

THE MILAN PARADOX

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‘...Contrary to the recent highly publicized claims by the National Cancer Institute (NCI) Americans are getting *more* cancer than ever before. And rather than getting better, the problem is getting worse.’

‘...the number of people *getting* cancer in America continues to escalate now striking more than one in three.’

‘...More specifically, the NCI continues to ignore or trivialize the wealth of information on avoidable exposures to petrochemical and other carcinogens in the workplace, air; water, food, cosmetics, and other consumer products and on the substantial scientific evidence linking such undisclosed exposures to the cancer epidemic.’

We Are Losing The Winnable War Against Cancer. The Cancer Prevention Coalition. Chicago, December 8, 1996

Lifetime Cancer Risk and Five-Year Survival.

Statistics from the Cancer Council of Victoria 2001

Site	Risk	Survival	Site	Risk	Survival
Brain	1 in 164	24%	Lymphoma	1 in 67	56%
Breast	1 in 11	84%	Prostate	1 in 11	83%
Stomach	1 in 126	24%	Testicle	1 in 500	95%
Ovary	1 in 93	42%	Bowel	1 in 20	50%
Uterus	1 in 65	81%	Kidney	1 in 120	59%
Bladder	1 in 73	66%	Pancreas	1 in 152	5%
Cervix	1 in 244	75%	Liver	1 in 271	N/A
Melanoma	1 in 37	90%	Lung	1 in 31	11%
Hodgkin's	1 in 67	84%	Leukemia	1 in 126	42%

One

Italian Genetic Research Facility, Algerian Desert, North Africa

Captain Brad 'Scorpion' Talbot reached forward and placed the thumbtack-sized lock destroying explosive firmly on the panel of the digital combination lock. A few seconds later, the Lock-Blaster exploded with a blinding yellow flash that sent the heavy metal lock pad tumbling to the ground. With a hiss, the vacuum-sealed door of the underground compound unlocked. The marine Captain shoved the heavy metal door open. A rush of hot carbon-tainted air rushed into the chamber, followed by a cascade of dusty sand

'Move it!' the marine yelled, as he pushed the boy up the ladder towards the surface.

Toby squinted through raw eyelids at the harsh light of the desert. It surrounded him like a vast dry sea. Having never been outside the confines of the underground compound, in which he had spent his entire sixteen years of life, he had never imagined something so infinite and so desolate. Undulating tan colored dunes stretched away along the horizon in every direction, further than he could see. The air was dry and had a strange metallic smell, a chemical smell. He found it very unpleasant.

'Come on, kid, punch it!' The marine urged him on.

Toby's breath came in ragged gasps as he ran wildly, desperately trying to keep up with the huge soldier in front of him. He felt exhilarated at finally escaping the compound, but highly conspicuous in his white all-in-one 'clean-suit.' He looked like a beacon next to the tall muscular frame of the marine in his desert fatigues. The anti-flash glasses, which the soldier had given him as they escaped the facility, had miraculously transformed the blinding sunlight, allowing him to open his eyes again. He noticed the name badge on the marine's chest said Talbot.

They kept running hard across the barren desert.

The marine spoke into the throat microphone of his secure Motorola MX300 radio. 'Oasis, this is Scorpion, come in.'

'Scorpion, this is Oasis. Do you have the package? Over.'

'Affirmative. I'll be at the checkpoint in five minutes. Request immediate evacuation, over.'

As the marine finished his last sentence, a high-pitched whistling sound rocketed overhead. Toby turned towards the noise and was hurled onto his back by the force of a deafening explosion.

Twenty feet to his right, a fountain of super-heated sand blasted out from the ground. It rose high into the air, showering him with clumps of burning molten sand.

'Shit, mortar fire!' Scorpion dropped to the ground and covered Toby with his body, shielding him from the lethal fallout.

Coughing sand from his lungs, Toby felt himself dragged upright again and forced into a run, behind him the sound of automatic gunfire.

Suddenly, a hail of bullets slapped into the desert floor kicking up a spray of sand that stung Toby's face.

'Move it. Over to that dune, now!' Scorpion shouted at him.

Barely able to see through the smoke haze from the mortar, Toby staggered towards the ridge of the dune. His head reeled from the percussion shock of another mortar explosion. Scorpion picked him up off the sand again and pushed him forward.

Toby had longed to experience the outside world, but had no idea it could assault his senses so savagely. He had expected that direct sunlight would blind him, but even the air he breathed on the outside seemed thick and strange. His lungs heaved with the effort of breathing and he coughed uncontrollably.

Scorpion turned to face his assailants. Three armored desert buggies, with top mounted M16 machine-guns and barrel-mounted grenade launchers, were bearing down on them fast. A puff of smoke extended from the grenade launcher of the lead vehicle, a telltale sign that a grenade had been fired.

Moments later, another ear-splitting explosion. The grenade slammed into the face of the sand dune Toby was heading for.

'Overshot the mark with that one, you prick,' Scorpion muttered to himself. Crouching into a tight firing position, Scorpion picked out the lead buggy through the telescopic sight of his MP-5K submachine gun. With a

squeeze of the trigger, he sent a volley of shots into the open canopy of the oncoming vehicle. A hail of bullets hammered into it.

Through the telescopic lens, he saw a jet of blood spurt from the skull of the buggy driver. The two men on the guns in the rear were thrown out as the buggy rolled in high-speed cartwheels. The crunch of grinding metal echoed across the sand.

‘One down, two to go!’ Scorpion took aim at the two remaining buggies and fired two fragmentation grenades at them from the M-203 grenade launcher slung underneath his MP-5.

A cloud of smoke and sand billowed into the air in front of each buggy as the grenades exploded. Then, red-hot shrapnel showered them like petals of fire. Through the haze, the two vehicles ploughed on, their bodies riddled with holes.

‘Damn!’ Scorpion spat into the sand.

The buggies opened fire again.

Scorpion shouldered his weapon and broke for the dune at a flat sprint. A hail of bullets chased him. He caught Toby half way up, struggling in the heat.

‘Come on!’ Scorpion yelled. ‘Move it or lose it!’

Toby scrambled up the shifting sand with renewed vigor, but he slipped back down almost as fast as he climbed up. His feet seemed like lead weights.

Scorpion climbed past Toby easily and began hauling him up. He shouted into his throat mike. 'Oasis, this is Scorpion. We're taking fire. We're comin' in hot.' Bullets kept raining down around them.

With the crest of the dune only a stride away, Scorpion grabbed Toby firmly by the seat and shoulder of his clean-suit. He stood to throw him over the top of the dune. As Scorpion launched him through the air, two bullets slammed into his exposed back.

Yelling with fright, Toby flew several feet through the air, up and over the crest and down the steep slope of the other side.

Scorpion let out a loud groan, his body thrown over the crest of the dune by the impact of the bullets. The pair toppled down the face of the dune coming to rest at the huge feet of two more marines.

The taller of the two, a black sergeant named Jefferson, stared at Toby with his hands on his hips, while his companion, sergeant major Eddy 'Bull' Bullstock, a heavily built man with a shaved head, trained an M-16 on the ridge of the dune.

Scorpion rolled back onto his feet and began walking, hunched slightly due to the pain. 'Take care of the kid, Alabama?'

Alabama Jefferson laughed when he saw Scorpion's back. Two holes were visible in the back of his desert fatigues. 'Hey Capt'n, looks like you been shot.'

'No shit, Einstein!' Scorpion said through gritted teeth.

‘Damn, I never thought I’d see Capt’n Talbot all shot up and ordinary like that.’ Jefferson almost felt sorry for the bastards who’d shot at his commander. Through his commando training Jefferson had met some hard-nosed combat soldiers, but no-one came close to Talbot. He was easily the most ferocious and explosive shock troop Jefferson had ever seen. He had to be, for he commanded a band of ruthless combat specialists whose respect was earned only by acts of extreme courage. To his men, Talbot was a leader and a warrior worth following to the death. For Scorp to have been shot at meant only one thing, he had left behind a trail of bodies.

Jefferson used his boot to roll Toby onto his back. He peered at the pale, exhausted boy.

Toby lay there his faced caked in sand. His chest was so tight, it was almost as though his lungs were trying to stop the foul air from getting in.

The giant soldier next to Jefferson began to back away from the dune.

‘All of you, back into the chopper, on the double!’ Bull barked.

‘You alive, boy?’ the black sergeant enquired.

‘Yes, I think so.’ Toby replied.

‘Well, you heard the sergeant major, we best be movin’ along.’ With that, Alabama hoisted Toby over his shoulders and ferried him into the waiting S-70A Black Hawk helicopter.

Bull walked backwards toward the helicopter, his rifle aim never once leaving the crest of the dune. 'Fire up the bird, Hawk,' he ordered the pilot through his throat microphone.

'Roger that, Bull,' replied Lieutenant Hawkins.

With a loud whining sound the massive rotors sprang to life, spinning increasingly faster until they became nothing but a deafening blur.

Captain Brad Talbot slid over onto the armored panel of the chopper nursing his aching ribs. He felt behind him awkwardly and fingered the two dents in the rear panels of his body armor. He looked hard at his fingers, relieved to find no blood. *Saved again by the Kevlar*, he thought.

'Go, go, go!' The co-pilot of the Black Hawk yelled hurriedly through his headset at the two marines still on the ground. They leapt inside.

With a loud roar, the pilot engaged the blades and the chopper took off, its missile pods trained directly at the dune ridge in front of it. The pilot held the S-70A in a slow controlled ascent, warming up the engines. At 50 feet above the ground, he reached the crest of the dune, and was suddenly confronted by the second armored vehicle. The buggy crested the dune and careered, engine screeching, into the air. The third buggy followed at a short distance.

Hawk swung the helicopter around, bringing the side-mounted .50 caliber machine-gun to bear on the vehicles. The gunner, Sergeant Tex Judkins, opened fire on the second buggy.

It sneaked under his aim and careered down the face of the sand dune under a hail of streaming bullets. The soldier inside held tight for the landing, then jumped back up with his machine-gun and took aim at the helicopter. He opened fire with a sickening blast. The rounds pelted the S-70A and bounced off the heavily armored forward ends of the fuselage.

With the target no longer free-falling, Judkins took better aim. Orange tongues of flame leapt from the spinning barrel of his .50 caliber gun. The stream of tracer bullets cut through the second buggy like a circular saw, sending the now separate front and rear ends of the vehicle crashing to the ground, all the occupants dead.

‘Nice shootin,’ Tex!’ Alabama cheered into his headset.

Sergeant Tex Judkins let out a whooping cheer.

Lieutenant Hawkins didn’t wait for the third armored vehicle to crest the dune. He hit the engine throttle on the control stick and applied maximum torque to the main rotor. The force generated by the rotating blades thrust them rapidly skyward, away from the line of fire of the one remaining buggy. He banked the chopper steeply to the south and onto a bearing that would take them back towards the USS Conquest helicopter carrier-ship, situated 100 nautical miles off the Algerian coast.

Suddenly, the missile warning light flashed on the instrument control panel and a loud alarm sounded inside the cockpit. The gunner from the third

armored buggy had fired a surface-to-air missile (SAM) at the chopper as it raced for home.

‘Man, these guys just don’t know when to quit. Hang on, we’ve got a SAM incoming!’ Hawkins warned the crew.

‘Holy shit!’ exclaimed Alabama.

Captain Talbot clung onto his seat grimly, taking shallow breaths through the pain of his two broken ribs.

‘Initiating countermeasures!’ Hawkins shouted, as he reached for the control panel in front him and engaged the electronic supports. A powerful radio generator inside the chopper began emitting a signal that jammed the SAM’s guidance system. Looking back behind him, he noticed the flight of the missile begin to waver. He ordered his co-pilot, ‘Fox one, ECM away.’

With the flick of a switch the co-pilot fired a barrage of spinning metal decoys at the approaching SAM. At that moment, Hawk thrust the Black Hawk into a nosedive to avoid its oncoming.

The marines scrambled around the crew compartment as the chopper lurched downward. The SAM moved awkwardly through the air towards the ECM devices, its guidance system thrown into confusion. Like a wounded falcon, it crashed into the ECMs and exploded in fire. No phoenix would rise from its ashes.

The fallout from the impact rocked the Black Hawk on its downward dive, kicking it off its course. Lurching sideways in the cockpit, Hawkins

wrestled with the cyclic controls of the chopper. Sweat beaded his brow. The aircraft was now locked in a deadly spiral fall towards the desert sands. Hawkins pushed the foot controls to steady the pitch adjustment of the tail rotor. With the cyclic stick he tilted the swashplate rotating ring and shifted the pitch of the chopper away from the ground. The stick shuddered as the centrifugal forces created by the fall threatened to drag the chopper to the ground.

‘Come on you mule!’ Hawkins snarled at the instrument panel. In seconds it would be too late.

The angle of the nose cone started to lift. Painfully slowly, Hawkins felt the cyclic control stick respond to his grip. The chopper started to move upwards. When just enough angle had been gained on the swashplate ring, he hit the throttle hard on the control stick again. The engine screamed into life, hurling the craft skywards. Hawkins breathed a little easier..

‘Nice one, Hawk!’ Talbot complimented.

‘Thanks, Capt’n.’

Alabama stood hunched over the thin figure of Toby, curled up on the floor of the chopper. ‘Hey, Capt’n, you better get a look at this kid. He don’t look so good.’

Cringing on the floor of the crew compartment, Toby groaned in pain. His sandy hair now plastered down on his face with sweat. The salty substance was alien to him. He had never been exposed to more than a five-degree change

Comment [. 1] : Why?

in atmospheric temperature inside the climate-controlled compound where he had grown up. His face and hands now burned with blotchy red welts and blisters that disfigured the skin of any areas on his body not protected by his white clean-suit.

Despite the anti-flash glasses he had worn, Toby's severely blood-shot eyes oozed yellow pus that rendered him almost blind. His breathing was wheezy. He was suffering his first ever asthma attack and his chest heaved with the effort of expelling each breath through his choked airways. He began convulsing on the floor.

'Damn, it's happening so soon. Hold on kid, I got your back.' Talbot held Toby's convulsing body clear of any dangerous objects inside the compartment and protected his airway. 'Doc! Get off that machine-gun and fix this kid?'

Sergeant Dwight 'Doc' Barnes turned to face his commander. Doc was a lean muscular man with a finely chiseled face and the solid square jaw of a boxer. He had completed three years of medical school before joining the marines in search of a career that better suited his angry temperament. Still, he was the only person on board who studiously maintained his combat medical certificate. 'Sorry Cap, my mind was still in combat mode.' He rushed to the boy.

'Yeah, well you better switch it into Doc mode before this kid pegs out.'

'Yes sir! Here, hold out his arm, Capt'n.'

Doc reached inside his field medical kit and produced a needle and syringe. It was preloaded with 5 mcg of clonazepam. He injected one milligram of the clear liquid straight into a vein in the boy's arm. Within 10 seconds his fitting had ceased.

'Good work, Doc.'

Doc quickly examined the boy. 'He's going into anaphylactic shock, Capt'n. Looks like some kind of generalized allergic reaction and a severe one at that.' He lifted Toby off the floor and placed him inside a transparent Perspex chamber located at the rear of the crew compartment. Fitting a nebulizer mask to Toby's face, Doc switched on the Ventolin and a fine mist of drug wafted into Toby's lungs.

Comment [.2]: They're still in the chopper.

Toby looked at him uncertainly.

'Don't be afraid, kid. This will make your breathing a lot easier.'

Toby gratefully breathed hard on the mask.

Doc put up a bag of saline fluid through an intravenous line and administered a shot of dexamethasone and antihistamine to block Toby's allergic response. Satisfied, he sealed the chamber and switched on the filtered air supply. 'There, that ought to keep him going until we make base.'

Alabama turned to Doc. 'Sweet mother o' Jesus, Doc. What the hell is wrong with that kid?'

'He is no ordinary kid, Alabama. He is a clean kid.'

‘A clean kid? What, you mean like he takes a bath all the time?’

Alabama laughed at his own stupidity.

‘No, I mean he’s genetically clean. That kid has the purest DNA in the world, not a mutation anywhere. Been raised in a completely pure environment. Not like the shit hole you came from.’

‘Hey, you’re just lucky we’re on the same team, Doc, or I might take offence at that.’

‘The kid has never been exposed to sunlight, never breathed unpurified air, never come in contact with a virus nor has anything impure passed his lips. Scorp has just liberated him from a cocoon. There is one other special thing about him too. He is a clone.’

‘A clone! Bullshit, Doc. A clone of what?’

‘Not what, Alabama, the relevant question is a clone of whom?’

The sergeant lost interest and took a seat up front.

Two

Offices of the Department of Homeland Security, Washington DC, USA

Jack Kenrick sat in his office chewing on a Cuban cigar. It was not the plush, grand office that he once inhabited back in the days when the Department was flush with funds and was the hope of a nation threatened by terrorism. Those halcyon days were gone. Now the office of the Director of the Department of Homeland Security was more akin to that of a greenhorn articulated clerk from a third rate law firm – shitty!

The antique Louis XV *bureau plat*, made from tulipwood veneer with ormolu mounts that he used as a desk, was gone. Gone too were his rich tapestries, his antique settee carved from walnut and two Louis chairs covered in Manuel Canovas silks that he treasured with the passion of a collector. Kenrick's love of French antiques and designer fabrics had seen the interior of his old offices so tastefully decorated that photos of them had once graced the pages of Washington's most prestigious interior-decorating magazines. Now, his office looked bland.

Kenrick detested his new surroundings. The penurious décor offended his discerning eye. He had fallen from grace. He was insignificant in the eyes of the Government. His department was relegated to the backwaters of

Washington. Out of necessity he had accepted the meager lodgings offered him. Where many would have resigned or committed suicide, Kenrick had survived. Down and out but not defeated, Kenrick had managed to keep the Department of Homeland Security alive. But he did have status anxiety.

Sticky saliva coursed down the back of his throat from the wet cigar tip clenched between his teeth. Every few minutes he coughed and spat into a pewter mug. His corpulent belly stretched the buttons on his cheap business shirt almost to breaking; black tufts of body hair protruded obscenely from the gaps between the buttons. It was hard for his obese body to lose heat. Dank sweat stains usually appeared on the armpits of his shirts by mid-morning. Bald and filthy were his look and his mood.

In Kenrick's view the world had turned to crap. The organization he still directed was an empty shell. The country's top medical authorities had declared his old life of vice and excess a serious health risk. The Cancer Prevention Coalition and the Center for Disease Control had been pressing smokers and the tobacco industry for so many years now that smoking had become virtually extinct. He hadn't smoked, really smoked, a cigar in eight long years. The Democrat's draconian 'clean gene' bill had robbed him and all Americans of the right to light up and smoke cigars years ago.

The tobacco companies that had not gone bankrupt as a result of the new legislation had merged and drastically downsized. Now, their remaining products although similar to the old lethal carcinogenic ones were highly

modified and made to be sucked on and inhaled through – not burned and smoked. Thereby, they had been able to reduce the carcinogenic potential of their product by almost 99 percent. These so called ‘clean’ cigarettes and cigars satisfied the new laws governing all food, beverages and recreational drugs in the United States, which specified that the content of all known chemical carcinogens had to be one percent or less.

Jack Kenrick knew that he couldn’t light the cigar anyway, not without the building’s air purification system sounding its screaming alarms, isolating his office air supply and activating the emergency sprinklers as though there was a real fire. Then there was the fine, for smoking in an office building, which was prohibitive.

Jack was the first to admit that the Delaney Law passed back in 1958, banning the deliberate addition to food of any amount of chemical additive shown to induce cancer, was a good idea. However, since medical science had revealed that human cancer was almost entirely caused by genetic mutations induced by chemical carcinogens, the Delaney Law had been extended and applied to just about everything with which a person came into contact.

To make matters worse, medical science had discovered new potent chemicals that caused genetic damage and cancer (carcinogens or mutagens) at an exponential rate. They had been found in just about everything. The Government in its wisdom had decided to ban them all.

‘Fuck ‘em! It’s a shitty world and we’re all pigs,’ Jack used to say. But not everybody acquiesced. Somehow, the president of the United States had decided that the world needed to be a lot less shitty and the American public had agreed.

Jack sucked some more air through his cold cigar and reclined on his black vinyl swing chair. Behind his cheap desk made of glass and painted aluminium, the back wall of his office was blazoned with the crest of the DHS – an American bald eagle superimposed on red and white stripes and surrounded by a half hoop of stars. His organization in its hey-day had occupied the entire sixteen-storey building in Washington. Now, with cancer emerging as the greatest threat to face the American people, his organization had struggled to maintain its relevance. The Cancer Prevention Coalition, now a subsidiary of the CIA had taken over three-quarters of his budget and his building, relegating his now downsized Department to the bottom four floors.

The incumbent Democrat president, who was now at the end of his first term and facing an election year, had been Jack’s nemesis. His fixation with winning the war against premature cancer, which had brought him a great many votes, had seen him strip away organizations like the now unfashionable National Cancer Institute (blamed for the dramatic increase in death rates from cancer), the Department of Homeland Security and the Marine Corps. In their place was the Cancer Prevention Coalition, backed by the long tentacles of the CIA. Jack took no solace from the fact that this was an election year. The

Democrat president was very likely to be re-elected. This was something that Jack wasn't going to let happen.

Three

Flicking through the Washington Post, Jack noticed with annoyance that most of the headlines screamed for better cancer treatments and, most of all, for better prevention efforts. He read the latest press release from the Cancer Prevention Coalition. 'Do your bit to stop the raging plague of cancer.' The CPC ran a daily column in the Post that was Government sponsored. It was primarily to remind the American people of their obligation to lead a 'clean gene' lifestyle in order to prevent premature death from cancer.

Cancer! Jack was sick to death of the word. It had cost him everything and he was reminded of this every time he opened the morning paper.

A flow diagram of *the path to cancer* was running on page three. The article began with a picture of a man who was described as being made up of billions of cells.

Jack read on. 'Each human cell contains 46 chromosomes that are made of DNA. On those chromosomes are some 30,000 genes that control every cellular function, including cell growth and division. They determine the exact number of cells required for every organ in the human body.'

The next picture was of a man having a meal under the sun smoking a cigarette. The caption explained that chemicals in food, water, air and smoke can damage your genes and when this happens mistakes are made and cells no

longer stop growing when they are supposed to. ‘This is what cancer is, a cell that is growing out of control until eventually it destroys the organ where it started and spreads to other organs growing and growing until it destroys those organs too. It spreads and destroys until it kills you. **Damage to your genes means cancer for you!**’

Jack was bored already and did not go on to read about prevention. Instead he flipped to the sports section. There was a piece on the Redskins game. Running his thick fingers over his balding head as he read, he scratched at small red patches of scaly skin. At least, psoriasis wasn’t cancer, he would say every time an outbreak of the intensely irritating condition plagued him. Which was almost all the time these days.

But Jack was going to have his revenge. His meticulously laid plans of the last decade were about to come to fruition. A very special set of circumstances had delivered him his opportunity. Kenrick was poised to implement the first phase of his master plan to coerce the American president to restore him and his organization back to their former glory. The very thought of regaining his power and prestige by manipulating the incumbent president excited him enormously. Having a wife and family to celebrate his victory with would have been nice. No matter, his own company would have to suffice. His nerves tingled. At last he would have that bastard by the balls.

Falling out of favor with the United States Government had seen Jack form an alliance with two unlikely bedfellows. The more unlikely of these was

the now disgraced head of the National Cancer Institute of America, Professor Rohan Dean. Breakthroughs in anti-cancer treatment had failed to allay the drastic rise in lethal cancers that had rocked the entire world in the last quarter of a century. The average life expectancy in the Western world was steadily decreasing and now stood at just 52 years of age. Advocates of cancer prevention and advocates of cancer therapy raged against each other. Successive governments had weighed in heavily. The losing party would take the blame for the rising death rate. The Cancer Prevention Society backed by the CIA and the Democratic Party had prevailed. Professor Dean and the National Cancer Institute were the fall guys. Despite his Nobel Prize winning research into cancer treatment, Dean and the NCI had been almost wiped off the map.

Jack Kenrick's other ally was an old friend from military college, Lieutenant General Peter Brack, who now occupied the position of commanding officer of the very much, scaled down Marine Corps. Brack, Kenrick and Dean formed a dangerous trio. All were disgruntled, all still held positions of relative power and all had ambition.

'Mr Kenrick, your four o'clock appointment is here. You want me to make them wait?' Jack's secretary's voice droned through the intercom. Her tone was symptomatic of the malaise that now swept through the office of Homeland Security these days.

'Just send them in, Louise,' Jack sighed leaning back on his chair again.

‘Come in Professor. Hello Peter, have a seat,’ he said casually motioning his guests to two worn-out leather armchairs in front of his desk.

‘Want a cigar? They’re clean,’ Jack offered.

Only General Brack accepted.

Jack cleared his throat before getting down to business. ‘Gentlemen, our moment of truth is almost at hand.’ He removed the screw top from a bottle of medium quality, alcohol-reduced bourbon and poured it into three glass tumblers. The amber liquid splashed onto his desk creating small sticky pools. Kenrick mopped them up with his fingers and then licked his fingers clean. Finally, he passed a tumbler to each of his guests.

‘It tastes like piss but it’s all I can afford.’ Jack drained his glass. ‘Our little venture is about to move from the white board to the theater,’ he said triumphantly.

Comment [.3] : Love it!

‘How so?’ asked General Brack. Talk was cheap to a man like Brack. He preferred to get straight to the point. Jack respected him for it.

‘President McMahon’s chief of staff has scheduled a meeting with us for tomorrow night at ten pm. I have just gotten off the phone with him. Seems there is a problem at the White House,’ he sniggered.

‘So soon, that is perfect,’ Brack replied, well pleased.

Jack nodded his large round head in agreement. ‘Are we ready?’

Professor Dean sipped at his bourbon and looked at Jack over the fine titanium rims of his reading glasses. ‘This is good news Jack,’ he said as he

craned his lean body forward in the chair. ‘Look, we’re ready to go from my end. The medical team is in place at the Marine Hospital in Beaufort, South Carolina. All I need is for the General here to deliver the package.’

Both men turned to the General whose erect posture and finely chiseled features exuded an air of self-confidence. ‘At this moment, there is an American Wasp Class multi-mission, amphibious assault ship on routine maneuvers off the Algerian Coast. On board that ship is a crack marine special-forces assault squad. They have been training for this mission for months and are within two hours of striking the target should they be given the green light.’

Comment [.4]: Standard US spelling is ‘maneuvers’, but if you hate it we can stick with the French.

‘Good, it seems that the trap is set,’ Jack said smugly.

‘Just say the word, Jack, and the marines are go,’ came the reply from General Brack.

‘Gentlemen, we’re off to the White House!’ Jack said, throwing back another bourbon as if it was water.