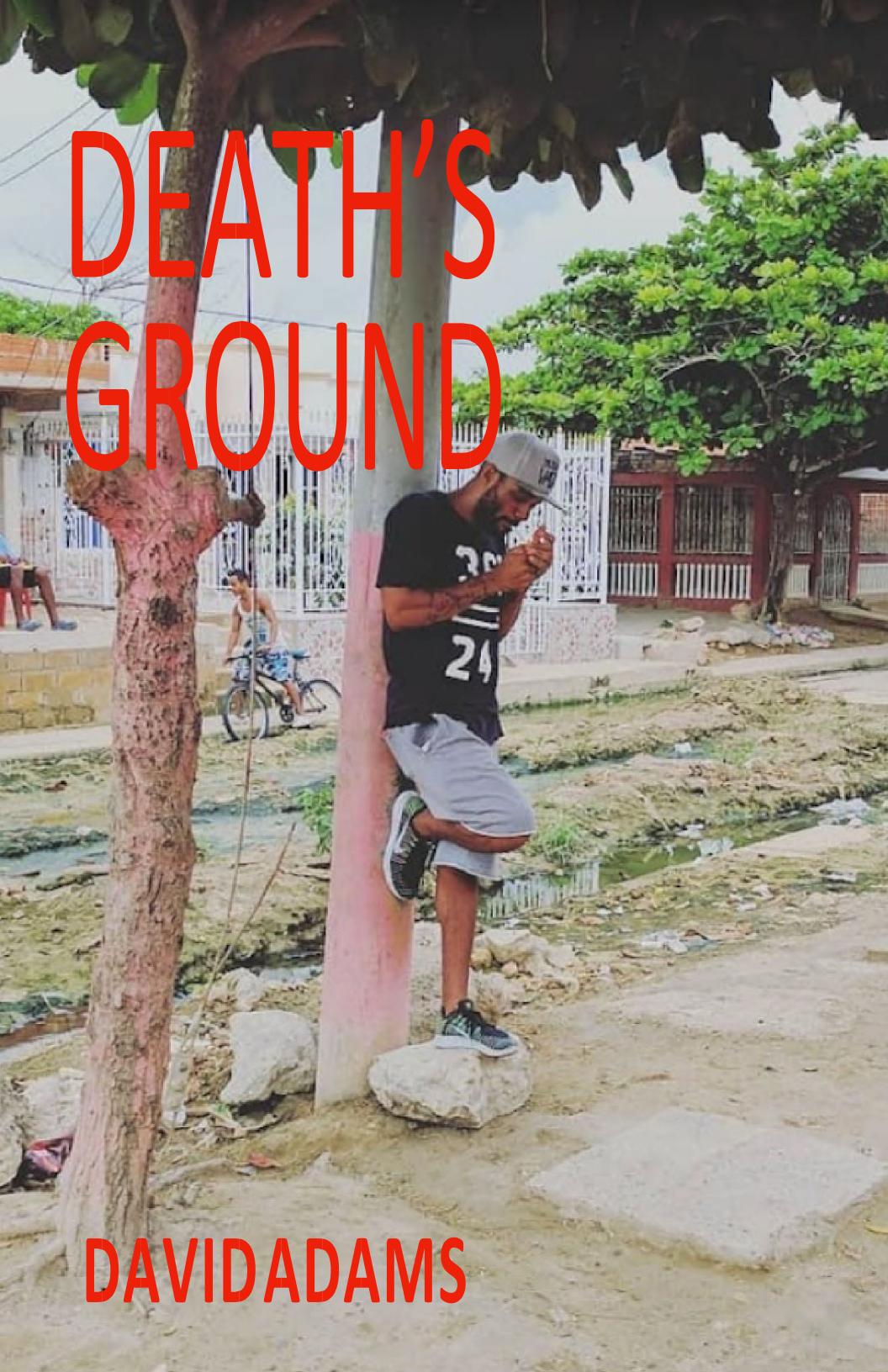


DEATH'S GROUND

A photograph of a man sitting on a large, light-colored rock in a debris-strewn, possibly post-disaster, urban environment. He is wearing a black t-shirt with the number '24' on it, grey shorts, and a grey baseball cap. He is looking down at a small object in his hands. In the background, there are other people, a bicycle, and buildings under a cloudy sky. The scene is framed by large tree branches in the foreground.

DAVIDADAMS

DEATH'S GROUND

DAVID ADAMS

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PROLOGUE

The caribbean-breeze whispers secrets through crumbling coral walls, carrying the tang of salt and the hum of salsa from sundrenched plazas.

Cartagena pulses with limitless vibrant life, a kaleidoscope of mango-tinted and cobbled-stones streets with laughter and rum soaked smiles.

Yet, beneath the shadows, stir.

Their dance unseen by the tourists' sipping mojitos, unheard by the children chasing pigeons.

In this city of contrasts, where beauty and brutality share the same cobblestones. So does Frank Mateo.

If we are being honest, it is technically Francis. Francisco. Morris. Matthews. He is, no more, no fucking less, a Latino than Donald fucking Trump. But on this present trip he is convinced his path in life was, “Make Cartagena Great Again!”

Three years ago, Mateo descended here. Legend has it via nothing more than slow current of the warm Atlantic Ocean. A storm-tossed antagonist or hero washed up and away by War.

Cartagena embraced him, its humid air clinging to him a lover's caress, even though its underbelly equally feasted on and fed him with experiences, challenge, and pleasures untold. He built his fortress amongst its fortified towers. A haven cloaked in the guise of luxury, echoing with the whispers of the forgotten and the ghosts of the memory of those left behind.

Music became his refuge, each bullet playing its part in a symphony. Born from the cacophony of gunfire and the whispers of regret. Each note a shot fired in warning against the encroaching darkness. A message of resolve with lack of insistent yet undeclared enemy. Each harmony a fragile peace treaty with the demons clawing at his soul.

Greatness was the title given to his latest creation. A defiant declaration against the gnawing hollowness that threatens to consume him.

But the past isn't so easily buried by Cartagena's warm embrace. One glance in the wrong shadows. One careless breath in the wrong plaza. That could mean your last.

A face he thought lost to memory twists with avarice. Hurmahn! A phantom conjured from the ruins of a forgotten deal; a betrayal etched in blood.

The air crackles with unspoken violence, the silence between them a loaded revolver pointed at the sun-drenched plaza. In that split second, years of battle converge, hardening Mateo's gaze, steeling his resolve. This isn't the first tango he's danced with death, nor the last, and hurmahn is just another note in the macabre symphony of his existence.

He seeks solace in the steel and concrete jungle of his tower, seeking counsel from his ally, a fellow traveler on this path paved with thorns. Their bond, forged in the crucible of blood and betrayal, is an unspoken pact, a shared understanding of the dance they both perform with death.

"Law 15," was the discussion, a cold calculus of consequences echoing in the sterile penthouse bathed in moonlight.

As Cartagena sleeps, oblivious to the storm brewing within its walls, Mateo sets his plan in motion. The domino, hurmahn, must fall. It's the only way to restore balance, the only way to silence the chorus of whispers demanding retribution. This fight isn't about right or wrong, it's about the brutal calculus of survival, a game played with shadows and bullets in the moonlit alleys of Cartagena.

The sun will rise soon, painting the city in vibrant hues, tourists will flock to its beaches. But in the shadowed corners, where Mateo walks, echoes of his war will linger, a stark reminder of the price exacted for the fragile peace he craves. The question remains, can a warrior, haunted by the shadows of his past, ever find solace in the sun-drenched embrace of Car-ta-heyna?

Only time, and the relentless dance with death, will tell!

Chapter 1

WAR READY



The morning Cartagena sun seeping through the blinds in Mateo's studio is a reminder that he has once again been working all night. This is not out of the ordinary for

him. Staying up night after night has begun to take its toll.

He is years into this current occupation of this foreign land. Regardless, this night was worth it, even if he did not realize it yet.

Mateo just finished recording his new song "Greatness," he is proud of how far he has come in his music-producing journey. In addition to becoming a seasoned strategist and combat-tested warrior, he sees this accomplishment as just another victory in his long three-year war campaign.

His music is the therapy to keep the soldier's mind occupied; in a modest attempt to avoid fighting his "Last War," But war is all he has come to know. It is his practice to apply his experiences to a melody to pass the time.

Possibly forgotten why he began this Odyssey in the first place. The exhausted soldier honestly does not remember his said mission goal.

Mateo decides to take a much-needed break. Grabs his phone and a wad of Colombian Pesos. Throwing on a California Bear snapback, he is headed to the bodega on the other side of the KyYay. Not something he puts much thought into risk-wise.

Mateo has a reputation as a man who is always ready for battle, his head on a figurative swivel to his surroundings, looking out for potential threats. Anywhere he does not have control is enemy territory. Which, at this point, is anything outside of the two towers of his residence.

A target on his back and the eighteenth floor are his reality. His physical-fitness routine consists of taking the stairs to stay in shape, and it also helps him evade any potential encounters with unwanted people or events.

Mateo has been in South America for the last three years. The man that entered Bogota three years ago and the man that stands before you today is the same individual by no means or any stretch of the imagination.

Mateo has been living on Death's Grounds for quite some time, growing eerily accustomed to it. He does not know who or what he is becoming, but he knows that the rest of the world does not understand his transformation.

Mateo silently exits his third world Luxury Apartment home, nodding at the security guards. He is well-known by Security - for better or worse.

Mateo is no stranger to fostering and mediating fragile relations in his current role as a “One-man Army and Master of His War.”

Mateo glances over to his left as he passes through the lobby. A hauntingly familiar face stares back at him, but he cannot quite place it.

“Como Se llama,” Frank asks in Spanish. The man furrows his brow before replying, “Mi nombre es Marteen.”

Mateo’s brain, although poorly rested and only aided by cocaine-induced insomnia. Suddenly had an explosion of verbal and emotional aggression. He switches to English, so no one in the lobby can understand his response to the man.

“Nah Motherfucker, your name is hurmahn Naranjo! Three Years Ago, you stole sixty-eight million pesos from me and willingly left your fate in the hands of destiny. I gave you my promise on that day. Made in blood. No matter the time or distance. My face, the face of no regrets, the face of justice’s scale, the face of death. It would be the last face you would see before you left this earth.”

“Today is that promised day, mi amigo. Today all scales will be balanced, all checks paid in full, no unpaid debts further permitted, and no remaining balances.”

“I have resided in Hell and battled with its inhabitants on a relentless non-conforming, non-forgiving, soul-altering journey to deliver the final terms of our non-negotiable contract. Welcome!” As he permits the man entrance into his underworld.

During the encounter, building security did truly little in response to the altercation in the lobby between Mateo and the Ghost from his past, maybe because they did not understand what was being said or maybe because Mateo had earned a reputation of a man not to be played with or challenged.

The door attendant tells Mateo, “You are a Loco Gringo,’ continuing to explain in Spanish that even though he did not

understand completely what was said. He understood that the man told Mateo his name was Marteen. But his name is Hurmahn, and he is a guest of a resident in Tower 2.

Mateo offers the door attendant no less than, one-half of one million pesos for Hurmahn's location. This was simply a few more numbers to figure out, on an apartment door.

Mateo knew this was basically one month's salary to the door attendant!

The information is exchanged as if he already knew it would be expected.

Mateo immediately goes to meet with his Russian associate, who resides in the penthouse of his Tower 1. He then calmly reminds his associate of previous conversations between the two over the last year of their friendship.

Without any unnecessary over-explanations and with a total lack of indignation of any version of Frank that landed in Bogota 3 years earlier.

His ^{Russian} associate tells Mateo, "Do not worry, comrade, this alliance we made on these hallowed grounds that death resides, where we have become so comfortable.

It is the most honest homeland we will ever know."

Explaining that Mateo "must crush his enemy totally" because "Even a little tiny ember left unextinguished is more than enough to leave the forest ablaze," the "Eastern-European-Don, advises Mateo.

These things Mateo needed not explained to him; Law 15 was not to be taken lightly or hesitated upon.

Destiny had added the equation of thousands of miles of distance, years of patience, the random longitude and latitude

positions, the division of the hundreds of thousands of scenarios, and the exponential liabilities and assets drained all for this moment. It correctly calculated all necessary variables for the moment of destiny.

Only Mateo had the formula for this moment. For if Mateo was nothing other, he was hell-bent on balancing his Libra-scales and, primarily, being a man of his word.

Despite the blurring of the moral compass that governed the current battlefield, whether it be Guerrilla, Dirty, Economic, or Internal Warfare practices, Mateo was considered an expert in his solo campaign.

He had endlessly prepared for this moment. It would be the culmination of all events, all his fears, all his regrets. If this was Goliath, he was David indeed. These last three years were his journey and his alone.

For the price of a cheap throw rug and the loyalty of two of Colombia's finest. That Mateo had bought and paid for over the last three years in bribes.

The simple request of their employer was not driven by what was right or wrong but solely by the practices of the Art of War. Hardened and cold, Mateo had zero regrets, or fucks left to give, on the finality of his decision.

It was later reported that two men were seen carrying a large throw rug out of the loading dock.

At the same time, the building security cameras conveniently had a media codec error caused by a power outage, which was common in the city with one of the most significant wealth gaps in the world.

CHAPTER 2

LAST TIME HOME



It would be the last time he would see the home where he raised his only son. He returned to finish moving the last few boxes because the property had just been sold. Frank arrives home to find a familiar but uninvited guest in his living room.

It is a wolf in sheep's clothing disguised as a friend named Willy. "Hey man, what is up with that money I asked you if I could borrow, I just need to hold four grand quick. Then I got you right back soon as I move this pack," appeals Willy. Frank had just come into a considerable sum of money, and vultures were circling.

Frank is on his way out of the country to a magical place. But before he leaves, his real-life tests begin. Frank wonders why someone who calls themselves a friend would ask for such a favor the night before Frank leaves the country indefinitely.

Frank senses the deceit and betrayal in the underlying factors of the present request. This event would mark the beginning, foreshadowing the danger in waiting.

But Frank was not in the mood, did not possess the patience, or was only tired of the world's bullshit. He was appalled by the request, which was met with disdain and rejection. That only South-Central Los Angeles violence can teach.

"Aye! Bruh, check this out, it might look like I don't live here no more, but I can assure you without a fucking doubt, this is still my

private residence, and I don't fucking remember unlocking no type of door to let you in this bitch," Frank states in a displeased tone.

"To keep it one hundred, you have been hanging around them bitches too long. You starting to sound like one," Frank adds.

The tension in the room has grown exponentially because of the nature of Frank's disrespectful reply to Willy's request; he feels his manhood has been challenged. So, for two men raised by the streets, this only has one outcome, violence.

"You gonna get enough of calling me a bitch, keep that shit up; we can step outside," Willy threatens.

Frank mentally questions his associate's sincerity in wanting to fight, as much as his commitment to repay the potential loan.

Since this residence was empty, Frank did not see any reason it would be necessary to step outside. Followed by an unannounced jab to Willy's mouth.

A violent ruckus ensues in what used to be the living room. Frank's favorite room. Primarily because of how spacious it was for his oversized L-shaped couch. But now, it provided just enough space for Frank to back his words.

It was a brief altercation that nosey neighbors and the words, "The police are on their way," quickly ended.

Frank would not allow anything to hinder his trip the following day.

He made his getaway leaving behind any possessions still in his home. See, this was the beginning of the mindset that he would need to adopt if he were going to survive his journey.

But there was one thing that hurt more than anything that he was leaving behind, his son. His son was his best friend, biggest

fan, most avid supporter, and the only thing he had ever absolutely loved.

So, on his last night, in the city where he was born, he would spend it with the most essential person in his life, or so he thought.

His son was waiting for him at Frank's mother's home. Frank and his mother had a rocky relationship that showed no signs of improvement.

Nor was she in support of his present spiritual journey. She had no problem letting him know that in her best approach, belittlement.

Frank saw his mother as everything he never wanted to be. And this was one of the main functions for the motivations of doing what only Frank seemed to understand.

After his mother let Frank know, he was not welcome in his own home, the only thing left to discuss was the explanation to his son about; Why Daddy had to go away for a while?

He began to review all the teachings he had passed on to his son over the years. He proceeds, "Following your dreams, challenging your limits, and that a man's purpose in life is to find his purpose in life."

Frank honestly believed that actions speak louder than words, and if he did not back the teachings to his son, they would all be for naught.

No one understood Frank's actions then, but he was confident that they would grow to appreciate it in the future.

On Frank's last night in the city, he decides to go out in style. He rents a room at a high-rise hotel downtown, where he had always wanted to stay.

Frank was new money, and he enjoyed every second of it. Even though he graduated from his ivy league alma mater on scholarship, his class was anything but bought, financed, or given.

7 am alarm awakes the newly affluent. But the notice began at 6 am for an 8:30 am international flight. Frank needed to arrive on time. So, we must remember that Frank will not allow anything to affect his journey.

Black Monogram, Louis Vuitton Duffle, and Tumi suitcase in tote. He shoots the valet an extra \$100 to hurry. The valet pulls the Cadillac CTS V-Sport to Frank immediately. Although Frank takes on far more than any average man should, he believes in necessary redundancies and fail-safes.

The current issue was morning rush hour traffic in Los Angeles. Frank jammed his foot on the accelerator, and the 425 horses in the Twin-Turbo engine roared to life.

“If the journey starts now, let the games begin,” Frank asserts. With the speed pass purchased for this moment, he roared away from the Biltmore Valet, burning rubber down the 110 South Freeway entrance.

Twenty minutes later, he arrived at LAX long-term parking, his soul vibrating with a newfound sense of power, as if he had conquered time itself. He knew he did not need to rush, but the world needed to slow for him.

CHAPTER 3

THE DEPARTURE



A

rriving at the gate late, Frank was greeted by his initial “Amigo Calmate” salutation. First, but not the last. Why would he think an international flight leaving in 20 mins would be ready for take-off? Of course not. Frank had not arrived yet.

These delusions of grandeur were nothing more than a culture shock that was the unneccessariness of rushing for life. Stop and enjoy it. These beliefs in efficiency and promptness were capitalist values; that he would learn to cherish them less and less every day.

The family dismay, abandoned, the dream realized, not deferred, and the scales balanced. Frank pops a Klonopin and reads his monitor in front of his seat. Four hours to Bogota, Colombia, “Where the magic lhivs.” Frank laughs to himself, an inside joke, “Magic means cocaine in Spanish.”

When Frank arrives in Bogota, a couple of things cross his mind. “I must call Kent in Cartagena to ensure he’s checked into the new Airbnb.” Kent is Frank’s Business partner in their media ventures.

This was considered a business expense, so Frank treated his partner to the fruits of the hustle. As repayment for believing in the dream, Frank ensured he was in good company and quality camera gear.

Kent was making the most of his trip, having arrived in Cartagena 3 days earlier than Frank's schedule would allow. The second thing that crossed Frank's mind was fifty grams of Heavy Hitters Cartridges in his luggage.

They seemed like a low-risk gamble. Who would be stupid enough to smuggle drugs into Colombia?

Chances were high that even if found. Vape Cartridges were as foreign as the kid from South Central in South America. Colombian inbound customs is no different than the ridiculousness of a bouncer in a gun club. It is a false sense of security.

After clearing Customs, Frank had just graduated to international smuggler with fifty grams of 97% pure THC extract—the first to be trafficked into Colombia. Frank descends from the Mecca of Marijuana. In his culture, you do not show up to people's homes empty-handed. He may have left his Mecca but was prepared to continue as usual.

To the Trap Gods, a sacrifice, if you may. Frank knew the Trap was a literal and figurative ideology. It will trap your soul, body, freedom, choices, options, view of the world, and what is real.”

But figuratively, it was Darwin's Theory, “Survival of the Fittest, on Steroids.”

He carried a manual he assessed as he prepared for his journey. The writings of Sun Tzu and Robert Greene. He quickly realized this was not a journey but a war with many levels, enemies, unforeseen obstacles, phases, fronts, and double agents.

Any day without war is a day of delusion. The battle in your mind was constant, the most crucial, and was prioritized as such. The various strategies were already waging war on Frank's culmination.

In The Art of War, Sun Tzu says, "No man truly knows himself until he has met himself on Death's ground." Death's Ground is a place of glory or tragedy, for a man has only two simple options.

Life or Death at this moment, and only this moment, does a man know what he is truly made of. Sun Tzu even goes as far as to say that you are not a man if you have never experienced this hollowed earth.

These words would be echoed in the eternity of Mateo's Mind. Frank is bred from the filth of the eighty's crack boom and the piercing of the unsterilized needle entering his father's vein, speed balling, so he has been told.

But in Colombia, "Where the magic lhivs." Mateo was born. Frank was not ready for what lay ahead, only Mateo, as he would be known. Only Mateo could do what was necessary despite the duplicitous nature of need combined with opportunity.

Mateo is the man that emerged from the Avianca flight that landed at Cartagena airport just after midnight. Frank had read about many things to avoid when arriving. But Mateo could not give two fucks. He flagged down the first taxi driver he saw that was with the culture.

From the beginning, the driver sent vibes of obscurity and distrust. But on Death's Ground, there was no time to waste on questionable circumstances. Only necessities and tools.

To spark a conversation, the driver asks Mateo, "Where did he traffic himself from in the United States." This was small talk Mateo had no interest in.

If Mateo was being honest with his thoughts, he wanted to know where the fish scale was, he had secretly coveted. In a Zenlike reading of Mateo's mind, but much more likely a ubiquitous question, "Do you need Coca"?

“Does one go to space to avoid the moon?” Such a philosophical response to such an easy answer. “When in Rome....”

Now the details of what happened over the next one hour.

Mateo’s first Hour in this magical place will play a key role in making decisions over the next seven days. This is neither a disclaimer nor a warning, only a statement of fact. Mateo’s driver retrieved about 15 to 20 grams of coke that Mateo trusted to be pure as much as he trusted his next breath.

Mateo had prepared himself for these negotiations over the price of the initial narcotics purchased. \$10 a gram was what he was willing to pay. The driver countered with \$30. Mateo quickly replies, “That is preposterous. It is only \$50 freely at my disposal in Los Angeles for the previous decade.” In an almost epiphanytype moment, the driver replies, “Yes, but you don’t have this in California.”

How could Mateo argue with such an obvious fact? Nor did he care upon careful mental computations involving supply, demand, convenience, and some desire to fulfill some distorted exotic thrill.

The taxi ride and the cocaine cost Mateo about 900,000 pesos—the price of admission for his newfound wealth.

But little did Mateo know he had just been dropped in what could easily equate to the “1969 Cambodia-Vietnam” border. The inhabitants were expert hustlers and extortionists, but only for 24 hours of the day.

The beauty and exoticism of the beach lure like a siren. But appreciating her beauty with the lack of awareness of all things seen or unseen makes you her newest victim.

He would soon learn that you are either the predator or prey in Cartagena. “This is Death’s Ground, bought and paid for.”

CHAPTER 4

THE ARRIVAL



Frank arrives at the Milano to greet Kent. Quickly after the greeting, Frank pours a line of cocaine. unfit for a beginner.

Kent is of zero surprise that Frank had the resources to find Colombia's crown jewel before even his exit from the airport to the high-rise luxury apartment in the community of Marbella. Nestled between a breathtaking view of the midnight Atlantic Ocean, a stone's throw from Cartagena Airport, and just north of the Upscale Neighborhood of Boca-Grande.

Frank informs Kent, "I have wasted no time beginning the festivities because I have plans for two women. companions to join us tonight."

To hold on to the moral fortitude that bred Kent back home in his two-parent Christian household in Los Angeles, he says he will run out and grab protection for the night's indiscretions.

As he exits the apartment, he asks Frank's preference. Frank's humble response was, "The biggest size they got... the biggest size they got."

Frank's motives for his trip are numerous. Still, the critical component is to research the elements of a Narco genre biopic

that he is willing to sacrifice all necessary to be as authentic as possible.

He takes to social media to post a vague declaration of commitment to this creative process and his small victory in securing the fish Scale he coveted for consumption.

His Facebook post reads, “Took Me all, three minutes, when in Rome....”

Although the post lacked specifics, anyone familiar with Frank knows what the post is alluding to. Frank sees it as such a small event at the time. But its effect will cause ripples through the rest of this journey that our hero has committed to, far before he understands what lies ahead. Frank then follows his post with a personal video documenting the motivations and goals behind this magical journey he begins unknowingly.

Under the influence of the purest Colombian cocaine, Frank has touched until this exact moment in his life. He begins a tirade of explanations, beliefs, and philosophical life questions.

He tries to convince his audience of one; he knows where he has made camp and is ready for all trials and tribulations. His video borders on clairvoyance of what is to come, but his arrogance only foreshadows all he must learn about what would become his new home.

Kent returns with the contraceptives that Frank quickly realizes will be useless to him. Kent says, "They didn't have any magnums." Frank declares, "That will not ruin my plans for tonight."

Frank then shows Kent the two women that would be arriving soon. They have a brief discussion of which woman would be for whom. Frank shows his indecision, but Kent has no quarrels with

his choice, and it is decided this will be the arrangements for the evening.

Frank proceeds with festivities of his ski fest with small mountains of cocaine he consumes with the total lack of any plan for controlled dosages.

Frank was on a cloud all his own. Kent and Frank had different versions of letting loose. In other words, Kent was not a coke user, but that did not slow Frank's approach to living in his moment of what he considered to be his best life.

When the two women arrived, neither man felt an ounce of disappointment. So, they both ventured off to start their private parties.

Frank wasted no time letting his date know he was new money and could make all her dreams come true if he saw fit.

He was then indoctrinated into levels of sexual satisfaction that eluded him his entire life in America.

The manner of sexual freedoms in Cartagena was far more than he could have ever dreamed of. Throughout the night, his companion knew all his desires for his first night in this exotic land and was more than willing to be his spirit guide.

Having pointed out earlier that Kent is a much more refrained tourist in comparison to the actions of his business associate.

This knowledge of their differences did not prepare Frank for the following events.

There is a knock at Frank's bedroom door. Kent's goddess-of-date says he must have been tired because he fell asleep on her. She expresses that her desires were nothing more than joining Frank's sexual escapades with her friend.

This was nothing more than the will of God. Because truly, at present, Frank felt no less of a god than Ares, Hades, Zeus, or Hercules.

So, what better way to welcome their new demigod than with pleasure only promised in the afterlife or heaven?

Having done God's work for the previous ten hours, Frank wanted to explore this new paradise.

He suggests that they all take a spa day to recover from the inhibitions from the night before. He asks his female conquests what the best place was to shop for swim attire in the city.

After his dates, explain that Boca-Grande was Cartagena's version of Beverly Hills.

Frank decides on a small shopping spree but suggests to Kent that they film the day's encounters because, in Frank's words, "We are doing shit, niggas only dream of."

Kent expresses, "The reason for this film gear was for these exact moments."

Over the next two days, Frank's life could only be described as his version of his rap video. Although Frank was not a rapper, he directed several music videos that did not even remotely compare to their experiences of the first 24 hours in Cartagena .

After a long day of partying, they ended the first day with massages, drinks, and dinner as they watched the beautiful sunset over the island of Manga.

The Day after, equally as extravagant as the day before, was spent on a 40-foot yacht with the two young women he had grown attached. But the lure of some financially dependent love affair with the women he had just met did not interest Frank.

Not to mention there is no place for women or love on this symbolic battlefield. But the mere symbolism of the battles ahead was momentary as the tangible war lay closer than he could comprehend.

CHAPTER 5

FUBAR



Frank sits on the balcony of his apartment and finally takes a moment to appreciate all the things that have led him to this point.

He thought back on all those who had doubted him throughout his life--his mother's words still echoing in his ears, "You're going to have a difficult life because you think you are a white man trapped in a Black man's body." He was not sure if the statement were a compliment or an insult, yet he could not help but analyze it. His feelings were torn between anger and admiration as if two opposing voices were speaking in his head.

He stepped back inside and picked up a white plate from the dining table; its surface beaded with sweat from the oppressive Cartagena humidity. Using the index finger of his right hand, he scooped a line of cocaine from it before tossing it back onto the table and sinking into an armchair. Frank's limitations of knowledge of his current environment were beginning to peak to

an ugly head. The fact that he had not slept since his arrival did not aid his ability to acclimate to his foreign city.

Even his room was foreign to him, still as if he were an explorer discovering it for the first time. And though exhaustion pulled at his eyelids, Frank felt alive at this moment—alive despite it all.

Frank was sifting through information on his phone, checking dates and events for the ongoing Carnival in Barranquilla while scrolling through his Google Pixel. A WhatsApp message popped up from his taxi driver, Valentín.

The message was in Spanish, but Frank had downloaded translation software to help him communicate successfully.

Valentín's voice drips with suspicion as he questions Frank about his Facebook post regarding cocaine in Colombia. Frank was confused because he knew his Facebook page was private.

Frank double-checks and ensures his privacy settings are an impetus to his understanding. With relief, he confirms that everything is set to "private." But the damage is already done. The seed of paranoia has been planted deep within him.

Frank is starting to find the verbal exchange uncomfortable because the driver had been ringing his phone five

days. Frank asks how he could have read his vague statement days before when his page is private. Valentín tells Frank, "We have people that check for these things." While Frank is thinking, "Who the fuck, are these so-called people?" Valentín proceeds to ask if Frank is at his Milano Apartment in Marbella.

Thinking on his toes, he replies, "I am returning from carnival festivities in Barranquilla." Frank bought himself 45 mins.

While Frank is fielding this awkward and perplexing call regarding what he believes, to be some bullshit scenario to extort

naive tourists. He quickly books a five-bedroom Mini mansion in the barrio of “Castillo Grande.” Frank has no issues staying nimble on his feet with the current balance of his bank account.

Frank knew little about the area, just that it was on the opposite side of town. With a population of a million people, Frank liked his chances.

Kent and Frank hurry out of the building, desperately searching for a ride. The beat-up car that pulls up looks like it could barely make it to the next block, but they do not have time to be meticulous.

Frank frantically scrolls through the Airbnb app, trying to locate the address as he desperately spews out what little Spanish, he knows.

Frank was still assessing the ins and outs of navigating his new battleground. One thing he had yet to quite get the hang of was relaying the location of where he needed to be. Somehow, in translation, the proper destination got lost.

Frank and Kent looked around the unfamiliar street with apprehension. Although the area was in the city, it did not look like what they expected from the online Airbnb listing. This place felt dangerous, and all around them were suspicious faces that were wary of their presence. A young woman appeared as if from a dream, her long dark hair brushing her shoulders. She seemed to float toward him, and he momentarily thought she might be a spirit guide. Her voice was calm yet firm when she spoke, pointing the hero toward his destiny. He did not recognize the danger that awaited him, but something in her eyes gave him strength.

Frank felt a strange disconnect from himself as the taxi drove deeper into the barrio. At the same time, Mateo was taking it all

in his stride--like he knew what was coming. He knew we were soon arriving at his “Large Castle” in the barrio of “Castillo Grande.”

By the time the second cab showed up at the deserted spot on the outskirts of Cartagena , Frank had vanished. While Mateo takes in the scene surrounding him, he remembers a quote from Sun Tzu: “When driven by any emotion, sit and wait until your emotions pass.” He realizes that decisions made under the influence of strong feelings, fear, or joy are equally precarious.

Mateo paused briefly and had an Argentinian Steak to sober up. These past two days, however, Frank was not following the Rules of Engagement that usually were extremely strict in his mental war room, and he was becoming a nonparticipant in the war.

Feeling energy, Mateo takes over events from here on out. He remains vigilant in his current scientific study of the effects of this white powdery substance that has brought the greats to their knees.

Mateo is a freethinker; he is familiar with the research of Freud. Also aware of the research on the long-term effects of cocaine usage.

The initial research led Freud to believe this was a miracle drug that made one into a genius. That is the hypothesis that Mateo intends to assess—only one issue.

You are currently on the run from your dealer, and honestly, you do not know why. “Oh well, this is Colombia.” It should not be too hard to find another Colombian Street Pharmacist. Mateo recalls he rented his current Airbnb from an American. So, he gives the host a ring regarding cultural region-specific, consumable souvenirs.

Without specifics and a total lack of confusion with Colombia's other export, coffee. The host ran through his mental Rolodex, "Hmm, Eduardo. No, he does not speak English. Oh, ok, I got it. Give hurmahn a call."

CHAPTER 6

MEET THE NEIGHBORS



Mateo quickly shot hurmahn a WhatsApp message; hurmahn is just around the corner. "Dondê Esta's?" hurmahn responds: Mateo is in luck; Close enough to walk because Mateo had discovered his current encampment might be too isolated. No taxis ventured into the neighborhood at night, making mobility a concern.

After a short walk, a few blocks to a Super Mercado. A group of locals greets Mateo.

Well, except for hurmahn, he is from Ecuador. He is also bilingual and has access to what Mateo sees as an invaluable asset. Mentally regrouped following the Rules of Engagement and back to the current task, script research.

Mateo is no Frank; he begins the conversation with hurmahn. "I was taken for a gringo on my first night in town. These are the type of scenarios that will not be repeated." Their agreement on the reduced-price shows Mateo is less of a target, and more, of a firing squad in this current negotiation.

After agreeing on a reasonable price and for the simple fact that he was fluent in English, Mateo began to favor hurmahn. He reminded Mateo of himself a bit.

Since they were new friends, hurmahn offers Mateo some advice, “Be Careful with women here; 90% of them are prostitutes.” Mateo had not laughed this hard since sliding through customs in Bogota.

Mateo replies, “Come on, 90%?” With a straight face, hurmahn reaffirms, “Just because she is not standing on a corner does not mean she is not a prostitute.” The offer of cash for sex will be met by all female parties willingly, he insisted.

With new knowledge passed on to him by his new ally, Mateo decides to take in the Boca-Grande nightlife.

Although Frank had financed the companionship for the previous few nights, it was something other than what Mateo was accustomed to. He was known for saying, “Why pay for what I have no problem receiving for free?”

As an icebreaker for conversation that evening, Mateo had no hesitations in asking all the young women he met, “Are you a prostitute? Because tonight, that was not the type of company I am seeking this evening.”

That night, 90% of the women informed Mateo that they were working girls. He finally met a beautiful blonde Panamanian woman that was adamant about the fact that she was not a prostitute. Mateo was sure that he had found the winner for the evening.

He asks his new love interest, “Are you ok with returning to my house to partake in some festivities and party favors?”

She agreed that idea was terrific. So much so that Mateo was clear that this was all her original idea, and he would happily play

his role of a suitor for the night. He quickly noticed that his new date was as wild as she was beautiful. She enjoyed her share of the snow. These were all things that Mateo only saw as advantageous to him at this point. He now had a limitless supply line of “A-1 Yola” through his new amigo hurmahn. Mateo, enjoying the choices he made for that night, decides to walk around his “Castle” to do his best “Narco Cribs” rendition.

Narcos, a popular show, was not a missed fact by Mateo. It was, in fact, his favorite show. But armed with his present knowledge of his current terrain and the misleading stereotypes of the drama set 30 years prior.

Mateo, the aspiring strategist, and maturing tactician was anything but armed presently.

But having taken mental and visual inventory of the minimum fifty grams of cocaine he possessed, he figured he would continue his campaign. “Campaign” is the key word because, after his subsequent request by his Panamanian female counterpart, he did not know if he was to be elected the next president or was genuinely God-like.

She softly whispers in Mateo’s ear. “Is it ok if my friend comes to join us”? Mateo began to understand that his sexual expectations in this magic land would soon be distorted, diluted, and challenged. These sexual entanglements of 2 and 3 women at a time would become standard in Mateo’s newfound homeland.

“Homeland?” he thinks. This is the first time he has thought about staying in his current environment for longer than expected.

CHAPTER 7

DEBTS INCURRED

All Balances Will be Paid in Blood



This was Mateo's first encounter with an Afro-Latina. When the new special guest arrived, he was in awe by the exotic, Moreno-skin-toned woman, whose body was something he wasted no time exploring. We must remember there is pure Colombia coke coursing through Mateo's veins at all steps of this endeavor.

Mateo retreats to the master bedroom with both women. Mateo thinks that these are the things that only dream, and fantasies are made of. He could be almost sure he was not dreaming because he had yet to sleep on this fifth day of his Colombian Odyssey. He is again feeling heavenly. Mateo begins to put in his god-like prowess on the best thing on earth, new pussy.

Mateo was amused, to say the least, by the almost ritual like dance his first date performed while holding the plate of powder and watching her friend be pleased in ways neither woman ever believed possible.

Let us say Mateo has a bit of assistance in that arena. He snorts powder from the plate of the alluring dancer while causing her friend to climax in the opposite corner.

The average man, unenlightened with Mateo's wisdom, that man would believe he was one of the lucky few chosen individuals that life permitted rewards for the small battles won daily.

Although Mateo is an avid risk-taker under normal circumstances, his current awareness level in his mental war ready

brain is omnipotent. He is beginning to recognize the smell of death, a swift reminder of where he is currently entrenched.

Although he is not a linguist of the native tongue of his current territories, he understands the look of jealousy as universally as the glow of the sunrise. The energy in his bedroom has quickly taken a turn, and he senses it no different than a herd of wildebeests aware of a Lioness predator.

The two women begin arguing in Spanish. Mateo understands not a single word but has no confusion about what their intense argument is regarding. You can fuck a woman's sister, friends, cousins, and even their mother. But the one thing you do not is fuck them better than the other.

Mateo was not surprised by the exchange of the two women. It was Mateo's opinion that she opened the door to these feelings of jealousy of her own accord. But the events that take place next are the turning of the tides in this story. Mateo's original date has become manic, emotional, and a bit out of control. But he chalks it up to her being high as a kite with a broken string. She begins to take a demanding tone with Mateo.

He is trying to translate her request to the best of his ability. If he is not mistaken, it sounds like this woman is demanding five million pesos—an odd request seeing how this was not an exchange of services for payment.

Mateo calls his new part-time translator hurmahn up to his room to translate. Mateo has yet to lose anything in translation because these are her exact demands. Mateo laughs it off because she believes he walks around with five million pesos in his pockets. Indeed, this woman had done one too many lines of cocaine that evening.

This siren of a woman has grown increasingly volatile in the passing minutes. She was walking through the Spanish model home waking everyone. hurmahn continues his translations while the bipolar woman continues her current bout with polarity, however temporary. Mateo cannot help but think about the reaffirmations of Herman's advice earlier that night.

Mateo and Frank, the duality of the personalities that navigate our hero, have reached a rare, although pivotal, moment. They are in complete agreement for one of very few times. "These Colombian motherfuckers might just think I'm a fucking sucker!"

Through translations, Mateo understands that we may have uninvited guests outside. This is an acquaintance of the livid Panamanian devil we currently have on the loose.

Let us suppose we are being even remotely honest in this narrative. In that case, it cannot be left unsaid that, to some degree, Mateo had been misled on the accuracy of how much the show "Narcos" does not resemble real-life present-day Colombia.

If you have ever been to Miami, Las Vegas, or New York, you would easily find Cartagena familiar and adaptable. However beautiful, different, or iconic you see these three cities to be. It can be safely stated that no one has ever claimed the desire to visit all three simultaneously. Welcome to Cartagena .

Entering through an unsecured front door, what can only be described as the Panamanian Prostitute's Pimp. Whether the subject was regarding stick talk, the inner workings of trap life, or the limited mileage of the pimp game, Mateo was fluent.

Whatever external threats would be hurled in Mateo's direction would only have their intended effect if acted upon.

Mateo was not a man that scared easily. By the code of the streets, Mateo knew he was in no erroneous position nor

deceptively inaccurate location, neither ethically, morally, nor culturally.

If this man's purpose was intimidation, he had much work ahead of him to have any effect on the hardened Los Angeles inner-city bred psyche of Young Mateo. But he leads with a statement that is anything but what Mateo expected.

He suggests that because of all the narcotics Mateo had in the house, this was a situation Mateo did not want to be involved in, no matter what the actual disagreement may be present. Sounds like old fashion extortion to Mateo. Straight bitch move.

So as the faux pimp starts his queen's gambit strategy, Mateo remains detached from the conversation because no matter even if the late Mr. Cochran was present to personify these closing arguments.

It still did not change that Mateo did not have Five million pesos in cash on his person. Nor did he have the means to access it at this late hour, with any point being moot. This was some scammer bullshit.

See, until now, and I mean this exact moment in existence. It was and is my firm belief that Mateo is competent. But clearly, the strategies that currently govern this crusade have been overshadowed by the rules that govern Los Angeles gang culture.

Mateo thinks that even he, albeit for a moment, is allowed to digress. Regrouping his mental state, Mateo is reminded that he is as unique as his present spiritual journey.

To an untrained eye, one might mistake Mateo for some dope boy on a Trap University field trip.

Perception is the predominant judgement of most things. But today, reality would have his day in court. He is a d-boy with a degree; to retain respect for our narrative's accuracy and provide

the most fitting description. Mateo took pride in his mix of street smarts and his ability to rise to whatever intellectual level required of him.

Mateo is in no rush because he slowly accepts that life is 90% what happens to an individual and 10% how said individual chooses to respond.

That smell of death began to be an echoed fragrance. Good thing for Mateo; his sense of smell started to go days ago.

So, what other bullshit did this Miami Vice 90's, retro-IcebergSlim-wannabe, sleaze ball have up his sleeve?

It was going to need to be David Blaine's levels of trickery. He then asks Mateo if he has PayPal.

Understand, there is something to be respected and even admired about genuine students of the game, Mateo ponders... the craftiness of your neighborhood scammer, your best friend's brother, the dope man, the capitalist virtues of the mom that sells her Xanax script.

Real street hustlers. No redeeming qualities in any man that makes it his profession to base his success on the sexual achievements of a woman.

We are on a new continent, far from any small-minded, hood mentalities. Or so you would believe.

Let us play ball, Mateo decidedly admits, "I do have, PayPal, but honestly, I have never used it." Mateo has understood that help indefinitely comes with some types of strings attached.

The faux pimp offers Mateo advice on accessing his virgin PayPal account. In Mateo's present mood, he was looking for a fight.

But the one thing that rang true to Mateo then was that he had gotten Kent into something he should have had no part in. Kent is not about that life.

To maintain the highest level of peace and to protect his close friend on the final night of his trip. Mateo transferred the \$1500 American into the account to bring a truce to the present stalemate.

Many may see this as an expensive lesson in trust, or others may see a soft-armed robbery. But Mateo understands that he sits precisely where he is needed most. Take heed; warfare is not a game of sudden moves nor a game of feet. It is tact, led by strategy measured in inches.

CHAPTER 8

DO NOTHING, DO NOTHING WRONG Lack of Emotion Strategy



K complete understanding of his battle stance. Kent only ent heads back to Los Angeles after a mere seven days. But it is Mateo who is the one who needs to be in signed up for a trip. Even though Mateo never guaranteed any adventure to himself, a journey was indeed the lure.

Once the Uber taking Kent to the airport left. Mateo feels relieved. This has nothing to do with whether his acquaintance will be missed. But more to do with his new freedom to wage his brief tactical battle on this wretched city at the temporary expense of the overall war progress.

The indigenous people here had not been warned of the worthy adversary it welcomed, a “rabid” foe it had made quietly, secretly, with Mateo.

It has been only a week, and Mateo has somehow managed to wind up on the wrong side of the Cartel's wish list, and five million fewer pesos depleted his war funds.

Small things to a giant, Mateo believes.

Small as these things may be. Unchecked, they can quickly become a big issue. The silent declaration of war Cartagena has made on our Hero is one it will soon regret. Mateo has decided that the adverse events will not be taken in vain but more so as a challenge of biblical proportions.

With all the partying out of his system and his acclimation to this hustle mecca. He has intentionally set his flag center stage in declaring immediate and future war. "Don't forsake your regrettable actions at this point!" Mateo defiantly declares.

If he were to be crowned King, he would first need to adapt his actions to those of the royals. A king would have a castle, he thinks. The security of the empire takes precedence over all things. Palmetto Beach would be his new ivory tower.

Mateo had begun building his army from the initial introduction to these foreign lands. He would wage his war on this magical place from this current encampment. His choice of residence was not made from chance but by calculating the possible pitfalls that lay forward and the landmines left behind.

Over the next few weeks, Mateo grows closer and closer to his trusted advisor hurmahn. This began to build a foundation of trust that would be the basis and center focus of both the problems and the solutions; That were to be the driving forces of this three-year war that would be waged from Cartagena to Barranquilla, Medellín to Bogota, Cali back to Cartagena .

This war was not civil in nature nor revolutionary in its introduction. Civilities have been consciously placed out of reach.

It was then that Mateo began to come to terms with the necessary self-evolution that would be required. He must lay to rest all of his comforts of home, the commonality of the familiar allies of the past. He must welcome all challenges to his perceived limitations.

Mateo began to understand that emotions controlled these hostile lands. Mateo understood if this society allowed emotions to control its governance. It would also be its downfall.

Being an expert in perception Mateo quickly realizes there is an unforeseen variable that completely nullifies the baseline gauge of enemies' actions or reactions, desperation.

Desperation may be one of the strongest emotions there is. Mateo must quickly calculate the effects and toll that desperation demands on the war economy.

Only then does Mateo discover this is an emotion with which he is unfamiliar. But if he is expected to be able to pay the fee of the entry into this world that he intends to master. He must quickly become comfortable with being uncomfortable.

Mateo was all but too familiar with the necessary finances and economics to wage a proper war effort. He understands that although his budget is robust today without a steady source of income, he would soon lie on the wayside in the valley of the fallen and forgotten gladiators that graced this arena in the generations before him.

Wise to the concept of the necessity of capital to generate returns, Mateo decides to begin to wage his war on the battlefield of economics. Mateo understood that without a current enemy to wage his conceptualist advances, he would need to wait out said enemy until it was confident to show its face and challenge the young knight.

He knew that his current action plan involved prepping his mind, body, and soul for the villains, shortcomings, and unexplained advances. His enemy was close, and the basics of warfare have always been rooted in the presence of the present.

His enemy would attempt to outflank him, deceive, confuse, and deplete his resources. But Mateo knew an enemy unseen is an enemy unknown. So, he adopts a strategy that permits him to move through Cartagena 's figurative and literal shadows with some degree of discretion. To level the playing field, he became a ghost. He became a recluse for his training.

Mateo's only present enemies are the ones that waged on in his head. Mateo waged war on his hustle, pushing his skill sets into the investments of Wall Street. Mateo also recognized that if he expected to be able to move freely across all corners of this land, he would be required to learn the language.

Light trading by day and self-taught Spanish classes by night, Mateo began applying expectations onto himself that would push his perceived limitations. His complete belief system would be challenged. See, there are new variables that Mateo can only begin to calculate.

Seeing moderate returns on what solid long-term investments were could have done more to assure Mateo that whatever his purpose may be here in Cartagena , it was anything but solidified with the Trap Gods.

Mateo began to build the infrastructure necessary for his long term mission success. He grew his alliance with hurmahn even further. The two had been inseparable since Kent's departure. He had become an advisor to the informally crowned king as he built his army.

CHAPTER 9

ALL'S FAIR IN ECONOMIC WARFARE



Onne of the most crucial soldiers was known as the Hacker. A trusted companion. But Mateo honestly was not too In Mateo's opinion, the Hacker was Herman's most fond of the individual known as the Hacker.

Mateo was cognizant of the Hacker's responsibilities on the battlefield, but he could not help but see them as limited. He viewed the role of a Hacker as superfluous and like that of a company's IT department.

Mateo's expertise in computers and technology is rooted in his youngest years; it all began when he assembled his first desktop computer at twelve. Since then, he has devoted his life to understanding the ever-changing landscapes of computers, tech, and data flow.

His drive and ambition overpowered his mind as he hesitated to take the Hacker's word without question for the upcoming battles. Any soldier that needs questioning is inefficient, costly, and a liability to the ranks. In war, you cut the fat and travel light.

This was dead weight.

Mateo maintained an outward appearance of neutrality. He lived by the philosophical views of Socrates, knowing, “True wisdom knows that you know nothing.”

By maintaining that core belief and out of respect for the foreign battlefield, he accepted the flow of information that the Hacker disseminated. Albeit very cautiously and privately under strict scrutiny.

Mateo respected that because the terrain is foreign, there could be something to learn from the Hacker regarding experiences that he may possess, which are the steppingstones to true wisdom.

There is no shortcut to being wise other than having experiences for you to call on for future decisions constantly.

Mateo still has one primary focus, Capital. Cash flow was his main focal point, although this was kept from other parties. His finances were of no one else's concern.

But late one night, he overheard Herman's conversation with an English associate regarding some shipment. Mateo was neither idiot nor oblivious to Herman's real job.

He was what you call a Masteria. A Masteria is a stockbroker for Cartel products. His duties are to sell kilos that are already predetermined to be shipped on preset dates. Think of it as a Girl Scout during cookie season.

Although Mateo understood this, he also understood all the legalities involved in that venture. But this night was different; weeks had passed since Mateo's arrival.

So, he could not help but grow more confident in understanding his present battlefield of conflict. Cautiously

confidence should breed ambition, and it is the seed of success. A prideful misstep is one of great risk, are just a few of the thoughts that race in Mateos mind.

After hurmahn ends his conversation, Mateo asks his most trusted ally to step out onto the Balcony to discuss something important —the two exits onto the balcony with the Hacker one step behind. But Mateo was quick to express the unneccessariness of his presence for this conversation.

This was the beginning of structuring the chain of command that would dictate every soldier's role in this war. Mateo began the conversation clandestinely, asking whom he spoke to on the phone. hurmahn began to explain that it was one of his clients waiting on a shipment to arrive in San Francisco. “A shipment of what,” Mateo responds like an attorney already knowing the answer to a leading question.

hurmahn, although a fun person to party with, was quite serious when it came to business. Solemnly, he responds, “Cocaine, what else.”

Keeping his poker face, Mateo asks hurmahn does he realize that San Francisco is the same state as Mateo’s hometown of Los Angeles.

He nods in response that he does. At this point, without it being said, both men understand what Mateo is implying. Although Mateo has grown very fond of hurmahn, he has no problem expressing his skepticism about hurmahn’s admission.

So, he becomes more direct in questioning, “So you are telling me that you can ensure the successful arrival of shipments of Colombian origin to San Francisco.” He replies in an almost insulted manner, “If you don’t believe me, I can show you.”

Mateo assures his new amigo that making him a believer will be complex. hurmahn attempts to show Mateo various past shipping manifestos of successful arrivals of shipments originating from the current narco-state.

But to Mateo, these are nothing more than letters and numbers not providing anywhere near enough information for Mateo to willingly take this severe risk.

In the following days, Mateo and his associate exchanged crucial information that would determine whether Mateo was willing to take a risk that could result in financial ruin and jeopardize his freedom, which he prized primarily. However, Mateo comprehended that victories are not achieved by leaders who are excessively cautious or fearful. Mateo attempted to recalculate his strategies with all the new information that had developed on the battlefield. A decline to adapt promptly was the root cause of defeat, failure, or death.

At first, he carefully assessed his steps and the significance of breaking free from the metaphorical and physical trap mentioned earlier in this narrative. He understood the gravity of this achievement and did not take it lightly.

Growing up in South Central Los Angeles, California, it was a common understanding that reaching twenty-five was not guaranteed for anyone native to those lands.

Mateo has surpassed that milestone by a decade and has experienced genuine freedom by breaking away from the mental and psychological limitations of the neighborhood that bred him by fire. He takes pride in overcoming the stereotypes that he once believed were predetermined.

Despite facing disadvantages, he did not permit them to become a handicap. Instead, he saw them as a source of pressure that turned him into a diamond. Although he left the hood behind, it was not forgotten.

He grew his knowledge at one of the most prestigious universities in the world. He raised his career in corporate boardrooms and claimed his place among the elite of the Hollywood Film Industry. He had honestly accomplished almost any task he had ever put in front of himself.

Despite his many achievements, no accomplishments were awarded any medals. However, he passionately believes that the experience of facing death will be more valuable than any accolade.

In all honesty, all his past accomplishments were motivated by his desire to prove others inaccurate to his perceived limitations. However, relying on others' doubts to push oneself toward success can be a risky personality trait.

Because at what point do you start living your reality instead of existing in a life full of expectations and limitations?

As he reflected on these many variables, he constantly referred to his guidebooks, Sun Tzu's, and Robert Greene's teachings. "Aren't I here for the War of my Life?" Is his existential question. After further guidance from his books that he held to be holy, he was willing to let go of all those past successes from a past life.

But there was one thing that still caused his hesitations. Mateo was no stranger to all the history and facts of his African American culture. Yes, it was confirmed that he was more than that, albeit summed up as being bi-racial.

He refers to all his ancestors who were stolen from their homeland and enslaved. He reflects on the many “brothers in arms” he has lost to confinement or early death.

Because of the weight of all the knowledge he carries and the symbolic torch for those that have laid the way for him to be in this exact place in this very moment, he could not help but feel that he would be betraying all of that, and his predecessors, not just himself.

The words needed do not exist to express the internal war he was mentally fighting. It must be stressed that this is not a decision made in haste nor taken lightly. He feels the ultimate truth eludes him. He does not know the answer.

He is pushed the limits of his beliefs and moral values to the brink. He acknowledges that the accomplishments he made in his life were only possible with the guidance of respected mentors who helped him along the way.

So, he decides to reach out to someone with far more wisdom than him, a man that has helped make him the man that he is today.

In a way, he was sure his mentor would caution him against taking such a significant risk that there may be no return.

He took all necessary precautions to ensure he spoke on a secure line and called his mentor. This following statement is not to be taken lightly in any manner; Mateo is not impressed easily.

So, anyone he has allowed to mentor him is someone of great accomplishment and respected in all facets of social excellence.

The added benefit of this one individual is that he is a respected attorney. He could be confident that his mentor would be considering the seriousness of the possible legal ramifications of a wrong decision.

Even with the confidence that he had the privacy he desired when the call connected, he still spoke to his current advisor in a code to not say too much over the phone.

Mateo felt relieved that he did his due diligence to protect his best interest by making this phone call.

So, he stopped speaking so that he could hear the advice of his mentor. But Mateo quickly had to slap himself to ensure he was not dreaming. Because what he heard next was not the response he was expecting, nor did it offer him the immediate clarity he sought.

His mentor advised him that life is full of decisions and opportunities that some people decide to take, and others choose to ignore or avoid.

But even though he did not feel that he could answer the question for Mateo. He could assure him that the men in this world that experienced the level of success Mateo was after did not come from the cloth of people that avoided rare opportunities.

“Wow” is all Mateo can think because although his mentor knew this was a decision that had to be made by Mateo. It removed the final layer of hesitation. In retrospect, the call served its exact purpose because it gave Mateo the clarity he was after.

CHAPTER 10

GUERILLA WARFARE



It might be a good time to note that Mateo's commitment to his creative process had no limitations because the story's authenticity held precedence above all else.

Including and especially his safety. This is not what I came to do here, he reasserts to himself, "Play it safe."

He then expressed his decision to his new socio, hurmahn. There are only two options, life, or death! hurmahn did not understand the response because he was unaware of the ongoing war efforts. But he elaborated further and said, I will give you my complete list of business requirements.

Mateo had finally truly accepted his current accommodations, Death's Ground.

His list begins with the first non-negotiable requirement. Sever all WhatsApp communication.

This was met with some disdain and disagreement. hurmahn allowed the Hacker to explain why that is the preferred method of communication. As the Hacker begins to ramble on, Mateo mentally reasserts to himself the uselessness of the Hacker's position. Mateo paid zero attention to anything that The Hacker was saying.

Mateo was left with a dilemma. "How do I respond to the birth of this very perilous, fragile, and invaluable relationship?" He could start with, "How, we are going to run this like a Fortune 500 company...."

But he honestly thought it was time to let his unknowing troops understand that we were, in fact, at war. He did not doubt that if he was going to partner with hurmahn, he must know.

Mateo had grown to think of hurmahn as a lieutenant with limitless potential. But the Hacker was nothing more than a case

of “Stolen Valor.” Mateo chose this as an opportunity to chip away at the facade of the Hacker’s armor.

“Why do we call you the Hacker again? Are you hacking, or do you enjoy getting hacked?” Mateo asked the Hacker what his basic understanding of encryption was. In the lawyer fashion that Mateo is becoming known for with his leading questions.

But this time, Mateo’s question was meant to be both leading and a trap. Mateo was already sure the hacker had a basic understanding of encryption technology, so after he gave a brief account.

Mateo was sure that his feelings towards The Hacker were holding. See, the hacker was not incapable or completely useless. To maintain the highest possible appearance of neutrality. Mateo was kind enough to compliment him about being very smart.

He then began to demonstrate to him his incompetencies. Mateo informed the Hacker that although individuals of South American descent find many comforts and enjoyment in WhatsApp. Mateo was not that.

In a symbolic drawing of a line in the sand. Mateo was letting it be known that he would be steering the figurative ship. Mateo believes that the person with the most money is usually in charge. So, it being a non-debatable topic, it needed to be understood how things would be run moving forward.

Mateo explained that he is the bank since he is the capital investor. The bank must be protected at all costs.

Then he verbally drew out the picture that although The Hacker may be very smart.

Smart people are the most dangerous people in the world. With someone considered to be low intellect. It does not matter if

they know nothing else in this world. They know they are moronic because society will convey this message throughout life.

The danger of being smart is that you fool many people around you. But you do not mislead the intelligent. There is one defining characteristic that separates the two. An intelligent person knows their limitations. While the smart is okay with believing they have none.

Mateo continues to explain that we are in one place now. But Mateo needs, and will always be able to move, everywhere. He explains to the Hacker “that he demands a higher level of encryption because he needs to understand that Mateo as an American citizen needs to be able to do business there, to keep the future business afloat.”

Mateo continues his tirade that he will never alter one key, core component of his business mindset. “I will always count my money in Dollars, never Colombian pesos,” without it not being lost that Mateo was fond of the metric system.

The Hacker’s reply was delightfully surprising to Mateo. “You should rather count your money in Bitcoin.”

Bitcoin was familiar to Mateo, but he needed to become an expert. He needed to gain more knowledge of how it worked.

Mateo wanted to discuss Bitcoin more in detail but wanted it to be understood that the first requirement of the list of demands had no flex.

Mateo ironed out that Signal would be the mode of communication among anyone that wanted to communicate with him.

WhatsApp would no longer be installed on his phone, so there was no other choice. Although he could not make anyone remove it from their phone, he strongly suggested they take heed.

Signal would be the form of communication, and everyone's settings should be specific to have all messages disappear after being read. Mateo also cautiously added another layer of protection, installing two separate VPNs on his phone and his WiFi router.

In that instant, the Hacker understood Mateo's practice of learning from everyone, including Socrates' teachings, and why Mateo kept the Hacker close.

One thing to be understood about Mateo is that although he has a hidden superiority complex. He admires people that recognize there is knowledge to be gained from him. Staying true to Socrates' beliefs, he enjoys passing on knowledge and any healthy intellectual exchange of ideas. The hacker asked Mateo about his decision-making process with a curious and innocent tone. Although Mateo usually disliked being interrogated, especially during a battle, he believed it was necessary to clarify his actions.

If this was indeed a military campaign, troop morale was a thin line to walk of delicate balance. Mateo understood that the whole purpose of building your army was that no war had ever been won alone.

So, Mateo explained that Signal was not a data collection-oriented company. Facebook, the owner of WhatsApp, was, in fact, that.

With that being said, "A company that is purposely collecting your data for advertising or any purpose could not be trusted with any true encryption."

The hacker grasped the concept. Then the added feature of self-erasing messages negated a paper trail. Mateo had the Hacker's undivided attention at this point.

Mateo continues to explain that he still was not fully entrusting any consumer-level encryption when it dealt with his freedom. So, he added a VPN to his phone and the Wi-Fi router. Intentionally two different variants.

The hacker was quick to point out that he knew about VPNs. Mateo replied, “Then you should know there are none that provide complete anonymity. FBI, CIA, and D.E.A. get any information they want with a warrant.”

Mateo saw his opportunity to give his troops a common enemy. Mateo explains that is who he must be protected from. He continues, “I’m attempting to create the closest thing to a Tor network without being on the dark web.”

The hacker points out that Mateo knows so much; even about the dark web, he must know about Bitcoin. Mateo assured The Hacker they would further the conversation the next day. There were many questions he still needed to be answered before business began.

CHAPTER 11

DEATH'S GROUND TERMS ACCEPTED



Mateo truly needed a moment of solitude. Because he fully understood the magnitude of the path he was choosing. Mateo went to work on his Pixel device as if he was some electrical surgeon. All social media apps must go. Any app that was data collection driven must go.

Then he slowly began to come to terms with what truly was happening. He had received notice, RSVP, and had been allowed VIP entrance into Death's Ground.

Mateo used his rare moment of solace and took a mental debriefing of the war effort.

The Rules of Engagement were.

Self-Directed Warfare: Mateo quietly mumbles to himself, "Check." This was why he assumed the reigns from Frank.

Declare War on all Known Enemies; This strategy was also being implemented; he has just given The Hacker a purpose, an Enemy. A task or challenge, but he is still under a watchful eye. His failures or successes will judge him. Those choices will be his alone.

Death's Ground Strategy: This is the moment that Mateo has been waiting for his entire life. Although Mateo understands the ultimate Art of War is victory with the total absence of violence. He obviously would not have accepted Death's Ground's terms if he had nothing more to prove. But for the first time in Mateo's life, he was ready to find the purpose of his own life.

Mateo had no quarrels with the terms of this strategy; he had already begun his baptismal onto the grounds. Its ritualistic indoctrination was a welcomed ally to Mateo.

On this night, Frank was laid to rest. Frank had no place left in this world. Mateo accepted that from this moment forward, nothing would be the same.

He respected all terms and cut all ties to familiarity. Took no joy from past successes. He created no fallback plans. He understood that only in this arena would he be genuinely crowned King. He became who he needed to be to survive.

And lastly, he decided to let go of it all instead of deleting individual apps and factory resetting his phone. He wanted no ties, of this life, to his old life but was aware that this revolution would be “Televised.” So, he created a new Gmail in a segment of your force’s ideology.

Although this was war, the laws of power would always apply. Mateo was willing to make all necessary sacrifices, but the speed at which information disseminates is far more powerful than any weapon. To build unnecessary fortresses would be closing himself off from necessary battle information in real-time.

Mateo’s moment of solace became a gift of the rare form —a goodnight of rest. Mateo awoke feeling well-rested. He took one minute, a literal 60 seconds of commemoration of the death of Frank. Being a part of Mateo, it did not feel like something was missing. Frank had done his part to get our hero to his ultimate life challenge.

Mateo was aware of where he was on the chessboard of battle. He understood what had to be done was done. Now his energies would be better spent on the mission goal. No resources were squandered on anything but the fight for his life. “This is where I will be broken or built. Broke is not an option,” he thinks.

Mateo proceeds to the kitchen and opens the oven. Removes a pot that contains another pot. This had become the

method of protecting the white from moisture. Dry as a bone as he had expected.

This was the progression of Mateo's complete acclimation to his adopted home, which felt less foreign each day—inhaling a line in each nostril to maintain the balance of mind and body.

He quickly snapped back into war form. He walks into the living room, the large marble tile cold to the touch of his feet.

The Hacker is sleeping on the couch. Mateo recalls their conversation from the night before. Remembering he showed some promise, Mateo was anything but convinced. The Hacker is not whom Mateo is looking for. He is eager to begin his work with hurmahn.

Mateo walks toward the quarters that have become. hurmahn's bedroom. Especially now that they are partners.

Mateo intended to keep him remarkably close. As Mateo enters the room, he hears a phone call ring that he is sure hurmahn will miss because he is knocked out cold. Mateo was not used to his penthouse being so quiet.

The Mateo that stands momentarily over his novel business partner is honestly not the man anyone has come to know with their previous perceived familiarities, however slight, would no longer remain. He would appear familiar in physical form but nothing else.

The time Mateo had allowed to pass was merely in preparation for the war. Mateo knows that the wait is over; the battle is upon us. Mateo is still standing over hurmahn.

Only Mateo understood his overnight metamorphosis. But soon, hurmahn will, I mean very soon.

Mateo has been standing and watching hurmahn's phone as it sits on the dresser beside where he lies asleep. What drew Mateo's attention was the length of time it took for his display to auto-off. Mateo thought that was why he had complained about poor battery life.

Mateo began to look at hurmahn as a friend. But a friend was not what he needed; it was a business partner that was necessary for mission success. Mateo was oblivious to how heightened and aware his senses had become, having crossed into the gates that preceded hell.

Anyone looking at Mateo now would assume he was deep in thought. But Mateo has become increasingly alarmed. Why has hurmahn's screen not cut off? War was at the empire's gates, but Mateo was fixated.

He picks it up, as if it were calling out to him. It was instinctual to swipe up on the home screen. At that moment, Mateo realized that although he was in war form, that is where it ended.

"What The Fuck!? hurmahn, wake up!" Mateo says with the most severe tone hurmahn had ever heard to date. "You don't fucking have a lock screen on your fucking phone?" While still waking up, hurmahn was very dismissive of this fact.

Mateo paused; he understood this was another opportunity to drive a wedge between him and his shadow, the Hacker.

Secure communications were the duties he had given to the incompetent imbecile last night.

Mateo decided then that the Hacker was the liability he knew him to be. Mateo rudely awoke The Hacker by kicking his feet off Mateo's Marble coffee table.

He asks him in a tone that a father would use to discipline his child, “How many fucking bits of encryption does WhatsApp have?”

Sensing the changing of the tide, Mateo declared his role as head of the new war chain of command. He replies, “256-bit encryption end to end”, The Hacker claims. “How many of those bits are retained without a lock screen on that same device?” Mateo replies.

The Hacker looks up at his new El Jefe with utter confusion. What are you talking about? He asks.

Why the fuck does hurmahn not have a lock screen on his phone? His confusion grew further.

“Did I not explain last night that the bank is to be protected at all costs? What protections am I provided knowing that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link? But no matter if I look right or left, I see you there.”

At this moment, Mateo understood that a meeting in his symbolic war room was necessary. Mateo believed his selected army had grown fat and lazy.

But Mateo understood the fine line of dealing with troop morale. A content soldier is a dead soldier. I need you starved and angry. He asserts that the games and playtime are over.

Mateo was making it clear to The Hacker that “this is not a fucking welfare shelter,” and for some reason, he believes that he thinks it is. “You don’t work; you don’t eat.” Making it known that if he expected to be around, he must pull his weight, and if he did not understand what that meant, he did not have the time to train him.

Mateo wanted to meet hurmahn privately, so he put The

Hacker to work, sending him on a mission. It was clear to Mateo; The Hacker was unaware that this errand would be a test. What could be perceived as paranoia was, in fact, another layer of security he was implementing.

“No more fucking Wi-Fi access,” Mateo declares. Mateo did not trust that the people coming in and out of his home could be trusted. Things were going to change. “I need Cat 5 cable. Three coils varying from 25ft.- 50ft., Find it.”

Before The Hacker could mutter, “For what?” Mateo exclaimed, “There will be no explanations today.”

The Hacker is showing signs of insubordination. Mateo could tell he was feeling “some type of way.” This is honestly precisely what he wanted. So, he could reveal his true self through being emotional.

It was time to trim the fat! He handed The Hacker 250,000 pesos. “I ordered you an Uber,” he states. “I need what I asked for?”

CHAPTER 12

WAR GAMES



F signed with the devil in their blood. His strategies finally, a moment to talk about some of the precise interworkings of the business venture Mateo had with hurmahn bear no resemblance to his dealings with The Hacker.

He intended to make hurmahn a true partner in the business even though he had no capital to invest. This was a strategy that he intended to emphasize to his compadre. My success will be bred from and attached to his own, in fact, successes.

To be truthful, Mateo did not have much faith in many things, except that people's self-preservation would always be a natural desire.

Mateo continues to explain that the war effort was not one of metaphor. That said, hurmahn should be able to appreciate the seriousness he is treating their potential business association.

Mateo wants a conference call with the San Francisco client upon delivery. hurmahn assured Mateo that would not be an issue.

"Then what price are we talking about per kilo," asks Mateo. "36 million pesos", hurmahn replies.

Mateo explains that his buyer in Los Angeles does not pay in pesos. "How much in fucking dollars?" "About \$12,000", he states.

He continues to explain that "an actual kilo is a 10th of that price, but all the extra money is paid for transportation costs and bribes to customs officials."

Mateo continues the line of questioning with what assurances do I have? hurmahn explained, "The Cartel and I are true professionals," he was sleeping in the other bedroom, which should offer another level of comfort.

Honestly, it did not. Mateo is cut from the cloth that says to believe half of what you see and none of what you hear. Mateo honestly did not trust his mother with that amount of money.

'So why should I invest trust in you?' he asks. hurmahn assures Mateo he would be able to alleviate all his concerns. Mateo explained, I am a businessperson, whether the product was coca or real estate. So, he would expect that level of professionalism in return in all their future dealings.

He also explained that any friendship they built had no bearing on his expectations in their business dealings. Mateo did a little more, then implied that a loss of his money or his product would only result in one outcome. With an air of innocence, hurmahn asks, "And what's that?" In a very matter-of-fact manner, Mateo replies, "Death."

For a slight moment, Mateo could tell hurmahn did not believe him. But even lacking a reply, hurmahn could tell Mateo was not joking.

"Because I do consider you to be a friend, I am telling you, these are and will be the consequences if you decide to move forward with me," says Mateo.

One thing to be understood about Mateo is that he offers everyone, with no exceptions, the same respect. Allowing them to make their decisions based on all the present facts.

"You have my word that any deals agreed upon will always be delivered upon," Mateo said.

Mateo enters his bedroom to take a couple more lines, "These motherfuckers, are stressing me out today," he thinks. As he raises his head from the dresser inhaling his limitless superpower powder. He realizes that he is missing the charger for his smartwatch.

To say Mateo was livid would be the vastest understatement of the entire campaign. But Mateo is entirely in command of R.O.E 1.

“Self-Directed Warfare.” “Waste no time on problems you have no control of; Waste no sweat on problems you do.”

Mateo is beginning to feel that a show of force may be necessary because any of his items missing is a dangerous game to play with a man who has nothing to lose.

Mateo does promise you the facts by his decree. But makes no guarantee in the conveyance of unnecessary intel. We are indeed at war. All is fair at present—no Love Lost.

Mateo has kept his true feelings about the Hacker to himself by no accident. He needs hurmahn to focus on the economics of the war effort. But this “ember” cannot be left ablaze, he knows.

Having reset his phones and broken necessary ties, he must relay an update of mission protocol through hurmahn.

“hurmahn, do me a favor, hermano, Por favor,” he shouts from his bedroom. “Que Quieres,” hurmahn responds. “Tell your Best friend I don’t need the ethernet cable anymore,” he says with calm irritation.

Mateo continues his request, “I need a new watch charger, somehow mines has grown legs,” he adds, with a false insouciance to his statement.

hurmahn explains that “those are not easy to find in Cartagena .” “Tell him to take the Uber wherever he has to go to find it,” he says. hurmahn confirms with a visual thumbs up.

It should be stated that Mateo is not what some would call a “social butterfly.” But somehow, his encampment has become a social-gathering center over the past few weeks. But today is a day that is like no previous one. Death is the valid owner of these lands, but it is currently occupied and financed by none other than Mateo.

The phone rings: it is the concierge. “Senor Mateo, you have visitors.” “If we are being honest, I do not,” he thinks. The arrivals are friends of hurmahn’s. The surprise arrivals cannot help but remind Mateo that he has missing items. It does not bother him that he must replace the object because money is rarely the issue. It is a respect factor principle in nature.

There is a knock at the door. Mateo thinks, “What in The Actual Fuck!? Did they take an express elevator?” Mateo’s Penthouse is on the 31st floor.

It is another uninvited, unknown, unannounced guest. Mateo takes a deep breath. “hurmahn, who the fuck is that now?” Mateo shouts, sounding a bit irritated at that point.

“Housekeeping,” Mateo hears coming from the entryway. Mateo gets up to meet the housekeeper; he needs his dry cleaning done.

Suddenly Mateo is not bothered by the idea of an unexpected visitor. He had never seen this housekeeper before; she must be new. Something about a beautiful woman makes you forget the things you did not want to remember already. Mateo begins to feel his day may make a turn for the better. As he follows her into his room to retrieve his laundry, he cannot help but be attracted to and turned on by the petite Colombiana maid.

He then recalls some of the wisdom that was passed on to him by hurmahn.

Looking over to his dresser again, he knows she sees that he “has been playing with his nose.” Lines are still on the dresser sitting right next to a small wad of cash.

Mateo gestured to the new housekeeper that the cash on the dresser was a tip for her. She picks up the 250,000 pesos and says, “Para, que?”

“Thank you, fucking Duolingo,” Mateo thinks. Because he understood her question. His response, “Porque, tu Eres Muy Bonita.”

What is understood often needs not to be explained. It was clear Mateo, and she had an understanding.

Mateo quickly closes his bedroom door. I guess hurmahn was right. Although Mateo knew he was at war. He had not yet publicly declared it.

Mateo cannot help but enjoy himself. Mateo assumes every man has had the sexy Latina housekeeper fantasy. But Mateo is positive he will never have to fantasize about it again.

“She deserved that tip!” Mateo then informed the front desk that he only felt comfortable and trusting of his new amiga to clean his apartment; she was very “trustworthy,” as he called it. “No problema, Senor Mateo,” the concierge replies.

Mateo has had a change of spirits. Mateo ponders if this is Cartagena’s version of a bad day. Then his new home was a wise selection.

Mateo notes that The Hacker has been gone for over 4 hours. He checks Uber; he is still in search. His commitment to mission success was noted.

Mateo sits on his balcony reading up on; What is Bitcoin? A crypto-currency, blah blah, blah, blah, blah. He thinks as he reads a short article about the anonymity of Bitcoin transactions and the new technology, blockchain. In short, it was beyond the control of all governments and could not be easily traced.

Mateo then understood what he needed about Bitcoin’s role in the war effort, albeit far from the expertise required for mission success.

Mateo is startled by an Uber notification. The Hacker has finally returned. “Finally, six fucking hours in an Uber,” Mateo thinks.

I mean, it is to be understood that this is a mission of life or death, nothing more, nothing less. Death’s Ground caters to no one and permits no hesitation.

The contract, signed in blood, is simple, short in contingencies, and final in completion.

You either populate the graveyard of the forgotten or bask in the immortality that it is to be its victor.

Let that be, but the constant theme of this narrative is never to be confused otherwise.

CHAPTER 13

WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION



Mateo’s smartwatch was more than just a timekeeping device; it was his most convenient and loyal translator and his most patient and accurate navigator. An understated tool of war. Mateo was as desirous as a child, anticipating a “long awaited gift” on Christmas

Day. The Hacker had been appointed to deliver the “longawaited gift” in more ways than he had realized.

Let it not be forgotten that Mateo is as fair as King Solomon. He promised his personal feelings would not be. “Judge and jury.”

Their failures and their successes would be the judge of all. If Mateo kept the correct score, this morning was not The Hacker’s fault. Mateo had even quietly given him a point for the Bitcoin reference. But admittedly, Mateo will never take nor mistake his word for truth or gospel.

The Hacker soon enters the penthouse, excitedly Mateo asks, “Did you get it?” The Hacker responds, “No, I could not find it.” Mateo was not expecting him to change, just as much as he would not expect any other person to. People are creatures of habit. This is Mateo’s truth.

But there was still a surprise for Mateo. You should know where Mateo resides if you closely follow this narrative.

Death’s Ground was bought and paid for.

But do not be misled. There is no credit, “cash only accepted.” It is either “cash or blood,” that is it, nothing else except it.

See, until this present moment, Mateo was not being fair. He was always aware of where he stood and the rules that govern it. He, and he alone, was a willing participant.

But we must also remember that all his guests, besides hurmahn, were “uninvited.” So, in this war, Mateo cannot be held responsible for collateral damage. And there are no innocents on Death’s Ground. So, by definition, all bystanders are fair game.

Mateo watched The Hacker walk away after he declared his failure. Mateo displays a face of confusion. Because he knows he

gave the maid 250,000 pesos, but he got what he paid for and has full intentions of doing the same tomorrow.

But he takes a moment to question himself regarding the 250,000 pesos that he gave The Hacker. Mateo honestly need not double-check himself. He is more awake than he has ever been. He is even well-rested on this day.

Spoiler alert!

It is with my sincerest apologies, but if you ever see. Mateo with a perplexed face or a look of confusion, he only gauges on a scale of 1 to 10. What level of aggression is necessary currently?

Now that we are clear on that topic, Mateo's face is no longer perplexed. Because he has already considered that he is outnumbered in his own home, but that is of little concern because he does not fear any end game.

But we must issue this disclaimer One Last Time.

Mateo currently has some of the world's best Colombian cocaine flowing through his veins and let us make that a safe assumption for the rest of this Odyssey.

"OK, you couldn't find it; the world will still turn on its axis," Mateo says. "But where is my money?" he says with a tone; that can only be described as the tone of death approaching. "I need you to be very careful about how you answer this," Mateo forewarns.

"What do you mean?" he replies, I have been searching around all day for what you wanted. "And you don't have it," Mateo responds. "OK, a show of force it is," Mateo thinks.

This was the first sorrow that Mateo felt about the loss of Frank. Because he would, honestly, just appreciate one last mutual self-affirmation that “These Colombian motherfuckers might just think I’m a sucker!”

But Mateo is a diplomatic leader, and he knows the ultimate Art of War is to obtain victory with a total lack of violence.

“Do you feel safe right now?” he asks The Hacker.

He had yet to learn that the hollowed earth where he stood may be where he would lay. Mateo had been so accurate with his assumptions of this figurative “deer in headlights.”

“Yes,” The Hacker replies. Mateo could not believe his ears. This could be nothing other than a declaration of war. Mateo was done with the game-playing and diplomacy.

He made it known to all. That at this moment, “War has been declared”!

He proclaims “that you are on Death’s Ground, so to feel safe is nothing more than a facade or illusion. You are out of options, but I will allow you access to the few you have left; it is your choice.”

“First option is to return my money, but you do not have it, so I would not grab at that one. Your second and only other option is to give me the charger from your watch because. I am such a nice guy. If I were you, that is the one I would go after.”

At this moment, Mateo understood the lure of Death’s Ground. Because fear was no longer an emotion he could experience. The tension in the room had grown so thick that parties not involved in the current discussion felt there was no necessity or space for them.

As Mateo's penthouse guests begin to clear out. Mateo made it clear that that was a luxury The Hacker did not possess. A dark side of Mateo started to emerge that no one had ever seen.

"IS THIS NOT THE FUCKING LAND OF PLATA O PLUMO!"

He is frozen still, like that deer in Mateo's headlights. The Hacker looks to hurmahn as if to say what do I do?

Mateo issues his final warning, "The only help hurmahn can offer you at this point is sympathy." It was clear to see that Mateo was out for blood.

"Are you willing to die for what you believe in!" Mateo harasses. At the same time, he takes one last step closer, invading all the Hacker's remaining personal space.

At this exact moment, it is understood that Mateo is willing to die.

"Just give him your charger," hurmahn said.

Like a good boy, The Hacker quickly went to fetch. "Now get the fuck out of my house," said Mateo.

"Cartagena , you have been warned!" declares Mateo. Victory without violence, he whispers to himself, in a warrior's homage to his master's teachings.

To Mateo's delight, everyone was gone except for. hurmahn. hurmahn has decided because hurmahn was still a present party. Mateo felt he was completely ready to move forward with business ventures. This was not something he would share with hurmahn yet.

"You are from Ecuador and not Cartagena ; I have no disputes with you," Mateo says with the mildest smirk.

"Hermano, when is the ETA for that arrival in San Francisco?" Mateo asks. "In 2 days", hurmahn replies. "That is all that I am

waiting on to move forward,” says Mateo with a brilliance of nonchalance.

But this was only the lead-up to Mateo’s actual request. So how much would it cost to get a gun? he says with brash subtleness. hurmahn believed his partner only to be joking. “What do you need that for?” he says.

Mateo explains, “There was a moment tonight when I had to decide. Even though I was outnumbered in my castle, in my kingdom. An aggressive response was necessary, and I did not regard whether I was outnumbered. But I never want to have to make that decision again.” hurmahn alleges he does not think that would be necessary here. “It is much more peaceful than the stereotypes imply. Owning a gun in Colombia is illegal; 12 years in jail minimum.”

Mateo asserts, “I only realize now that this is the first time, we have been able to sit down and have a real conversation.”

Mateo continues, “Hermano, if you believe that I would come to a land where I intend to wage the war of my life and not read the laws of that land? Then equally, I am saddened and worried that you do not know, and I suggest you take the time to understand that I am a serious threat to any social or economic formation I am thrust into.” “It's costly and dangerous to buy,” hurmahn advises.

Mateo responds, “I have decided I am not leaving. There is no price that is more valuable than my peace of mind,” Mateo acclaims.

“Every gringo that comes here says that” hurmahn doubtlessly states. “Cartagena is not a place where many people can endure,” he adds.

“Neither is South-Central Los Angeles,” Mateo devices with a peaceful smile.

“But if you say you are in need, I will reach out, but it will not be cheap, I promise you that,” hurmahn states with a tone of slight skepticism.

Mateo reflects on his first day, truly on Death’s Ground. Rules of engagement are unchanged and still actively intact against all adversaries. War waged on all necessary enemies that proved to be liabilities to mission success.

After Mateo’s mental debriefing, he is reaffirmed that this is the same mission he has signed on for. Mateo is surer of his current warpath than he has been at any other time in this campaign.

As a gesture of his commitment to the war effort, Mateo logs into his online banking account.

After some research, he sent a \$20,000 wire transfer to a vending machine company in Seattle, Washington.

Mateo is learning to appreciate that there is nothing else. This is the calling. Mission failure is not an option.

CHAPTER 14

A BORED SOLDIER, THE WORLD'S MOST DANGEROUS WEAPON



eeling at peace with his war effort. He enjoys resting under the stars on his high-rise balcony, gazing over. the Atlantic Ocean and the midnight sky.

FHe is notified of a 15.51 Bitcoin deposit in his crypto wallet just before he closes his eyes. “Count that up Bitch,” he lips to his fallen foe, The Hacker.

I have never felt more alive for this to be Death’s Grounds, he ponders while he dozes off. To retain the integrity of the narrative, I should remain neutral, but I think our hero might be delusional enough to be dangerous.

Mateo rises, ready for another day of battle. His awakening thought is Psalms 23:4 & 5

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil".

Mateo would be mistaken, an idealist, far before being mistaken, for a man of God. Mateo knew God had no place in these lands. These were the Devil's lands to govern how he saw fit.

The words Mateo quoted from bible scripture were not for him but a private acknowledgment to his enemies to make amends to their god before their afterlife. Mateo understood that others must perish for him to be a true gladiator.

Cartagena is my valley. I will wait and see if my socio is factual and provide me my rod; he cannot help but think. Mateo had not forgotten the conversation with hurmahn from the night before. But he has high expectations for his new partner.

Growing bored of the walls of his castle, today will be a day of reconnaissance. Mateo will remain a ghost no longer. He will engage in any occupation of surrounding territories. Emerging from the shadows and armed with some understanding of the native language. He will form new alliances and identify all threats to his campaign.

Mateo decided to go to the bar he had become a regular at on the main boulevard of Boca-Grande. He takes extra time today to pay attention to all that migrate across his visual analysis and reconnaissance of the surrounding territories.

He takes the time to take notice of a beautiful young girl with her friends. She was not close enough to catch that Mateo paid her a little more attention than everyone else.
Or so Mateo thought.

Magnetically, he found the three women sitting beside him in the bar. Surely Mateo was mistaken for a naive target of these three young ladies, a Gringo.

One of the women seems far more entranced to Mateo than the others. Mateo began the conversation by asking where the women were from.

They informed him that they were on vacation from Medellin. Immediately Mateo could tell that these women were not descendants of the brothels that claimed Cartagena 's most beautiful victims.

These were college girls on vacation with their families. He could enjoy this company without any drama-laden demands for money. He was getting passionate energy from these three young ladies.

They were equally beautiful; Mateo had no preference other than the preferences of all three cousins.

They wanted to relax on the beach in front of Mateo's Castle. No was not a word in Mateo's vocabulary today. If the King was to be crowned, his royal behavior fit that concept.

Mateo allowed the woman to be as Royal as he on this day. No cost was questioned, and no limitation existed for the enjoyment and festivities.

The woman jet-skied while Mateo was treated like a King with massages of his feet and back.

All three women desired Mateo to frolic in the blue water of the southern Atlantic with any of the chosen three. Mateo felt he needed no plan of attack with the three women. The cards would fall as they may.

Getting close to sunset Mateo only grew more confident. But we always remain vigilant. This is Death's land; let us not forget.

Suddenly six police officials surround Mateo. Mateo cannot help but let his past interactions with the police influence his mental reaction.

.88 grams of cocaine in my camouflage North Face bag. Legal by Colombians statutes, he thinks quickly. "Why are they focusing on Mateo?" He inquires in the third person. One of his new female acquaintances informs him that the police are there to escort him to his castle. They believed he might become a target, with his free-spending practices without resolve.

This must be one of the most surprising things that have happened to Mateo to date, not only on his marathon journey. This was quite different from the treatment he received in the U.S.

But Mateo understood that if you walk with royal intention, dress in royal design, and rule in imperial behavior. Then it was only proper that knights would come to protect the empire.

Mateo's surprise quickly turned to an understanding. Although his mission was his alone, it was a feat of no commonality. He was the prophesied leader that would come to put this Hustle Mecca on notice.

He was no different from the second coming of Christ. The Simon Bolivar of South Central had returned to South America to give them what they desired.

A leader unparalleled and unmatched by all previous candidates to the calling of the Sacred Brotherhood of Death. But he would reign with a supremacy that was foreign to him in his homeland.

These are the thoughts that Mateo allows to populate his brain as he is escorted to his sanctuary in a procession of police officers. They understood that their true King was of Moor descent.

When his police escort is no longer present in the lobby of his unofficial sovereignty, he is unsurprisingly in the company of all three new amigas.

He offers the young ladies' dinner as he checks his missed calls and notifications. The day continues to bless our hero.

He reads a message from hurmahn informing him that he was able to locate Mateo's illicit request from the night before.

hurmahn is in a presumptuous mood because he is adamant that the price tag of ten million pesos would be a final deterrent for Mateo to heed his previous advice.

Mateo's only question was how long it would take to acquire. The price tag had no relevance.

Compared to his death, his life would undoubtedly carry on with all the necessary value to merit the investment in his "peace of mind."

But the "peace of mind" did not regard his safety. It was, more, a necessary, valid representation of the commitment of his new partner to their entrepreneurial endeavors.

Mateo knew purchasing a firearm was far more dangerous than any other black-market purchase.

In a continuing effort to keep our narrative as accurate as possible. Mateo did not believe that hurmahn would perform the requested service.

But this was the information Mateo needed to judge his socio's true intentions. Mateo logs onto his Western Union account and delivers the necessary pesos to complete the dark acquisition.

He affirms to Mateo that he will take delivery the next day.

Mateo's hands were full that evening with his threesome of dinner companions. He gives it no more thought. Mateo would not be surprised if he never saw hurmahn again after giving him the small fortune of ten million pesos.

CHAPTER 15

TO THE VICTOR GOES THE SPOILS



Treating his guest to Mateo's go to meal, Argentinian steak, the women lounged around the King's castle. At the same time, he picked up the food close by.

Mateo frequently employed a strategy to assess the extent of trustworthiness he could place in an individual.

However, it was yet to be discovered by most visitors to his home. This term was yet to be widely known among the Colombian population.

His property was considered a "smart home," not because it was a good investment but to ensure its protection and security.

The cameras were not appropriately concealed, and their purpose was not malicious. They were intended to allow Mateo to observe your behavior when you thought you were out of sight.

Certain societies may view this as inappropriate, but war cannot be considered a society since it does not involve social interactions.

However, it can be viewed as an economy where time holds more value than its weight in gold, and timely facts are deemed priceless, even more so than said gold.

The fact was no different than Frank is Mateo. Mateo is Frank.

But in war times, Frank's n had no relevance, a nonexistent value, because he is an absent party.

Frank's caution would be seen as a weakness. His attention to detail would be interpreted as hesitation. Mateo would be the metamorphosis of the warrior consciousness that would guide our unsubstantiated King to not a thrown, a crown, or a court.

But an Age of Enlightenment. The wealth of a nation is not defined by its fiscal responsibilities but more so by its commitments to those fiscally irresponsible.

Cartagena 's sole responsibility was to make everyone responsible for their irresponsibilities.

After dinner, Mateo invites his guests to stay the night. But he was surprisingly informed that he would have to meet with their family first for them to be permitted to slumber in the kingdom.

This was oddly refreshing to Mateo that he had encountered the beautiful three young ladies who reflected class.

Mateo had grown to dislike the prostitution dynamic of his new Ciudad. So, he was willing to oblige the young women's families' wishes.

It being late, he sent the ladies home in a taxi and suggested they repeat their fun of today, out on the beach again, with his

promise to be more adventurous and join them in the blue Atlantic Ocean water.

It was agreed that it would be a date. He would meet them at their hotel to meet with their family so they could be familiar with the regalities the ladies would be privy to. That night, Mateo decidedly dedicated his time to researching the correct operation and maintenance of the Browning "1911" .45 Caliber sidearm by watching countless YouTube videos.

He examined the many ideologies behind concealed carry practices by keeping one chambered versus none. He understood that night that an unchambered weapon was equally effective as a paperweight in any potential future conflict.

That night he agreed that a chambered round was the only form to carry concealed. But these were all unfulfilled desires until he felt the cold steel of his "peace of mind."

Familiar magenta-orange shades, crowded by a haze of clouds, gave way to the next morning's sky. Far before Mateo realized the hour.

He is then alerted to a message from one of his three female amigas from the previous day. They are very eager to get an early start to the day. So, they invite Mateo over for breakfast.

After meeting their family, he picks up the three young women as a man of his word.

The three women quickly return to Boca-Grande with Mateo with a free pass to enter his kingdom.

They did not head directly to the beach but took time to make themselves more comfortable with Mateo's castle. The women's desires that would be the permissive entanglements began to show. It became evident that Mateo was in control of his desires

presently, and there were not many limitations the women would set forth.

This is the theme of the day. So, in Deja vu fashion, the foursome returned to the exact location as the day before. But this day would prove to have its differences and similarities.

Mateo began to feel in the moment enough to take a day of rest from the war effort.

He was undoubtedly winning the war in his mental constraints, feeling more at peace than he typically experienced.

After being lured into the ocean water with ease by the innocent but seductive qualities of an entirely new type of Colombiana, he had never encountered. As the perfect Colombiana culo baited his entry into the southern Atlantic, he was delightfully surprised at how warm the water was.

Mateo embraced that as a by-product of his extensive research that he was becoming the subject of this biopic. But his commitment to this concept was no different from a method actor's commitment to the acceptance that he, as a result, has become the art.

Mateo is having these principles driven deep into his soldier psyche.

Despite what you may feel concerning whatever current comfort levels Mateo may be presently experiencing, it has no bearing on the facts of these non-wavering rules of war. Any day without war is a day of delusion. Mateo is snapped back to his reality instantly. He relaxes on the beach, consistent with the repetitive nature of this Deja-vu like-day.

He becomes aware of a new police presence like yesterday. But today far more discreet and subtle. One single police officer approaches him he recognizes from the night before.

Mateo does not feel the initial anxieties from yesterday that he experienced with his surprise introduction to Colombian law enforcement officials.

The officer wants to convey a message to Young Mateo; he begins to type a statement into his Google Translate so everything would be preserved in translation.

Mateo reads a message that he absorbs with some level of denial or doubt at what he was reading initially. "Amigo, you did not tip me for walking you home yesterday." The translation explains.

A tourist may have perceived this as some extortion from a law official. But Mateo understands extortion is a set of circumstances or happen stances that would not even survive a single breath on Death's ground.

So, Mateo understood the knight had returned to offer his services. Nothing would please Mateo more than donating to the officer's charity of his necessity.

And Mateo understood at this moment that he was no longer an officer of the law but was loyal only to a steady stream of Colombian pesos.

Mateo handed the officer an amount more significant than one week's pay. He quickly dismissed the officer's presence but told him to stop by his palace tomorrow to talk further business.

Mateo was enjoying all aspects of the events of today. Any interest or desire that he would possess today would undoubtedly be fulfilled.

But his mind constantly on the war at hand, he cannot help but ponder hurmahn's present actions as Mateo waits patiently and doubtfully on word of his black-market purchase that was honestly the defining factor of our hero's inability to turn back.

This would be his point of no return. Because Mateo knew if the cold steel of that Browning mechanical masterpiece were permitted to aid his war front, no man, land, or vast ocean could stop the war Mateo would wage on this countryside.

All war and no fun would erode even the most seasoned veteran's efforts, so he decides to enjoy the rest of his day. Those thoughts were for a later time.

Mateo was still presently enjoying the environment during his current beach entrenchment campaign.

He had already decided that today would be a much more adventurous and opulent day than the day before. Mateo wanted to test the theory that his generosity would make him a potential target.

He silently attempted to rival his previous day's spending out. He had no doubt he dwarfed the previous days' effort. As the day ended, he was almost waiting for his police escorts to guide him and his concubines to a night to remember. Mateo had honestly not had the pleasure of three women yet.

So right on cue, his police escort returned at dusk. Although they only came in gentle force this evening, the intentions and results would prove far more profound.

They had the same motivation that Mateo was becoming a target. But this night was not focused on some unforeseen criminal element.

It was aimed at the establishment Mateo had generously patronized the last two days. They quickly began reviewing Mateo's bill. The police officials are growing upset with the bar owner.

Mateo is trying to gauge why that is. Then to Mateo's stunning surprise. All his attempts to outdo the day before we are all for

naught. Because even though there was twice as much food, drinks, and festivities, his bill totaled half the amount the day before.

The police officers issued a stern warning to the bar owner regarding the price gouging that they were currently basking in at the expense of Mateo.

This was not even a battle that Mateo was wasting his vast chest of tactics and strategies on. But as he was beginning to see, this is the purpose of building your army.

He began to understand that his time would no longer be wasted on the small frivolous day-to-day battles. But exclusively on the strategy of the collective war dynamic. He was pleased by these new unforeseen, unexpected allies waging war on his behalf. He understood that these protections were neither free nor pure of heart.

But to Mateo's recollection, a pure heart has never been the champion of any warrior's return from Death's ground.

CHAPTER 16

THE STRATEGIST'S SUCCESS, THE TACTIAN'S PATIENCE



S

till in the figurative honeymoon phase, Mateo is far too relaxed on his defensive footing. Mateo secretly yearns for discourse, calamity, and confusion. Mateo is

nothing more or less than a seasoned warrior veteran.

This is the only place that he knows to be home, war. He has tasted blood and is only tortured by each passing moment of any illusion of the concept of peace or opposing sides cooperating.

Having already seen his initial investment in his police protection returned. Mateo has undoubtedly decided to try his luck with his tour of his overnight guests with their figurative permission slips.

Mateo let the evening naturally unfold and pressed forward with no collective plan of attack or ultimate expectations. Mateo is reminded of the African fable of the Father Lion and his son.

The young lion cub tells his father of all his temptations in his current field of view. He told his father, "Dad, look at all those lionesses to choose from; let's run down and lay claim to one of our own." The wise father tells his son, "No, son, let's walk down and lay claim to all for our own." This is with the same patience Mateo would move through his night and experience yet another victory.

First, he was thanked for his generosity by the eldest cousin of the three as she exited the shower in Mateo's bedroom. To say she was appreciative is a bit of an understatement.

But to say Mateo was merely pleased would be an equally extreme understatement. Honestly, Mateo had all the thanks he needed from the group.

But that did not change the fact that the group still possessed much more gratitude that would be expressed beyond Mateo's control.

The sleeping beauty still occupies his bed. He moves to his balcony to check the status of hurmahn's valiant efforts. Only adding to the fervor of today's perceived epic nature, hurmahn informs Mateo he will be at Palmetto Beach in about an hour with the General's requested armament.

Mateo returns from the balcony feeling untouchable. This immediately proves a fallacy because he feels a soft hand grabbing him to pull him down to the couch where the youngest of the three cousins lies.

The following events are no shock to Mateo because, at this point, his campaign has gone unchallenged.

Mateo lays his head back on his couch while he is pleased by the oral amusement of what is becoming one hell of a “family affair.”

Even with the current serial bliss that has expressed its sincere appreciation for his genuine generosity.

He can hardly hold his anticipation for hurmahn’s arrival with Mateo’s weapon of choice.

After finishing inside the youngest cousin’s articulate inlet with her insistence on swallowing his seed, Mateo offers the young siren a towel to reclaim her sexual sovereignty.

She illustrates that she would rather continue her allegiance with a seductive inhalation of the pearl white powder from his member. She is pleased with her performance, Mateo internally confirms.

Mateo cannot help but ponder the “hat trick.” The last middle cousin sleeps in the other bedroom, but Mateo doubts the youngest will follow those slumber tactics soon. She inhales two more enormous bumps from her long fingernails. She is doing her best to tempt Mateo with far more pleasure.

Then Mateo suddenly hears a knock at the door. That must be hurmahn, Mateo thinks. He opens the door to greet his most trusted socio. hurmahn enters the penthouse carrying a “Mac Center” bag.

Inside the bag is no type of Apple products. It is an original War World II near-mint condition Browning 1911. Mateo is in denial that he has been permitted to grow his military, armory, and territory in the face of a non-existent enemy.

Mateo immediately begins to feel the power the mere 16oz of hardened steel exudes. The “1911” was such a perfect piece of machinery that it remained the side arm of the US military for

over one hundred years. Second to only the AK-47 when dealing with body count. At this point, Mateo is searching for a battle to channel his aggression.

Mateo cannot help to remember the five million pesos that he was blackmailed for a month prior.

This story's narrative would like to take a moment to point out that Mateo, although regal in his actions and behaviors.

Possessing his relentlessly consistent royal mannerisms does not come without a dark side.

Mateo possesses another secret that lies beside the underground superiority complex he keeps hidden in his transpiring thoughts. Mateo is a prideful King. But he is unmatched in his commitment to his “pettiness.”

He does not possess a gene that allows forgiveness. Additionally, Mateo collects on all debts.

All imbalances must be presented with counterweights in all given scenarios, business, or street dealings. So please do not for one second believe that Mateo had forgotten about the imbalance that occurred when his citizenship was still in its infancy.

So, we will later revisit these redeeming qualities of our great King, General, and Strategist.

Mateo is so engulfed with his new purchase that he almost forgets hurmahn is present as Mateo begins to dismantle his new firearm. Checking his literal lifeline for any imperfections that would affect his defense of the empire in future battles.

Mateo begins his best “Scarface” rendition. “You’re all a bunch of fuckin assholes!” “Do you know why?” “You don’t have the guts to be what you want to be.” “You need people like me to point your fucking finger” “And say that is the bad guy.” “Well,

say goodnight to the bad guy.” “Last time you will see a bad guy like me,” as he laughs villainously. Mateo’s newfound power has his partner feeling unhinged. hurmahn’s next question catches Mateo off guard. “You are not going to kill me with that thing, are you?” hurmahn conveys a tone of discomfort and concern.

Mateo replies, “Why would I kill you? Are you planning to give me a reason?” Mateo wondered why his partner would be concerned about that. Presently Mateo placed more trust in hurmahn than anyone else.

Mateo hesitantly locks his Browning in his luggage to negate its unannounced power. Mateo returns from his bedroom to tell hurmahn it is time for “the birds to fly north for the spring.” hurmahn’s face displays a look of contentedness after Mateo conveys that news.

At the same time, Mateo continues to feel invincible. He tells his amigo, “Do whatever your heart desires inside these walls or out.”

But Mateo has some unfinished business with his last female overnight guest. Surely there is no possible way Mateo can lose on this night.

Being an authentic Los Angeles King, Mateo is now confidently protected by the angelic number 45. Symbolically intertwined with the legacy of the “1911” Browning.

But he enters the guest bedroom of his penthouse, only aspiring to be like the ninety-nine of Wayne Gretzky. The “hat trick” is a challenging feat. But an occasion to be celebrated, albeit only on this final night of banal pleasures and unworldly distractions.

CHAPTER 17

DEATH'S PLAYGROUND



A

s the spring equinox sun rose over the equator. This would be a day of birth and death. The three cousins that laid about Mateo's dwelling no longer had a place that fits the star-crossed lovers.

Whatever kindness they found comfort and pleasure in, in the company of Mateo, was put to rest following the events that took place the night before.

Mateo had his way with these women. Honestly, he had been having his way with his battlegrounds. But he knew this was all a facade and a distraction.

The metaphoric war was now a reality. Today was primed to be the day that would deny our hero any retreat or contingency. The only guarantee that would be granted moving forward was the promise of disarray, disorder, and unrest.

If Mateo came for the test of his life, his life would be wagered against any dereliction.

The thought of anything besides survival at all costs would cost all survival. Death's Ground was bought and paid for, only accepting payment in blood, and honestly, it never could be bought or paid for.

The imminent domain of the souls laid to rest here would offer no companionship, for these were tormented beings that only indulged in the companionship of misery. Congratulations on any success of battle would be a fantastic fantasy. The permanency of that fatal mistake would quickly replace any moments occupied by pride or pleasure.

The time for pleasure had reached its end. With this knowledge, Mateo parted ways with the three women callously. He handed them cab fare plus a little extra in no different fashion than he had countless times before with Cartagena culture in his heart.

Mateo understood the need for the cold depth beginning to form where his heart lay. This was honestly something that he cherished dearly.

In his thoughts, his mind was a far more necessary weapon. So, he took the last remnants of his ordinary world, his heart, and his doubts and symbolically laid them to rest alongside his fallen brethren Frank.

Now was the point of no return. Now there would be no safety net to cushion his fall. There would be no mentors to guide him where he could find comfort. No apprenticeship existed to prepare Mateo for the trials ahead.

No life vest to secure him in his proverbial dive into the deep end of this shark-infested water. However-still, the waters may seem only justified by how deep their depths could be taken.

This point in our hero's journey was every ounce of what he had yearned for since birth. These are not metaphors, analogies, or similes. This would be life or death.

CHAPTER 18

YOUNG PABLO



Mateo and hurmahn joined on the balcony during the spring equinox, discussing the details of their initial load of only 2.2 pounds of white powder.

Mateo felt like a thousand grams and an infinite distance from his past, surrounded by total unfamiliarity.

Mateo's curiosity was aroused, and he wanted to know more about the delivery process, so he asked hurmahn for clarification. hurmahn explained that this shipment would be handled differently than usual, as it was a single item rather than part of a larger package.

He continued explaining that a DHL shipment of legal documents would be required to form their business. The documents would be received by their legal counsel in Panama and then forwarded to whatever address Mateo chose.

When Mateo asked why they were dealing with an attorney in Panama, hurmahn assured him that he should trust his actions on this delivery. hurmahn explained that any packages from Colombia to America would merit additional inspection.

However, real estate documents, including a deed of conveyance from a lawyer in Panama, would provide sufficient cover and subtlety to reach their destination without any issues.

Mateo needed to be in a secure position regarding his professional life. He had ventured into an underworld area

governed by those brave enough to break boundaries and challenge the existing order of things. Triumph in this underground economy was often only achieved by the most clandestine and reticent people; information was a highly guarded commodity.

Mateo had mastered the successful practices of men far more corrupt than any cocaine distribution network. Some people claim that people in positions of influence, such as Mark Zuckerberg, can profit from the most private thoughts and desires of unwilling parties.

They argue that these personal reflections are then distorted and given back to you, which tricks you into thinking they are your own. Others even suggest that these powerful individuals may be able to affect the results of democratic elections.

Some people may believe that individuals like Elon Musk are self-made geniuses. Still, others see them as manipulative individuals who may persuade you to beta test their products without fully understanding the risks involved.

The fortunes of such people are often based on an ideology that goes against the basic principles of supply and demand, and it can be a risky venture that only the most affluent consumers can afford to undertake.

From Mateo's perspective, Pablo Escobar, the Medellin Cartel, and the Cali Cartel's Ochoa brothers were choir boys compared to the subvert tactics used by the tech giants, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. These companies' data collection tactics are a flagrant violation of privacy. Even drug traffickers do not invade your privacy to this extent. They then sell your data to salespeople or ad companies with dubious intentions.

Their business practices are incredibly complex, like creating a new demand. Once achieved, they are willing to supply unlimited sensitive data with pleasure.

In contrast, narco business models operate on the simple principle of supply versus demand. The end-users generate the demand, and Mateo aims to create a continuous supply flow directly from the source, without involving any intermediaries, to maximize his profits. Despite being aware of the unforgiving and dangerous nature of the business, Mateo applies academic business theories to it. However, more experienced strategists may scrutinize his tactics.

Mateo started to grasp the strategy being used and the potential risks involved. Whether within legal bounds or in a morally ambiguous territory, as a seasoned businessman, his priority is always to safeguard his interests, even though there are no guarantees in life or business.

After hurmahn explains the method of travel for business goods, he continues the discussion, transitioning into questions involving payment. This was no surprise to Mateo because the transfer of capital is always a key component of any successful business transaction.

Mateo explains that he has had the necessary bitcoins for the initial business transaction for some time. Mateo was using that apparent information to show his commitment to mission success. He also believed it was a necessary interlude to explain that there would be no exchange of funds until a successful touchdown to his buyer in Inglewood, California.

Immediately it became clear that was not the scenario that hurmahn desired. This was expressed through his verbal disdain and concern for his responsibility to his employer.

Mateo questions hurmahn. "What is your concern involving payment?" Mateo stated they slept across the hall from each other, like when hurmahn suggested that fact earlier in forming this dark alliance. Mateo continued by adding that he was a true business professional with self-appeasing slight pettiness to his tone.

Mateo was honestly offended that his financial standing or follow-through was being questioned in any way whatsoever. Mateo continues his response to the aggrieved implications with a stance of stubbornness to the impending pecuniary standoff.

His continued diatribe was expressed with the arrogance of nothing short of a kingly decree. "Where am I going?" he emphatically states with a regal assertiveness. "Cartagena will rid itself of my urban infestation through nothing short of my final demise."

To be fair to our hero's journey, no one south of the north pole could currently question our general's sincerity or commitment to the war effort of the present battle. Mateo understood how important it was to avoid a stalemate in the war effort, as it could have serious economic consequences. As he gained more experience as a strategist, he became better at handling unexpected challenges and responding quickly.

hurmahn shared his concerns, explaining that any deviation from the intended outcome of the transaction would put him in a precarious position with his employer due to his responsibilities. hurmahn's attempts to push the transfer of funds through prematurely did not sway Mateo. Mateo knew he was placing far more on the line than hurmahn could imagine.

Mateo was deeply involved in Death's Ground, which was currently occupied. He had agreed to the terms of engagement

and was following the rules completely. Any appeals for mercy on this battlefield would be disregarded. On Death's Ground, every decision made by all willing and unwilling parties means the difference between life and death. This was not the time to let your mind or thoughts define you. Giving in to that notion would lead to a quick and certain demise. Mateo willingly positioned himself with his back against the proverbial wall that separated everlasting greatness from utter destruction.

When dealing with arduous circumstances like Death's Ground, Mateo must be careful not to waste time, make unnecessary miscalculations, or move inefficiently. Doing so could result in losing valuable resources, territory, or life.

Despite hurmahn being a trusted ally and partner, there was zero possibility to fund or pay for any commodities until proof of concept was conferred.

When contractually agreed-upon products had exchanged hands and only at that moment would any bitcoin be transferred. It must be universally understood that continuing sanctions will be imposed on all nonperforming entities. This was necessary to ensure that the desired undivided attention and demands were satisfied and assured.

Mateo was permitting no possibility of any other scenario. He must convey the necessary ideologies to empower hurmahn's decision-making relief. Mateo carried mild malaise to hurmahn's references to his "employer." An inherent defect existed in the relationship as partners with his present thought process. Mateo is completely benevolent in transitioning hurmahn to El thinking. "You are in a precarious relationship with your responsibilities to yourself," Mateo exclaims.

Mateo understands how Law 13 governs the present power structure. Law 13 dictates that only appeals to their self-interest could prove responsive when the need to sway an opposing party exists. “See, it's obvious you're not looking at the total picture at this moment and clear you don't fully understand your role in this business venture,” Mateo relays with a confidence that could only be developed by staring death in its face.

“You are under the assumption that I am purchasing from you to complete this transaction.” Mateo continues. “Well, nothing in life is free,” hurmahn asserts, confused. hurmahn had walked right into the trap Mateo set.

“Thanks for clearing that up for me,” Mateo responds. “Since we agree that nothing in life is free. I am sure you will understand the value of what I am about to propose. You are part owner of this initial Brick, albeit beginning percentages on this first run,” Mateo informs.

hurmahn began to become suspicious once offered something for free. He remained cautious. “I understand that you must trust me completely when deciding. However, I do not do things just for my amusement,” affirms Mateo. “As with any sales-based income, you will not experience longevity nor success without referrals and repeat business. This will be the first in a long everlasting stream of transactions.

“Numerous variables are outside my control, and few are mine to influence. I believe that the most concrete way for me to ensure that a consistent ever-lasting stream continues is to share all profits with you as a partner.” hurmahn is in disbelief at Mateo’s claim. “I can tell by your face and body language that you are fueled by doubt. But that is nothing more than your employee mindset playing tricks on your

subconscious regarding boss concepts. I explain this to you with mindful aegis," Mateo expresses.

"Why do you tell me this?" hurmahn questions. "So that you understand that completing this transaction is equally advantageous to collecting your share of this and all future profits. So, when I make accusations of the precariousness of your success, you understand what I am implying," Mateo explains.

"My only confusion lies in if you are more loyal to your employer or your success. My willingness and ability to pay is a moot concern. The only concern is if you are as committed to your success as I am," Mateo asserts.

"As I said before, if there is any variance from the expected outcome, I will face dangers that I could not purposely subject myself to," hurmahn says with heightened concern.

"I understand that you are worried about potential consequences from your boss if things do not go as planned. Your concerns are valid and relatable. However, I can assure you that if anything were to go wrong with my investment, the consequences would be much greater than any repercussions from your employer.

With my capital, there is no question about my actions, and all uncertainties would be eliminated. The consequences would be absolute and final." said Mateo.

"As my friend and partner, I apologize if that came across in a threatening manner because I intended to convey the complete opposite, a promise, a blood oath," Mateo assures.

"So as long as your confidence in your abilities is genuine, your only concerns should be if you want your share in cash or bitcoin," contends Mateo.

Intimidation was not a tactic currently engaged by Mateo. It was only a fair warning to his socio. It was, in fact, hurmahn that procured Mateo's firearm.

It is truly delightful to witness Mateo's sense of accomplishment when his coaching yields positive outcomes, particularly when it instills a newfound sense of self-assurance in hurmahn to make difficult decisions.

It is noteworthy that Mateo is proficient in handling all manner of scenarios. Still, he emphasizes avoiding using deadly force with his "1911" .45 ACP.

Thinking about the two samurai in The Art of War, Mateo is reminded of a quote from Sun Tzu.

According to Sun Tzu, the warrior who constantly brandishes his sword to intimidate is not a cause for concern. However, the individual who never displays their sword is far more worrisome, especially if they finally decide to reveal it. In that case, there should be no doubt that they have the intention and capability to use it in the most lethal and bloody manner possible.

If there is any need to be clearer in this narrative's unbiased but informative approach, in that case.

Mateo follows the ideology and practice of concealed carry, always without exception, with one in the chamber for anyone that needs undoubted verification.

CHAPTER 19

GONE ON ARRIVAL



currently being pressed into individual
squares of "paper ateo and hurmahn have negotiated and
agreed on the price per key. After Mateo has confirmed the
brick

legal documents" as approximately 85%-88% pure, he has all
the necessary information to negotiate a price with his
associate in Inglewood, California.

The LA streets, specifically Inglewood bred Mateo. Mateo will
only deal with someone he trusts to handle that weight. This was
an easy decision.

Mateo knew Yung Piru was the only potential buyer capable of
affording and distributing that large volume. He ^{had} always
respected Yung Piru's hustle and commitment to the game's rules.

Although they were not connected by literal blood, they
represented the same color flag hanging from their back right
pockets. The simple fact was that they both banged blood.

In 2017 the going rate for one thousand grams of white flake in
Los Angeles hovered around \$25,000. But there were countless
other obstacles and hurdles to clear.

Mexican street gangs like MS13 or 18th Street were in full
control of the powder game in Los Angeles. Being directly
affiliated with the Mexican Mafia and numerous Mexican Cartels
allowed them to keep a stranglehold on the LA market.

But this was not a Walmart purchase; there was no Costco to bargain shop bricks. You had to be tied in with a reputable, respected individual in their ranks. But all this did was get you a meeting.

So once whatever fragile alliance you were able to form got you in front of someone who mattered, someone that could put a bird on the table for the ability to even begin to discuss business.

To be clear and direct at this moment of our narrative. If you had a Mexican Patna and the necessary funds, you would find a brick in LA with little trouble.

Even though white and green were the only two colors that truly mattered in this narco game, it was a more complex concept.

As with any entrepreneurial endeavor, the better the quality of what you sell, the easier it will be to eliminate your inventory. As your quality grows, your loyalty from the consumer will coincide. Not to mention the cleaner the product, the larger the profit margins.

But here is the facts of the matter. “If you are Black, you think the Mexicans are giving you that. I do not know where you are from. Tu no hablas Espanol you not getting none of that good shit son.” I mean, your shit is stepped on; Mateo ponders.

Every hand that brick touches from its Cali, Colombia origin to the hand of the Mexican Cartel that is responsible for tunneling it straight under the American border. And I mean, every single hand in between has had its way with manipulating purity.

After adding whatever dilutant differing parties have come to trust, it is dropped into a wooden box frame and stepped on in a modest attempt to re-press the diluted product to represent untampered merchandise. This is not a possibility. This is a promise.

So, let's assume.

"Su habilidad, para, hablar español, es mejor que, el gringo promedio." In translation, we will assume that your ability to speak Spanish is better than the average gringo.

That fact will serve your credence and move you up the hierarchy of who gets the purest product. Now let us avoid getting carried away with this fact. Forty percent still needs to catch up to the baseline of what Mateo would consider acceptable business practices.

This 40% claim of purity is Mateo being generous and optimistic in its truest form. I explain these details to allow our readers a backstory to the sales tactics Mateo will unfurl in the subsequent secured communications between Mateo and Yung Piru.

Mateo activates his IP Vanish app to represent his location anywhere else besides the interior of any represented Colombian border. He shoots Yung Piru a quick message.

"Look for my call on Signal as soon as I return to the krib, woop," as quickly as the message is read; it wastes no time to remove its presence in their chat thread.

Immediately upon return to his casa Mateo connects to his Movistar fiber optic broadband. He checks the Express Vpn app settings that are constantly protecting his home Wi-Fi. He feels Croatia is a corrupt enough government to begin his "IP hopping" practice. Followed by an "IP bounce" through narco neutral nation of Portugal.

A fun fact about Portugal is that no single inmate populates their prisons on a drug charge. Portugal was a progressive nation, especially considering its residency on the continent of Europe, which was as naive as America regarding its war on drugs.

With the added security protection of Signal's double ratchet algorithm, pre-keys extended triple Diffie-Hellman Handshake and the AES-256 symmetric block cipher of 256bit end-to-end encryption.

Mateo now possessed the anonymity he required to talk as freely as necessary, to negotiate his price to his blood brother.

The call trills no less than three times before the encrypted call bounces across the Atlantic, no fewer than two times before its final globe-trotting data traffic connects Mateo to the ghetto of his birth. This single connected encrypted line covered more territory than European colonialism.

Yung Piru gets right to business. "So, I know my white bitch be asking a lot, but I don't treat that bitch no better than my old Mexican bitch that stayed down, especially when I came across that main line," Yung Piru infers.

"I got a bitch so right you don't know if she from Bolivia, Peru, or the Swiss Alps," Mateo replies. "That bitch be hopping flights to appease me like she owes me money, Mateo adds.

"You know me, I don't get sweet on these hoes; they come and go as they please," Yung Piru continues.

"My bitch loves me so much she hops flights to make sure she wherever I need her to be," Mateo asserts. "I still told her it ain't no fun if the homies cannot have none, even though she is on that; I am a virgin and pure type shit. That is the only one that ain't lying," Mateo brags.

"What the fuck that bitch be talking about," Yung Piru questions.

"That bitch swear she only twenty-two, but I am like, bitch I cop your flights. I know that bitch was born in like 88 or 85 or something. I saw your paperwork and passport hoe. You are

fucking with a real nigga, so do not play with me or the facts I told her,” Mateo says with strict confidence.

“My Mexican bitch swear she 19 and a half,” Yung Piru adds.

“Yeah, but that bitch got 40 years’ worth of miles on her; at worst, my bitch split the difference down the middle on that 22 shit,” Mateo conveys. “Even If my bitch gets flipped by two niggas, whether she is twenty-two or was born in eighty-five, she is still putting in miles in these streets like she two bitches. My bitch is so bad that she can be in two places simultaneously.

You know these niggas love these young bitches so much even if she claimed she is twenty-two; these thirsty niggas are on some getting 11-a-piece type shit. At least I know she was born in eighty-five,” Mateo finalizes.

“Say less. I will pick that bitch up and see if she bout that life,” Yung Piru exclaims.

“I do not do frequent-flyer miles, so if I am paying for her flight, she bad as fuck, Mateo, adduces.

“Send me the flight info. Woop,” as Yung Piru cuts communication.”

Chapter 20

You Thought I Forgot



G

eneral Mateo is in full command of his army. He has laid all the necessary groundwork and infrastructure for the extended war campaign of the current foreign occupation. He was a leader, wise beyond his years.

So, he understood the necessity of embracing the “When in Rome...” tactic. In converse, he uniformly understood, believed, and agreed, “Rome was not built in a day.”

Rest was an underestimated superpower that tonight Mateo would lay claim to. Tonight, he would pause all war efforts out of respect for the physical, mental, and financial overtax he has placed on his singular entity.

This would not be a night of celebration, obliviousness, or indulgence. Just a moment to catch his breath and gather his thoughts.

Despite his willingness to take any proposed or implied challenge with the reckless abandonment of a man with nothing to lose or a deity that possessed an implied immortality.

Tonight, he would interblend among the locals as just a man. No thoughts of regality or internally contained superiority. Mateo almost felt humble this night as he walked to his Cartagena version of “Cheers.”

Yes, his “Browning” was tucked close to the small of his back. This narrative merely suggests he is in a mode of recovery, not mindlessness.

Mateo arrives at the Lobby Store, a bar where he has become a regular. Mateo had frequented the bar quite often over the last couple of months. He grew to know the staff well. This was one of the few places on the battlefield where he felt comfortable enough to let his guard down.

He was a local celebrity. They were fans of a few music videos he filmed back home in Los Angeles. It was common for the bar owner to play Mateo's videos on YouTube while he was having a few beers.

Mateo was not much of a drinker. He was honestly more fond of the food at the establishment. Mateo's dark eyes, flecked with points of light, watched the dust dance in shafts of white moonlight.

His heart beat a soft, steady rhythm in his chest. The taste of white and beer lingered on his tongue. He felt like he was floating between worlds at that moment. Cocaine had become part of his body, as familiar as the blood that flowed through his veins or the air he exhaled in his lungs. Mateo's transformation into the fearless leader he is today took work. Mateo had to hammer his spirit and courage into a steel-like resolve as he traversed this treacherous journey.

Each passing day peeled away more of his former life and replaced it with the unforgiving culture of his new world. Mateo embraced the changes and became an indomitable force against any who dared oppose him.

But whatever plans of temporary peace he may have concocted in his head, they were an idle dream. This narrative centered around Death's Ground does not offer such moments of respite; no matter how hard our protagonist tried, he could never escape this realm's relentless hold over him.

As if to hammer this point home, I will take this moment to remind all our audience that our hero has willingly and knowingly chosen to inhabit Death's Ground.

Let us take this moment to document Mateo's last attempt to claim nobility to his persona. This is war, not a game with the luxury of a figurative timeout.

This would be the exact moment when our hero would embrace these lands that had bred him. This narrative does not take sides. It solely explains events and how they occurred in memory. We will make no attempts to be biased toward our hero.

Mateo has many qualities that offer some redeeming nature. But he also lay claim to darkness that must be questioned. But this narrative does not claim any influence over Mateo.

It has been previously stated that Mateo collects on all debts. He does not permit any defeat. Any battle that a documented enemy perceived as a victory was nothing more than momentary.

And so, our hero will be permitted to balance all scales of justice. A familiar fragrance begins to permeate his nostrils. It is the echoed smell of death, not cocaine.

Mateo's casual reconnaissance of this night would prove invaluable and anything but casual. Casual relations have proven dangerous and costly in the past.

But tonight, a rare opportunity will be gifted to Young Mateo. An opportunity for retribution. Yes, it is known to be a fact that Mateo possesses a petty nature.

But his following actions of tonight are not influenced by that admitted flaw of personality. It will be influenced by more of a principality of nature.

Mateo is well-known for holding a grudge; however, his reluctance to forget is the more pertinent factor of the night.

Mateo thought of the woman he could never forget. On the outside, she was a perfect vision of beauty, but inside there was

an ominous aura that threatened to infect his very being like a deadly virus.

Mateo's gaze is rigidly fixed on the unsuspecting target. However, Mateo is not as shocked as his victim; he understands that the world works off two contrasting, competing forces.

He considers concepts like good and evil, positive, and negative, God and the Devil as mere words - ideas that race through his mind.

Mateo sends a WhatsApp voice message to the Colombian law officials with whom he has contractual obligations. Unfaltering and unyielding in his stance, Mateo despises the police.

But this is Death's turf, where limitations of the physical and mental worlds take no precedence or accordance in aligning with morals, ethics, are justice.

Here, no protection or security is real; it is all an illusion. So, Mateo would never truly, state, believe, or desire any concept or implication that he found enjoyment in his request.

Mateo believes that in Colombia, anything can be acquired with money. He supports this belief with his personal experiences. However, he never admits to participating in any financial transactions that were ambiguously immoral, falling in a gray area between right and wrong.

Mateo was sure that the woman he had seen out on a date earlier that night had entered the neighboring establishment. He felt something boiling inside him, knowing it was because of her.

She had wronged him in many ways, and now she would face the consequences of taking his five million pesos. But as much as he wanted to see her get what she deserved; his heart still ached at the thought of teaching her a lesson. Mateo knows every law

and rule regarding power, seduction, war, and mastery. At this very moment, he was willing to break those laws, disregarding the rules of power or rejecting war strategies.

His seduction would draw no further message. "You take away from me? The gloves are off," Mateo says with a voice of sorrow.

Mateo was no psychopath; no known records represent that diagnosis. But Mateo was perfectly capable of sociopathic behavior.

"Yo tengo un trabajo para tu. ¿Estas ocupado?" Mateo sends an audio message to his contracted law official through WhatsApp. It was a rhetorical question because Mateo knows the police officials are loyal to the silver. For tonight's event, he is willing to pull out the platinum.

Mateo reads a phrase from google translate because for his request, it is imperative he has all specificity.

"Sin preguntas como siempre. ¿Puedes recoger a una mujer con la que quiera hablar?

Office Nomar responds, "Si, Claro." "Should I wear a uniform?" Officer Nomar questions in Spanish with a confused tone.

Mateo had been adamant about the officers never talking to him in public while in uniform. But tonight was special, so Mateo suggested that he come in uniform.

I believe this may be the exact point in our narrative when Mateo is content, accepting all the hardships that proceed to scamper, lay down, run, relax in the sun, trick, control, snatch away, assault, remove, take into custody, strike out at, and visit terror upon those in his path.

It was expected that Officer Nomar, dressed in his olive-green police uniform that read 'POLICIA' across the back, would enter the restaurant to remove the Panamanian devil. It was not an

impossible or strange concept for Nomar, especially since he had a known prostitute in handcuffs with him.

This was not an official capacity, fill out paperwork, type of pick up. Mateo was completely drawing a blank about why he even originally thought this was a good idea.

He pours a more generous line out on the countertop of the lobby store unisex bathroom after his return from the literal room that would cause this night to lack any rest.

Mateo is so high that coming down now or anytime soon would be unrealistic, impossible, and unwanted.

Mateo honestly has grown very conflicted about his request because this is nothing close to his perceived experiences to be expected.

There is to be no misunderstanding. Mateo will always do what is required and what is necessary. But he is unequivocally positive to the fact that he will gain no pleasure from a victory over an opponent that is inferior by nature.

Before his mind begins its full-length motion picture level of analyzation, Mateo decidedly calls off Nomar.

The exchange of some form of language that had yet to ever exist. Because the communication to change the mission took much work to explain.

Mateo felt awkward talking an officer of the law out of a crime on his behalf. He clearly understood why he remains loyal to his disdain of law officials.

His instinctual fight or flight response was to keep them Fed with bread and separate from hCis business.

Chapter 21 Scales

Balanced



U

unlight, filtered through sheer curtains,

painted golden stripes across Mateo's face. He blinked, the city's rhythmic murmur rising like a symphony beneath his penthouse perch. His head, however, throbbed like a poorly played bass drum, a testament to last night's agonizing tango with doubt and cheap tequila.

The events blurred through his mind's eye: Nomar's gruff voice slicing through the haze, the stark image of a bound woman on a phone screen, and his own rasping plea for an alternative. His stomach churned. Violence, collateral damage – they were instruments he'd vowed to discard, melodies of vengeance he refused to conduct.

Mateo's eyes cracked open, not to the gentle caress of dawn but to the stark stare of a ceiling fan spinning blades like a predator's hungry maw. His penthouse, usually a refuge of glass and steel, felt oppressive, the air thick with the cloying scent of stale smoke and regret. His head pulsed like a drum solo after a tequila binge in hell, each beat echoing the woman's face on the motel

phone screen, her defiant sneer a constant thrum against his skull.

Nomar's voice, sandpaper on granite, ripped through the haze. "Jefe, wake up. It's done."

Mateo groaned, the word a rusty hinge creaking open. "No, Nomar," he croaked, the taste of ash heavy on his tongue. "No killing. I told you."

Nomar, a shadow draped in human skin, loomed over him, a toothpick poking like a morbid exclamation point. "Killing's cleaner, Jefe. Quicker. No loose ends." Mateo sat up, a wince accompanying each movement. "Easier for you, maybe. But I... I made a promise. No crimson trails. No innocents."

Nomar snorted, the sound like dry leaves rattling in a desert wind. "Innocent? She, Jefe? Remember what she did? The money, the mockery? A bullet's too kind for her forked tongue."

Mateo pressed his fingers to his throbbing temples to banish the drum solo. "And I deserve redemption, not to become what I despise. Look, Nomar, there's another way. Something... colder, sharper."

Nomar raised an eyebrow, skepticism etched on his weathered face. "Colder than a morgue freezer? Sharper than a jaguar's claw? Spill it, Jefe, before the sun melts my patience."

Mateo leaned in, his voice dropping to a conspiratorial whisper. "Public humiliation, Nomar. We'll make her pay, not with blood, but with every shred of dignity she possesses. We'll turn her betrayal into a spectacle so excruciating, so utterly soul-crushing, that she'll wish she'd swallowed cyanide the day she crossed me."

He described the plan, each detail a brushstroke on the canvas of her downfall: a fake award ceremony, a rigged acceptance speech, and a hidden microphone amplifying her every cringing word, broadcast live to the

city that worshiped her now and would spit on her tomorrow.

Nomar listened, his face a granite mask slowly giving way to a predatory grin. "Now that's music to my ears, Jefe. Cruel, cunning, and guaranteed to leave her reputation bleeding in the gutters. Let's paint the town red... with embarrassment."

As Nomar slunk out, a predator slinking away with a fresh scent of prey, Mateo knew this wasn't just revenge. It was a declaration. He wouldn't be consumed by the darkness, but he would dance with it, embrace its cold kiss, and use its own weapons to orchestrate her fall. He might not be a saint, but he was the devil's conductor, leading a symphony of shame, and the woman would be his unwilling soloist, forced to perform for a city hungry for her downfall.

He rose, the room tilting before righting itself. He showered, the water washing away the night's sweat and the lingering temptation of more accessible, bloodier paths. He dressed each button a tiny vow against the siren song of violence.

Today, he wouldn't be consumed by the shadows. He'd be the shadow master, weaving a web of public humiliation, spinning a tapestry of regret in which she would forever be entangled. He'd show her and the city what betrayal tasted like - served with a side of selfinflicted agony and a lifetime of burning cheeks.

He stepped out onto the balcony, the city sprawling beneath him like a glittering carcass waiting to be picked up. No, he wasn't a saint. Not by a long shot. But he was Mateo, the conductor of whispers, the maestro of nightmares, and the woman... she was about to dance her final, humiliating waltz in the spotlight of his vengeance. And the music, oh, the music, would be pure, uncut darkness.

Chapter 22

Dead on Arrival



It is no later than the peak of the noon sun on the spring Cartagena day that will prove to be in her infancy. Mateo sits down on his Palmetto Beach Balcony overlooking the beautiful Atlantic Ocean.

He sniffs eight lines of Colombian flake evenly spread over his two nostrils.

"What a fucking day," Mateo acclaims.

He permits the crystallized flake to enter his bloodstream.

It can't be stated anymore that Mateo is growing more and more emotionless. Although he has just had a moment of compassion, it will be a moment of very few and extremely far in between.

Mateo decides to spend the rest of the day meditating and reflecting on all the decisions that have led him to this point in his residency on Death's Ground.

He is aware that he is not at peace with the decisions he is making at present. He retreats to his battle stance, "Art of War" ideology, to remain idle whenever emotion influences you.

He decides to further his studies of the Spanish language. He opens Duo lingo on his Pixel XL.

"Tienes el número de tu amiga Gabriela?" the Duolingo lesson asks Mateo. "Si, aqui tengo el numero".

This is the obvious correct answer to Mateo. But before he can press the capacitive button to receive the proper response on the OLED screen of his Google flagship device, he gets a notification from the Signal app that Hermon would like to be able to contact him.

He swipes the notification to the side, returns to the Duo lingo app, and selects the correct answer. He answers about eight other multiple-choice questions to complete that lesson. Then he returns to the Signal notification and permits his socio, Hermon, to contact him.

As soon as he selects allow, he is bombarded with no less than 12 messages from Hermon asking his whereabouts. He is in some peril or an emergency of some sort.

"Donde Estas...". "Hermano, where are you...". "Why Don't you answer WhatsApp....?" "I thought you are ready for business.....?" "My employer begins to question your commitment..."

Mateo calls Hermon on Signal after reading his bulk thread of messages.

"What's got your panties all in a bunch?" Mateo asks Hermon. "I have been calling you since the sun came up," Hermon replies. "I had other fires to extinguish in Cartagena," Mateo rebuttals. "You have been calling me all morning? Clearly not on Signal", Mateo defiantly asserts. "OK, I call you on this Signal app as you wish; I assume this line is secure as you say," Hermon continues in a questioning tone. "Chill, if this resembles plug talk," Mateo redirects. "No direct talk over any

open air; I am in my penthouse," Mateo infers as he disconnects the call.

"What the fuck? These motherfuckers act like they ain't never heard of the fucking drug war. You ain't never heard of BIG BROTHER", Mateo ponders.

"I'm not doing 20 to life because they are too lazy to obey the rules of engagement", he mumbles.

Mateo continues his next Duolingo lesson, Unit 6.

"Tu Eres Maria"

Duolingo reads over his earphones, showing undisturbed focus on the lessons. He gives no more thought to this morning's negotiations with Nomar or his borderline reckless exchange with Hermon.

A couple of hours passed when he got a call from the concierge saying that Hermon had arrived and was on his way up. However, Hermon's name is on the concise list of individuals permitted to his Penthouse.

The concierge is under strict instructions to be notified of anyone's arrival.

See, Mateo has forgotten a thing or two about where he resides. We will point it out again, as previously stated in this narrative.

"Any moment without War is a moment of delusion." Mateo believes that his early battle of this morning, a carryover from the night before, and his journey through his slumber's ethereal dream and revelations would permit him a day of strategic retreat.

But this narrative does not know patience or understanding of our Hero's limitations or triumphs, only how these events occurred according to memory.

"Dios Mio," Hermon asserts as the elevator doors close behind him in Mateo's Penthouse. "Do you know what is happening tonight?" Hermon adds. "This is not playtime; you are playing games on your phone while our whole deal hangs in limbo?" Hermon continues.

Mateo looks up in a very matter-of-fact expression.

"When the fuck did you start leading the troops" Mateo laughingly exclaims.

As he hits his vape pen.

"I don't play games; I feed my brain at my pleasure because I answer to no one but Santa Muerte," Mateo continues. "This is one of those luxuries of being your own Boss; who the fuck do I answer to besides Death himself?"

Mateo finalizes with a tone of arrogance.

"We must talk now; it's very important," Hermon responds. "What is so important? I have done all that I am responsible for to this point. My buyer is waiting for the flight information. He is ready as he will ever be", Mateo declares.

"You do not understand how these things work. There are many moving pieces, and people need to be paid to look the other way or ensure variables move in our favor," Hermon appeals.

"So, what is so important?" What is the 911 emergency? Has my bitch touched down already?" Mateo affirms.

"No, and she may never if you do not listen to what I am telling you; I need you to transfer the Bitcoin to the wallet at this address like yesterday, "Hermon interjects pleadingly.

All right, wait! Spoiler Alert:

Well, not really.

That would only apply if the narrative were utterly linear in nature. However, the fact that this narrative skipped to a climactic point at its introduction was not a cliché attempt at In Media Res.

OK, Forget I mentioned that.

Switching back to our narrative, Mateo absorbs what Hermon is asking and repeats a familiar saying to himself.

"90 percent of what happens and 10 percent how said individual decides to respond".

Mateo takes another deep inhale of Heavy Hitters LA Confidential THC Pen.

He then opens a fresh bag of powder and cuts sharp lines with his platinum card without a care in the world.

He cuts eight lines. Equal to the ones he began his morning pursuit of self-awareness with.

But he then combines them into only two much more prominent lines. He inhales one in each nostril because Mateo believes in balance. He is an admitted Libra. That being said, Mateo is immediately aware that it is a bit too much whenever his scales begin to sway in one direction. He mentally questions if Hermon is crossing the figurative line to throw or Hero off balance.

