport to offload his catch and resupply the boat with ice and fuel and provisions before returning to the Gulf.

When Kelly arrived in Freeport his father was in the Gulf and not due to return for at least another week and his grandmother—good soul that she was—called his mother reassuring her that he was there with them and in good health. “Hello Gertrude this is Mavis. I just wanted to let you know that Timmy is here with us. He got in on the bus last evening and he told me that you knew all about it. You did know about it didn’t you?”

“Yes, I knew he was there,” she almost choked on the lie, Gertrude Kelly had issues with her in-laws, “Is he there?”

“He took a walk to town but I’ll have him call you when he gets back.”

“How about his, father? Wait, skip that, if James isn't out fishing, he's drinking beer and playing dominoes in some dive. He has always been such a great role model for Tim.”

Ignoring the sarcasm Mavis continued, “No James is out in the Gulf on a shrimp boat. Don't know when he's coming back but I'll be sure and have Timmy call you as soon as he gets in tonight.”

Faced with the inevitable Gertrude Kelly consented to Tim spending the rest of the summer in Freeport, “Don't bother Mavis he'll probably get in after midnight. Tell him he can stay there for the rest of the summer but I insist he call me every couple of days unless he's out with James in the Gulf.”

“I'll sure tell him Gertrude. Good talking to you.”

Kelly walked the mile and a half to downtown Freeport stopping at the local pool hall where he thought he would hustle a few games and pick up some pocket change in the process.

Entering the hall for the first time he looked around. The room was three times the size of Torres' pool hall and beer joint back home in Port Isabel with its six standard tables limiting players to eight ball, nine ball and straight pool. This place was a real pool hall with snooker and billiards, as-well-as regular tables, Fat Jack the owner operator came up to him, “What are you doing in here kid?”

“I Thought I'd stop in for a friendly game of pool.”

“Oh, you did, did you? You're not a hustler, are you? Cause if you are, you're not welcome here.”

“I'm no hustler I just like the game.”

“Regular pool snooker or billiards fifteen cents buys you a quarter hour and for two bits you get a half hour and four bits gets you an hour.”

“Here's four bits I'll take a regular table.”

“Table four is ready. What's your name kid?”

“Tim Kelly.”

“Where are you from Tim?”

“I'm from Port Isabel.”

“The name's Fat Jack. Welcome to the Golden Cue.”

As Kelly lined up a shot on the two ball five boys sauntered over to his table—one of them grabbed the cue ball, “You had the wrong angle on that shot new boy.”

“Well that's why they call it practice. So why don't you give me back the cue ball and hide and watch while I finish running the table.”

“And if I don't?”

“Well since I still have two bits worth of time on the clock, I guess I'll just have to ask you for two bits plus two bits more for my trouble.”

“What trouble?”

“The trouble it's going to take to kick your ass.”

The boy whose name was Ronnie Clark smiled and moved his hand towards the knife in his belt, “Well now let me introduce you to my friend Mister Pig Sticker.”

The butt of Kelly's pool cue hit the top of Clark's right big toe with enough force to break it causing Clark to cry out, “Ow you bastard you broke my damn toe.”

Fat Jack moved in fast for a big man and holding a cut off pool cue he said, “What the hell is going on over here? Don't you boys be starting anything in here. Take your disagreements outside. I mean it God dammit.”

“No problems Fat Jack I tripped and tried to recover my balance with my cue and it accidentally came down on this fella's toe. Sorry about that man.”

“You boys get along over here now. I don't want to bar anyone from the club but I will if I have to.”

“That's bullshit Fat Jack my daddy holds the note on this place.”

“Yeah don't count on it junior. Your daddy and I were in the war together and I hear he ain't real happy with you right now,” Fat Jack moved back to his linesman's chair giving him an overview of the large room.

Clark grimaced as he held out his hand to Kelly, “Thanks for covering for me my daddy would skin me alive if he heard I'd offered to pull a blade on anybody.”

“No problem. Sorry I broke your toe.”

“Hey Fat Jack you got any tape?”

“Just some electrical tape it's in the drawer under the cash register. Help yourself to it.”

“Thanks,” Kelly said retrieving the tape.

“What's the tape for Kelly?” Clark said.

“It's a little trick I picked up from our town doctor. You can't put a cast on a broken toe so you buddy tape the broken toe to the next toe. Let's get your boot and socks off; your toe is already starting to swell. You should probably cut the toe out of a tennis shoe to wear until your toe heals.”

“Thanks Kelly it feels better already. I'm Ronnie Clark and that there's Pee Wee Brewster, Sonny Spencer, Gordy James and my cousin Ray Jay Jackson.”

“Nice to meet you all,” Kelly said, shaking hands all around.

“How old are you Kelly?” Clark said.

When questioned about his background and age Kelly always lied. His lies were simple and therefore believable. His new friends were older so he projected himself as older. “I'm seventeen turning eighteen in September.”

Because of his size his newfound friends accepted this fictional age without question and about a week later Kelly and his friends were sitting around a picnic table in the park.

A fat man wearing a hat and vest made from tinfoil shuffled down the street carrying on an animated conversation with an unseen companion.

“Who is that guy? He looks like one of the same weirdo's we have around Port Isabel.”

“That's old slow Joe he talks to aliens in their space ships. Maybe he knows something the rest of us don't. Anyway, he's harmless.”

“Has he always been like that?”

“He was a champion bull rider until he got himself throwed at the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo a couple of years back.”

“Hey hold up there Joe.”

“Hey Mister Clark you boys best get under cover I'm getting a lot of signals from the mother ship today.”

“Thanks for the warning Joe but I heard if you drink enough beer you can block those signals.”

“Is that so? You know best Mister Clark.”

“Tell you what Joe take this money and go and get us a couple of six packs of cold Lone Star. Get yourself a nice bottle of wine and a couple of hamburgers too. You can keep the change for your trouble.”

“Thanks Mister Clark, I'll come back right away.”

“That was a good thing you did there Clark.”

“Think so? Normally I'm a jerk but Joe's a special case. The old man lets him rack out in a room in our barn. He does odd jobs for us and daddy slips him a few bucks now and again and our cook feeds him in the kitchen. Dad was a huge fan when Joe was doing the rodeo circuit. A real shame what happened to him. I don't even know if he has any family.”

“When I first met you Clark I thought, you were just another spoiled rich boy. I hate to be wrong, but you just may be one of the good guys.”

“Well keep that opinion to yourself. I can't have you ruining my bad boy reputation.”

Joe returned with the beer, “Here's your beer and change Mister Clark thank you for the wine and the hamburgers.”

“Keep the change Joe.”

“Are you sure Mister Clark? You gave me a twenty.”

“Okay Joe—if it makes you feel better when you get back to the house you can wash my pickup and rub down my horse.”

“Sure, will Mister Clark I sure will do that for you,” and he turned and walked down the sidewalk carrying on the same animated conversation as before.

Clark opened the beer and passed them around, “You're almost eighteen aren't you Kelly?”

“Like I told you I'll be eighteen in September.”

“Now you don't have to do this if you don't want to but me and the boys have decided to join the Navy. Are you with us?”

“Damn straight I am. Can't let you guys have all the fun, now can I?”

“Good. We'll finish these long necks and put the top down on my car and haul ass on over to Houston and sign up.”

It was too late for Kelly—hopelessly hooked by his lies—to do anything but go along.

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Port Isabel's Police Chief knocked on the Port Isabel City Secretary's open office door and Gertrude Kelly responded to the knock with a cheerful, “Come in George.”

“Gertrude, I didn't realize your son Timmy was old enough to join the Navy.”

“He's not. He's only twelve. Why do you ask?”

“I just received a request for a background check from the Navy recruiter in Houston on a seventeen-year-old Tim Kelly. What should I tell them?”

“Tell them he's twelve.”

When his mom called, Kelly was out on the fishing boat in the Gulf of Mexico with his dad.

When he returned, he was immediately put on a bus and unceremoniously shipped back to Port Isabel and grounded until school started in September.

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Kelly finished packing his bag and taking his savings from the summer's employment as a dollar-an-hour lifeguard on the county beach on South Padre Island—a grand total of \$167.47—a fortune to a 13-year-old kid in the summer of 1956—as he boarded the local bus to Brownsville. He purchased the ticket in advance and hiding in the alley next to the station he boarded the bus at the last possible moment.

Arriving in Brownsville he realized \$167.47 wasn't nearly the fortune he'd thought. He could only afford a \$35.00 bus ticket to New Orleans leaving \$132.47 to live on until he found a job after he got there.

No matter, his adventure had finally begun and that was the important thing.

## THIRTY-TWO

**F**ELICIANO'S CHIEF ENFORCER knocked, then opened the door to his boss's office. "*El médico.*"  
"Show him in, Gonzales."

Impeccably groomed, as befitted the head of the cartel's black-market human organ and tissue operation, Doctor Diego Rivera was tall well-muscled and tanned and he looked very much like the soccer fullback he had been in his university days.

The black-market organ and tissue operation Rivera ran with ruthless efficiency was easily grossing over two-hundred and fifty million dollars annually. These huge profits made the Doctor one of Don Feliciano's favorite earners. The two men exchanged the customary Mexican *abrazo*, "Have a seat, Diego. Make yourself comfortable and tell me about this urgent business you alluded to on the phone."

The doctor mixed himself a drink and sat down in the ornate overstuffed chair facing Feliciano's sixteenth-century oak desk, "With government troops aided by the American CIA and Special Forces closing in on him, my old classmate from medical school, Che Guevara, has become desperate and is hoping to turn some World War Two germ bombs into cash to support his revolutionary activities."

Rivera moved to the bar added some ice and three fingers of Johnny Walker Blue Label to his glass and returned to his chair, "Countries build up stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction, such as ICBM missiles capable of carrying a nuclear warhead, nerve gas or even weapons-grade biological cultures like inhalation anthrax. These things act as deterrents to the other side doing the same thing and you can apply this same reasoning to the cartels."

Feliciano held up his hand, "How so?"

"If the Campeche Cartel was the only cartel possessing germ warfare capability and if none of the other cartels knew that we had that capability, we could control the drug flow into the United States and Canada by introducing inhalation anthrax into the ventilation



systems of our rival cartel's factories. Anthrax is a spore-forming organism that becomes airborne by attaching itself to particles of dust or powder and introducing airborne anthrax into an environment full of cocaine or heroin dust would infect anyone handling the product and how long do you think it would take before the word got out that the only safe product comes from us?"

Feliciano's facial muscles relaxed into a smile, "You would of course set up and manage this germ warfare program?"

"Not me. I'm a surgeon not a microbiologist. However, I do have someone in mind."

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Gathering information from several criminal and government sources—both in the U.S. and Mexico—at a cost of over a million dollars, Doctor Rivera succeeded in locating Doctor Hienrich Fleischer, the reclusive, self-proclaimed world's foremost authority on germ warfare.

If the information was correct, Fleischer's location was the site of a secret government germ warfare facility, abandoned at the end of 1945 and that it was carved into the Trans-Pecos Mountain Range made it ideal for carrying out clandestine biological research.

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He was somewhere between Alpine and Fort Stockton, Texas. The morning temperature was rising rapidly and there was no breeze. The air-conditioner in his rented Willys Jeep station wagon didn't work and the windows were open and the clouds of road dust mixed with his sweat formed muddy patches on his face and arms and upper torso.

No longer on the blacktopped Farm-to-Market Road, he'd been bouncing down this dusty rutted goat trail of a road toward the foothills of the Trans-Pecos for over two hours. He was hot and tired and thirsty and the combination made him impatient and ill tempered. He reached into the cooler sitting on the passenger seat and removed an ice-cold can of Budweiser and placing the can between his thighs, he popped the top with his right thumb and

forefinger while holding the wheel as steady as he could with his left hand and raised the can to his parched lips and allowed the cold beer to slide down his throat. He smiled, belched, and continued drinking. Taking more measured sips now. *That's more like it*, he thought. *I'd prefer breakfast in bed with Champagne and a beautiful woman. But for now, a cold beer will do nicely.*

Rivera passed a third “No Trespassing” sign. This one warned, “Turn Back Now or Deadly Force Will Be Used.”

As if to punctuate the words on the sign, a burst of M-60 machine gun fire tore into the trail ahead of the Jeep.

He slammed on the brakes and turned the wheel hard to the left—the engine stalled.

A voice from a hand-held bullhorn within the helicopter hovering overhead, said, “Get out of your vehicle with your hands in the air and spread-eagle face down on the ground. Do it now.” The speaker fired another short burst from his door-mounted M-60 over Rivera’s head.

The helicopter touched down in a whirl of dust and debris and three armed men, all dressed in desert camouflage and wielding assault rifles, surrounded Rivera, “Get on your feet. Who are you, and what are you doing here?”

Two of the gunmen dragged Rivera to his feet before he could stand by himself.

Rivera was seething with rage, “Take your hands off me, *Hijos de puta*. My name is Doctor Diego Rivera, and I have business with your employer, Doctor Heinrich Fleischer and I demand that you take me to him at once.”

“You hear that, boys? The doctor demands.” The men were laughing, “Listen, Doctor, you’re not in a position to demand anything shut up and do as you’re told.”

A fourth gunman joined the group. He seemed to be in charge. He was speaking into a handheld walkie-talkie, “Yes, sir, we’ll bring him in right away.” The man pointed his finger at Rivera and motioned him to the helicopter. Flanked by the other three gunmen, Rivera boarded the helicopter and took a seat in the cargo bay.

The pilot looked at the fourth man who gave him a thumbs-up and the aircraft lifted off and headed in the direction of the side of the mountain.

Just when it appeared as though the aircraft was about to crash into the mountain, the rocks parted, revealing a giant hangar inside.

The pilot hovered in place until the huge doors were fully open. Then eased the aircraft into the hangar.

As the rotor blades came to a stop, a tall man in a white lab coat approached and one of the gunmen elbowed Rivera in the ribs and motioned for him to get out.

Rivera stopped in front of the man in the lab coat and shook the man's outstretched hand, "Welcome, Doctor Rivera. I am Doctor Petrovich, Doctor Fleischer's chief research assistant. Our agent in Alpine informed us you were coming. I trust your welcome was not too harsh. Some of our mercenary security forces tend to be a little zealous at times. I think they just get bored. Follow me, please."

"No problem. You can't be too careful these days, I suppose. When will I see Doctor Fleischer?"

"All in good time, Doctor. Meanwhile, let's get you a shower, some fresh clothing and some refreshments."

Leaving the hangar bay, they passed through a series of electronically controlled airlocks. Finally, they were in a long corridor.

Stopping in front of one of the doors, Petrovich said, "I think you'll find everything you need inside. I'll return in an hour to take you to Doctor Fleischer."

The room resembled a high-end four-or-five-star hotel suite. On a sideboard, at the far side of the room and next to the fully stocked wet-bar, coffee, fresh fruit and assorted gourmet snacks were available with clean slacks, a shirt, underwear and socks were on the bed.

*I wonder how they got my size*, Rivera mused as he poured a cup of black coffee.

Exactly one hour later Petrovich opened the electronically controlled door.

It had not escaped Rivera's notice that the door only locked from the outside.

"I see that you've cleaned up. Good, Doctor Fleischer is ready to see you now."

Rivera followed his guide through the maze of corridors to another airlock. On the far side, a hermetically sealed elevator-style door opened into a huge office, whose furnishings included a conference table surrounded by ten chairs on each side. There was a larger chair at the head of the table as though intended for a powerful man with an ego to match.

A fully stocked bar blended into a floor-to-ceiling bookcase covering an entire wall and containing hundreds of books and manuals on every subject imaginable.

The thing that piqued Rivera's interest most was the full-scale model of HemisFair Park. Presently under construction to accommodate the throngs of tourists expected during the 1968 World's Fair in San Antonio.

Doctor Heinrich Fleischer entered through a hidden door, revealed when a section of the massive bookcase swung into the room on hydraulic hinges, "Ahh, Doctor Rivera. I trust my people have seen to your needs."

"Yes, everything has been most satisfactory," Rivera said, while thinking, *this whole setup gives me an uneasy feeling. I don't know what it is about this place, but there is something evil going on here. It's almost palpable.*

Scowling at Rivera's outstretched right hand, Fleischer said, "I don't shake hands. It's one of my several idiosyncrasies."

He motioned toward one of the chairs, "Have a seat, Doctor and tell me about yourself. You have just the one doctorate?"

"Yes, in medicine. I'm a practicing surgeon in Mexico."

"I see. I myself have four doctorates, including medicine. Your English is good. Is it your first or second language?"

"It's my first. My mother was American."

"I myself speak eight languages. I seem to have a natural gift for them."

“English, Spanish and a little French is the extent of my linguistic ability.”

“Pity. My agents inform me you work for the Campeche drug cartel. I’m a microbiologist of international acclaim, not a biochemist and by all accounts, the Campeche Cartel is doing extremely well in the drug and human organ and tissue business, which begs the question, why are you here?”

“The Cartel has obtained an amount of weapons-grade anthrax and we need someone to develop a germ warfare program for us. Our ultimate goal is to control all of the cocaine and heroin going into the United States and Canada.”

“How interesting. You said weapons grade. What gives you that impression?”

“The original strains came from Japan’s secret Unit Seven Thirty-One, before the Japanese destroyed that facility at the end of World War Two.”

“And you know this, how?”

Rivera took out the Polaroid photos obtained from his friend Che Guevara and spreading them on the desk in front of Fleischer, he said, “The Japanese characters on the sides of these canisters indicate that they contain pulmonary anthrax spores.”

“You don’t have to interpret for me, Doctor Rivera. I read Japanese fluently.”

Playing to Fleischer’s ego, Rivera said, “Tell me, Doctor. Why does someone of your obvious genius seemingly drop off the face of the earth to live the life of a recluse here in this mountain?”

“I was betrayed by my country and the Army and my so-called friends and colleagues and even my wife left me for one of my graduate students and when I was in the Army, I worked at this very facility until 1945. In those days, I tried to tell them airborne anthrax was the ideal biological weapon of the future. Even then, my work on a highly sophisticated anthrax vaccine was almost complete. However, according to my enemies, I was supposedly mentally unstable. Lesser men were stealing my ideas and my life’s work and the Army banished me to Brooke Army Hospital in San Antonio, not to head the microbiology department, as I should have done, but as a

junior microbiologist. I was furious—of course—but when I protested, the Army’s position was if I didn’t like it, I could always resign my commission and I vowed to do just that, but on my terms and at a time of my choosing. The Army took from me, so I would take from the Army before my departure. Then the rumors that I had been selling secrets to the Russians started. I lost my security clearance and I was forced to resign—my life was in shambles. However, they could not steal the key elements of my research locked in my brain.”

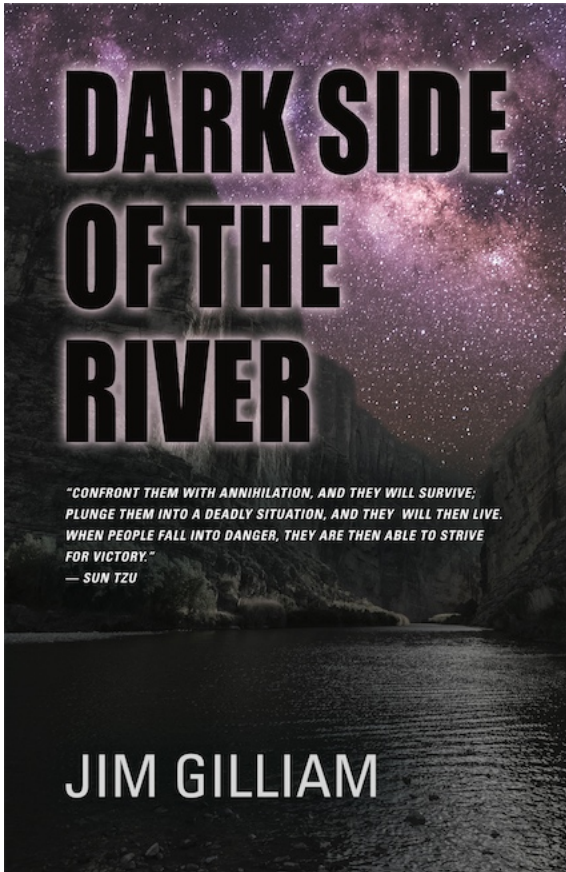
“That is a fascinating story. But tell me, why did you return here? Aren’t you afraid your enemies will find you and silence you once and for all?”

“This was a secret facility and it is not in the Army inventory of abandoned bases and you saw first-hand some of my security measures.”

“Aren’t you afraid the people who shared the secrets of this place will divulge the information to the Army chain-of-command?”

Fleischer almost smiled. His deep-set dark eyes gave nothing away, “I don’t think there’s much chance of that happening, Doctor Rivera. You see of the hundred and fifty people who knew about this place and what was really going on here. I’m the only one still among the living.”

Fleischer was like a king cobra, with his cold-eyed stare and Rivera the mesmerized prey. Rivera experienced a cold chill followed by an involuntary shudder. Any doubts he may have had about Fleischer’s mental state were gone—he sat across the table, fascinated by Fleischer—a stone cold psychotic serial killer.



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