

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

SHERIFF

ORTEGA STOOD

on the edge of Panocha

Ridge. Below, he watched Joe

Lucky secure the barn doors with chains

and walk into the house. From a rocky outcrop,

CIA Bill studied Ortega. A Texas dove flew up from the cliff

and landed on Ortega's truck. The big bird tilted his

head and looked to the heavens with one eye. The

dove cooed up at LRRP's silently gliding down

on silk parachutes toward earth. Ortega

watched one parachute catch wind and

sail off course toward the north.

"Madre de Dios!" he said.

"The Army is here! I

wonder if I can

resign this

pinche

job?"

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

PACHUCO WAS DREAMING

that he was in a bar in
Tijuana. Half-naked women
wiggled around him like earthworms.

He licked the back of his hand for salt and
fired down a dream shot of tequila, and grunted
in his sleep with deep satisfaction. Someone, he did not know
who, perhaps a jealous lover, came into the bar with a gun and
fired a shot at him. . . BANG!

Outside, the wayward LRRP crashed boots first into the
flimsy tin roof of Pachuco Pacheco's chicken coop. The rooting
chickens flew into a frenzy, beating their short wings and flying
nowhere as feathers floated in the air. The white dust of chicken
poop shot up through the gap in the roof. Inside the tiny adobe
house, Pachuco searched for his bifocals. He was thin as a river
reed in his white night gown. He placed the bifocals on his bony
nose. His hair was thick and messy like old Moses on the
mountain. At eighty years old, Pachuco had buried three wives
and many lovers. None of them worth a centavo. He located his
slippers and yanked his Remington shotgun from under the
bed; (Sheriff Ortega let him keep it for the Texas doves and he
did fire the first volley in the bird wars) and then turned on the
lights in the kitchen. Muttering curses in Spanish, he went onto
the sagging porch and stood peering into the darkness. His
chickens were squawking like his first wife.

"Venga aqui, you chicken stealers!" shouted the old man.
"Andale, cabrones!"

Pachuco pulled back one hammer on the breach and fired
wildly into the night. Shotgun pellets ripped through his long
johns that dangled on the clothes line. The LRRP paratrooper
panicked at the sound of the blast. He exited from the madness
inside the coop, and was entangled in his white parachute. His
head appeared round from the shape of his helmet and only

black jump boots appeared out of the shroud of white silky parachute.

Pachuco was horrified. He stood paralyzed with fear between the two small windows that glowed from the light in the kitchen. The paratrooper stumbled blindly in the yard. His arms and legs kicked violently to free himself. Pachuco let loose the second barrel but it sailed high into a tree. Leaves fluttered down into the yard.

"Un espiritu maligno!" shouted Pachuco. He hobbled off for his old Chevy truck and tossed in the shotgun. He climbed into the truck and sped off, honking the horn to ward off the evil spirit.

Back at the ranch, Duke stuck out his black snout from the dog house and sniffed the air. He looked up and watched the LRRP's float down to earth and thump in the far recesses of the meadow like fruit falling in the old orchard. He offered his half-hearted bark and receded back into his dog house. The LRRP patrol tossed down their heavy packs and started to cut slabs of grassy sod with pack shovels. Then they dug deep foxholes.

Joe Lucky stuck his head out the bedroom window.

"Hey Duke, hold down the fort, boy. Bite them bastards if you get a notion." Duke whimpered from inside his dog house.

"Joe, come to bed," said Rachel.

Pachuco stomped on the brake and skidded to a stop in front of the San Miguel Church. He ran into the sanctuary with his shotgun, trying to cock both horse-head hammers. He lay prone in front of the Virgin de Guadalupe.

"Blessed Virgin, please forgive my evil ways. I do not want to go to Tijuana."

Padre Gomez entered, wearing his own white night gown.

"Is that you, Pachuco? Why did you bring that gun into the church? Esta loco?"

Pachuco rose to his knees and genuflected to the Virgin de Guadalupe. He shivered with imaginary cold. "Padre Gomez don't take offense, but how else am I, a viejo, to do battle with a

diablo. He's at my casa. Eating my dear chickens!"

"You will go to hell for lying, old man. And where are your clothes. This is disrespectful. What devil?"

"He looked like Casper."

"Casper the ghost?"

"Si, Padre. He looked like him. I know it! Pray for them, Padre."

"The only chicken I'll pray for," said the exasperated priest, "is one in Julie One Owl's frying pan." He lifted a crucifix and kissed it for more patience. He took up a book of matches and lit a candle. Pachuco lay on his back in front of the altar, his frail chest rising and falling in his fear.

"Forgive us, Holy Mother, but we have a misunderstanding in the middle of the night. And you have more important issues at hand." Padre Gomez turned to Pachuco. "If you

don't take that gun out of here" he said sternly,

"I will summon Sheriff Ortega." "Ortega is

watching Joe Lucky's ranch. Renaldo

Chavez saw him." "Then I will

throw you in jail myself,

viejo!" Padre Gomez

sat in a pew,

dejected.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

CIA

BILL CRAWLED

past the dog house with
a rope around his neck, a crowbar
in his belt and a flashlight in his hand.

He tossed a biscuit in front of the dog house.

Duke stuck out one big paw and fetched the biscuit.

CIA Bill continued to crawl toward the barn, swift as a lizard. He hurled the rope over the weather vane and climbed onto the roof. He yanked out squeaky nails with the crowbar, removed boards and descended into the barn by rope. He dangled in the darkness. He flicked on the flashlight and the beam zigzagged through the rafters.

CIA Bill saw the most horrendous figures, nightmares of the mind, hanging from the rafters like weird giant bats. Did Joe Lucky join the aliens to hatch these beasts on mankind? The flashlight beam darted over the entire output of Joe Lucky's hellish, artistic mind. CIA Bill gasped for breath. He cursed the CIA. He knew that someday he would suffer a ghastly death. He just didn't want to die in this lonely place. The CIA never claimed any agent's body. Agents had to be content to go to the grave with only the notion of being a great patriot.

Then he bumped into something in the dark.

There was a clattering noise.

CIA Bill nearly had a stroke when the light flashed onto the huge skull of Snippy and her mocking horse teeth. CIA Bill and Snippy were so close they could have French kissed. He screamed in terror.

"Son of a bitch!" said CIA Bill, and pulled himself up the rope as nifty as a monkey. The flashlight crashed down onto the flying saucer, which emitted a pitiful beam. Up in the sky, Predator drones circled like buzzards over the J. Lucky Ranch. CIA Bill repelled off the barn and took frantic flight

from the yard, but he tripped
over a discarded sculpture.
He tumbled like a
circus bear
into the
night.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

AT
NORAD,
Snoopy Taylor
looked closely at a series
of photographs. A communication
specialist tinkered with the images, zooming
them into larger shapes. "I can't tell what's inside the
barn, sir," he explained. "But there are some strange holes in
the meadow."

"Make a guess on the holes," demanded Snoopy Taylor.

The specialist zoomed a photograph to fill the huge screen. He saw a roll of toilet paper on the grass. "If I had to guess, I would say some sort of foxholes."

Snoopy Taylor slammed a fist on the table. "God damn it! The Army's got into the fray!"

Captain Jack said, "they might be Green Berets from Fort Carson. Or perhaps a Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol?"

"Drop a missile," said Snoopy Taylor, "let's see if we can flush some quail."

A Predator drone glided over the ranch and launched a missile into Joe Lucky's meadow, and then went floating off into the sun. There was a huge explosion. The earth spit up clods of dirt and grass. LRRPS popped up like gophers from under layers of sod, fired some rapid bursts from M16's, and then sank back down into the earth.

Joe Lucky, Rachel and Summer ran out of the house and stood in the yard. In the distance they saw a plume of smoke linger in the air. Joe Lucky shielded his eyes and looked up into the sun.

"What the hell was that?" he said in bewilderment.

"Joe, are they bombing us?" asked Rachel.

"The government wouldn't bomb us."

"The government bombs everybody, Joe."

She grabbed Summer and went back into the house, slamming the porch door for effect. Joe Lucky walked to the barn, dark with gloom. He unshackled the heavy chains on the double doors and walked inside to gaze upon his shiny, slumbering flying saucer.

And then he saw sunlight pouring through the hole in the roof. He climbed up the ladder and onto the UFO and gazed up into the gaping hole. "It looks like I got some nasty skunks on the premises."