

PITY THE DAMNED

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by

Eugene Roberts

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HELLO AND WELCOME FROM EUGENE. I WROTE THIS PIECE A WHILE BACK BUT NEVER REALLY THOUGHT IT WORTHY OF SHOWING TO PUBLISHERS. I'D LOVE SOME FEEDBACK AS TO WHETHER ANYONE "OUT THERE" MIGHT ENJOY READING IT...SEND ME AN EMAIL IF YOU DO. IF THERE'S ENOUGH INTEREST I'LL PUBLISH A CHAPTER EACH WEEK,

CHEERS, EUGENE.

BOOK SUMMARY

Globalization promised a better world with fewer barriers between countries. Criminals now threaten to exploit it. Delve into a dark world of Colombian narco-traffickers, Chinese people-smugglers, European prostitution rings, and Russian gangs, and see the human face of those trapped in this web of crime and misery.

BOOK DEDICATION

To my dear and wonderful family.

With special thanks to my friend and mentor, the late Raymond E. Ward, for being so generous of his talents and time, and for his unwavering encouragement and support.

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BOOK EXCERPT

Three malevolent looking Blackhawk helicopters in tight formation skimmed over the dense, mist-shrouded jungle canopy like three angry dragonflies intent on harm. The roar of their air-beating rotors sent wildlife in the depths of the dark undergrowth below scattering in every direction, their blood coursing with fear.

Two of the helicopters were each crammed with ten heavily armed Colombian army personnel as well as the three crew. The third Blackhawk carried eight uniformed soldiers and two men dressed in civilian dress. The taller and older of the two was FBI agent Richard Drake, while the other was his Colombian partner. They were accompanying this military airborne unit on a “seek and destroy” mission. The objective of the raid was to “take out” a drug-producing laboratory that intelligence had located deep in the jungle.

This particular laboratory was not in a region normally identified as being part of the officially designated and highly dangerous *zona de despeje*, but the need to remain fully alert was no less important. Drake knew that regardless of which drug baron owned the factory, the production facility would be well protected.

CHAPTER 1

The New Breed of Mafia

RUTHLESS REDS.

*“When you cross the Italian Mafia they kill you.
When you cross the Russian Mafia, they kill you,
your family, your cousins and everyone related
to you.”FBI spokesman.*

By Martin Kasindorf,

USA Today.

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The sky hung dark and menacing above the two armoured payroll vehicles as they sped towards the southern Italian town of Lecce. The duty crews in the two vehicles were eager to reach the town before the approaching storm broke, but the thunder echoing through the surrounding desolate hills told them that their chances of outdistancing the storm were not good.

Their destination, the town of Lecce in Italy’s Puglia region, was tucked away on the dry Salentine Peninsular. The *Penisola Salentina* was the heel of that geographical feature known as “the leg and boot” that was Italy.

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The *Penisola* region had once been an important center of the Roman Empire and was littered with ancient but well-preserved ruins. During the Middle Ages the region had developed a strong tradition as a center of learning and culture. An abundance of an easily carved stone, *pietra di Lecce*, ensured that the town was rich in ornate buildings and monuments of the Lecce Baroque style, which had flourished in the 17th century.

Unfortunately for latter-day Lecce, it was too far from the popular tourist venues to benefit from this cultural heritage, and the town had missed out on the benefits of the tourist-based prosperity that blessed other regions of Italy.

Aldo Mazzini sat in the lead armoured truck next to the driver, gazing out of the bulletproof window, his face alert with sharp-eyed concentration. He knew that this remote road winding its way through sparsely populated and rugged countryside was ideal “ambush territory”. He unconsciously tightened his grip on the automatic shotgun resting across his knees, comforted in the knowledge there were two other security guards armed with sub-machine guns in the back of his vehicle.

The two-truck convoy was transporting two and a half trillion lire in cash, equivalent to around US\$1.3 million. Each vehicle carried four heavily armed crew; two in the driver’s cabin, and two in the rear compartment that held the money.

Aldo turned to the driver and perhaps to increase his own self-assurance said, ‘**Anyone thinking of attacking us would have to be *pazzo* (crazy). Eh, Gianni?’**

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‘Certo! (That’s for sure!),’ agreed Gianni. **‘Anyway, we’re almost there... another thirty minutes and we’ll be home and safe! I just hope we beat the storm...I hate this shitty weather.’**

Gianni paused for a moment, then, without taking his eyes off the road, asked Aldo;

‘Why did you volunteer as a last minute replacement for Carlo?’

‘I need the money,’ replied Aldo. **‘When they told me Carlo was sick I decided I could use the overtime pay. My little boy Domenico has his birthday next week and the extra money I earn on this trip will buy the bicycle he’s hoping for.’**

Gianni nodded approvingly. **‘Your son is a good little boy, Aldo. You are very *fortunato* to have *una bella moglie* (a beautiful wife) like Lucia as well as a cute baby daughter like Silvia.’**

Aldo’s mind snapped back to attention when Gianne suddenly lifted his foot off the accelerator pedal and swore heatedly, hissing out the words **‘*Porca miseria!*’**.

The armoured truck had rounded a blind corner and was bearing down rapidly upon a slowly moving school bus. The curves in the road prevented Gianni from overtaking with any degree of safety. Glancing impatiently in his rear view mirror Gianni checked that the second armoured truck had slowed down behind them. At that moment he also noticed that another vehicle, a tip-truck, had caught up behind them as well as two large black sedans.

‘Great!’ he cursed. **‘Can you believe it? We’re out here in the middle of nowhere, and now we’ve got a traffic jam! Fucking great!’**

‘Relax. Don’t be so impatient *amico*,’ said Aldo calmly. **‘We won’t be all *that* late.’**

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The next instant Aldo's body was violently flung forward when Gianni jammed his foot down hard on the brake, bringing the truck to a tire-screaming halt. The school bus up ahead had braked suddenly and without warning. A split second later, the lead armoured truck was rammed from the rear by the second security vehicle, which in turn had been savagely rammed from behind by the tip-truck.

Bruised, dazed and winded by the seat belts snapping across their chests, Aldo and Gianni struggled to free themselves. They reached for their weapons as four balaclava-wearing attackers leapt out of the school bus and opened fire on their armoured vehicle with heavy caliber machine-guns.

The gangsters raked the front of the truck with their weapons sending sparks and metal shards showering off the amour plating. The bulletproof glass deformed and was rendered opaque by a spider-web of cracks, as countless rounds struck and bounced from its surface.

Aldo instinctively shoved the barrel of his shotgun out of a gun port and fired a blast in the direction of one of the attackers. He aimed at the waist sensing that the bandit may be wearing a flak jacket underneath his black outfit. The attacker dropped his weapon and collapsed with blood showering out from his lower body.

Before he could fire again a massive explosion at the rear of Aldo's truck lifted it several feet into the air as the armoured car's rear doors were blasted open with explosive. The concussive force of the detonating Semtex plastic explosive burst into Aldo's eardrums and brain with a purple flash and plunged him into deep unconsciousness.

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The first *Carabiniere*-filled Alfa Romeo sedan to arrive at the point of the ambush, with its siren screaming, found a scene of devastation reminiscent of a wartime massacre. Both the armoured trucks were terminally damaged. One vehicle was lying on its side in a ditch by the side of the road emitting acrid smoldering fumes. The other vehicle was blazing fiercely on the actual roadway, a black plume of noxious smoke rising into the sky from its burning tires. The rear doors of both vehicles had been blown wide open and the money containers that had been packed with two and a half trillion Lire were gone.

The bloodied and mangled bodies of the four security guards who had been in the back of the trucks were scattered along the roadside like broken rag dolls. Three were dead beyond doubt, while one was badly wounded and barely clinging to life. The drivers and the other guards in the front compartments were all badly injured and their ultimate survival would rest on urgent medical evacuation and treatment.

The first of the ambulances arrived with lights flashing furiously and sirens wailing as the *Carabiniere* Captain asked one of his men, **‘Are we fighting common criminals or terrorist commandos in a war zone?’**

Don Vittorio Collazione’s villa was but one of many expensive terraced houses perched on the steep mountainous slopes of the village of *Positano* in this spectacular corner of the *Costiera Amalfitana*. Located on the southern side of Sorrento’s peninsular, it was accessed by a narrow and winding road that snaked down from the mountainous heights to the sea that foamed around rocks five hundred feet below. The surrounding scenery boasted splashes of lush green vineyards cascading down amongst the mauve colored cliff faces between villas that appeared to defy gravity, as

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though they were glued to the rocks. Centuries-old rustic stone villas, draped with wild roses and interspersed with Cypress and Aleppo pines, stood like embedded rocks defying the decay that would ultimately in some future century cause them to crumble and fall. While away on the right the brightly colored dome of the Church of St. Maria Assunta cast its lighthouse beacon to the members of the Christian faith.

Positano was once a charming little fishing village and a Mecca for writers and artists. Now the village had become a chic holiday resort for the international vacation throng. Bikini clad women and tanned males covered every square inch of its pebble beach or roamed cheerfully in holiday mood through its cobbled streets beneath the windows adorned with florid flower boxes. Notwithstanding this great influx of visitors, nothing could spoil Positano's natural charm, with its terracotta roofed houses and ochre yellow facades, and the ubiquitous washing strung out to dry in the warm sun. The aroma of pastas, olive oil, seafood, garlic and basil sauce permeated the village, and created an ambience of its own.

Don Vittorio Collazione strolled into the breakfast room of his luxurious Amalfi Coast villa with its floor-to-ceiling windows. Gazing out on the scene below he admired the shimmering waters of the *Golfo di Salerno* and instinctively knew that this was the same wonderful sight his ancestors had enjoyed before him. Nearby lay the *Isola di Capri*, the sybaritic island paradise that had been the holiday home of so many Roman emperors, and now enticed latter-day celebrities.

Although clad in his white bath robe and black leather slippers the Don remained an impressive figure, standing six foot tall with a ram-rod straight upright physique that belied his fifty plus years. His face was ruggedly handsome with a shadowy hint of his Italian descent and Roman heritage in the slightly aquiline nose.

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His hair was thick and black except for a noticeable graying at the temples and the betraying threads of age in the thin manicured moustache. The vitality of his eyes indicated a man who enjoyed every aspect of life.

‘Buon giorno, Don Vittorio,’ came the guttural greeting from behind him. He swung around and replied with warmth in his voice, ***‘Buon giorno, Guido, another beautiful day.’***

Guido Leonetti, the Don’s head bodyguard and a trusted “captain” of many years, agreed.

‘Si, Don Vittorio. It is indeed a beautiful day.’

Leonetti then sauntered casually over to a far corner of the room and eased his broad frame into a chair, but the darting eyes remained ever alert, ever watchful.

The maid, Donella, had prepared Don Vittorio’s customary breakfast, a long *espresso* coffee, soft boiled egg in a cup, and strips of buttered toast set out next to the neatly folded morning newspaper. Don Vittorio noted these touches of custom and order approvingly as he took his seat. Taking a sip from his coffee he carefully unfolded the newspaper. The front page headlines atop the graphic photograph of carnage and destruction made him freeze momentarily, before he exploded in a fit of rage that startled his bodyguard and caused him to leap to his feet.

Thumping the newspaper down violently onto the table Don Vittorio screamed out the words;

‘Porco Dio! Those fucking Balkan scum! Who the hell do they think they are? First they fuck up their own country with a war that turns parts of Yugoslavia into a wasteland with mass graveyards everywhere..... now these crazy killers think they can cross the Adriatic Sea and move in on our territory. Do these animals think we Italians will roll over and let them give it to us up the

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arse? Those miserable vermin! They deserve to be exterminated like all other vermin!’

Guido Leonetti moved quickly to join Don Vittorio at the table, picked up the newspaper, and read out aloud the front-page headline that had so upset the Don;

“2:5 TRILLION LIRE HEIST

BALKAN GANG STRIKES IN TERRORIST ATTACK”

A graphic photograph below that headline depicted in stark detail the carnage at the scene of the robbery. Several mangled bodies were clearly visible near the burning and wrecked armoured trucks. The twisted lifeless corpses were made more pathetic by the stark black and white photograph with no attempt made in its presentation to spare the sensitivities of the viewer.

Guido continued reading out loud;

‘Ten balaclava wearing men with Balkan accents rammed and cornered two armoured trucks near the town of Lecce. Blasting open the doors with explosives they raked the security guards with machine-gunfire, leaving three dead and five wounded. In a second attack on the same day also believed to be the work of Balkan criminals, guards had a miraculous escape when another gang intercepted a delivery of pensions.’

Guido put the newspaper down, and shaking his head in irritation turned to face the Don. He spoke slowly, his deep voice accentuating every word.

‘This incident is not good for business, Don Vittorio.’

‘Si, Guido, you’re exactly right. With these robberies these mercenary bastards are virtually declaring war on the *Polizia* and *Carabiniere*, which is

utterly stupid! They will only succeed in unleashing an angry backlash of retribution and a police “crack-down”. Our businesses will suffer in the backwash of all this, and we will lose money. The army may even be brought in to deal with these foreign gangs of Albanians, Serbs and Montenegrans, putting unnecessary pressure on our activities. The trouble with these foreign *bruti bastardi* is they have no respect. No respect for anyone. Most of them are just fucking war criminals looking for a new killing ground. They’re used to butchering old people and children; they have developed a vile taste for blood. And now, they are openly challenging us as well!’

‘Si, Don Vittorio,’ Leonetti agreed wholeheartedly, ‘They are indeed disrespectful bastards covered in blood!’

Guido Leonetti watched as Don Vittorio walked over to the side table that stood against the wall. The Don took a cigarette from the wood-inlaid box on the table and lit it. Guido knew the Don was greatly annoyed and angry, for he did not normally smoke this early in the morning, so stood patiently as his boss inhaled the smoke deep into his lungs before blowing it out slowly. The Don remained silent although his brow was creased in a deep frown.

‘How do we respond to this act, Don Vittorio?’

The reply from the Don was cold and calculating.

‘I intend to immediately call for an urgent meeting of all “The Commission” members. The Dons from all the main *families* must be gathered to discuss and counter this threat. These bandits have thrown out a challenge to us, and we certainly won’t run from their insults. Our band of brothers must meet them head on, crush them like the vermin they are, and exterminate them! We will kill them and bury them deep in the pit that they have dug for themselves.’

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Don Collazione threw back his head and gave a mirthless laugh;

‘Soon, we will send them to the place in hell they deserve!’

It was two weeks after the Lecce armoured car massacre before a pivotal meeting took place in a secluded villa three hours drive east of Rome. The area of Abruzzo was selected because it was central to the majority of the Commission members, and importantly, because the location was sparsely populated. The business to be discussed and the identity of those attending to the business of the day had to be kept secretive. Security and concealment were the deciding factors of paramount importance in this line of business. An old Mafia saying put it succinctly, “For every crime there must be care, for someone will find a witness, and *that* will require *another* crime and perhaps create *another* witness.”

What better place than the wild, brooding landscape of Abruzzo, dominated by the Apennine mountain range. In these bleak surroundings only small ramshackle towns cling to the steep mountainsides, many semi-abandoned and in a state of forlorn decay. For most of the inhabitants who remain and look out over the vertiginous drops, life remains primitive and poverty-stricken; a location eminently suitable for a clandestine gathering.

The actual meeting place was a three centuries old villa situated in the heart of the Abruzzo National Park. The villa during its long history had been the country residence of many a wealthy noble family, being used as a retreat from the hot and stifling summer heat of old Rome when primitive sewerage and sanitation facilities made the city unpleasant. Moreover, it was a game hunter’s paradise, and many a nobleman of the past had flushed deer, quail or hares out of the thick underbrush.

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The two-storey villa was perched atop a high hill and from its vantage point looked out over the surrounding rolling hills of olive trees. The villa could only be reached by a narrow, ascending road bordered by rows of majestic pencil pines. The original and deteriorating exterior of the villa with its flaking walls and rustic terracotta roof tiles belied the modernized and luxuriously appointed interior of the apartments inside the building.

The black Mercedes sedan with the heavily darkened windows slowed as it approached the gates to the estate upon which the villa stood. Two four-wheel drive vehicles, one on either side, were blocking the drive whilst six heavily armed men clad in uniform dark suits and dark sunglasses stood checkpoint duty.

A scrutiny of the occupants of the Mercedes was carried out by the gatekeepers, and then came the words spoken with deferential respect;

‘Don Collazione, we have been expecting you. Please drive through and up to the villa.’

The tires of the Mercedes raised a cloud of dust from the unsealed road as it powered up towards the villa on the hill. Don Vittorio noted a dozen or so mostly black vehicles parked in its grounds as he spoke to Guido Leonetti who sat up front next to the driver.

‘It looks like almost all of the Commission members are already here.’

Guido nodded. He had already observed the armed lookouts scattered around the villa and on its roof, as well as the two helicopters circling lazily overhead. Two of the attending Dons had chosen to fly in and their helicopters had been placed in service as additional lookouts during the course of the meeting.

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The six-hour meeting proved to be a tedious and frustrating time for Don Vittorio. All of the Mafia heads related stories of ruthless Balkan gangs muscling in on their traditional territories, stopping at nothing in their attempts to establish power bases in their adopted country.

However, there was considerable disagreement and heated discussion over what should be done to counter the problem of these interlopers. To his chagrin Don Vittorio soon discovered most of the other Mafia “families” were in favor of trying to form a passive, almost peaceful alliance with the Balkan gangs.

One Don expressed his feelings on this matter.

‘They are not like us! This is a new breed of criminal, with new rules and new weapons. Where we use a stiletto, they use a machine gun. Where we use a pistol, they use a rocket launcher. We only kill when we must. They kill for the thrill of it! I say we make a pact with them. Let them have the illegal immigrant trade and the smuggling of drugs. We will keep the gambling, prostitution, cigarettes, liquor and the trade in arms. Let them get blood on their hands with all the dirty stuff. Let them break their balls using brute strength, we’ll keep doing business using our brains.’

The Don from Rome smiled as he entered the debate;

‘Besides, we can make far more money defrauding the European Union Subsidies Schemes, and running our scams in world wide stock markets, and through credit card and Internet fraud. There is much less risk of government intervention or of getting caught! Violent criminal acts only serve to shock people and governments into taking punitive measures, whereas, no one gives a fuck about our vices they can’t see!’

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The murmurs of approval from around the table indicated that the majority of “family” heads were in agreement with this opinion of an arranged pact and a division of illegal activities. Nothing in Don Vittorio’s arguments to the contrary could sway the other Dons against voting in favor of arranging this course of action.

The meeting concluded around mid-afternoon, and the participants then hurriedly headed to their waiting limousines or helicopters and departed in haste by different routes from the villa, back to the sanctuary of home territory.

Don Vittorio slumped back in the rear seat of his heavy black Mercedes as his driver joined the column of cars and drove down the winding road, and then away from the villa. He remained deep in thought after his defeat at the table of the Commission, and several minutes passed before he spoke slowly and deliberately to his bodyguard.

‘Madonna! Essi hanno perdoto i coglione! (They have lost their balls!). I swear by the cross on my mother’s grave.....’ he paused, and the menace in his voice strengthened as his mind ended all the controversy of his fruitless submissions to his fellow Dons, ***‘this Balkan trash had better not cross my path, or cause me a moment’s trouble, or these mongrel bastards will curse their mothers for ever giving birth to them!’***