

Mexico

“Step out of the cockpit, *senor. Por favor.*”

Backlit by the last of the setting sun, it was difficult to see whether the uniform was Federale or local, but the AR-16 was pretty easy to identify, especially the black hole at the end of the barrel, a foot from his face.

Cole held up one hand and pointed at the seat belt with the other, reaching down to the release only after receiving a nod. He opened the door carefully and stepped down onto the tarmac, holding his arms high. He smiled but the man with the gun didn't smile back. He motioned with the gun and Cole walked dutifully to the right, towards another officer who was also holding an AR-16.

This was not good. Culiacan had always been bought so somebody fucked up. It was going to get considerably worse when they looked inside the plane, to say nothing of the .45 in the shoulder holster under his snappy Hawaiian shirt.

“New sheriff in town?” Cole said.

“*Maldito idiota.*” Now he smiled, raising the gun level with Cole's chest.

Cole heard the report of the rifle as the officer's head exploded, and his *compadre's* followed suit a beat later, their weapons clattering to the pavement as their bodies fell.

Cole wiped the blood splatter off his face with the tail of his gaudy shirt and tried to stop his hands from trembling. Tommy Thompson emerged from the gloom, the BAR in his hand, cigar clenched in his teeth.

“Damn, flyboy.” Tommy grinned. “Get your skinny ass in that plane. This time you gotta make room for me. We can't be hanging around here. Fucking people getting shot and shit.” He shoved Cole towards the airplane. “They were Cali cartel. You were toast.”

Shouts came from the one-story building across the field. Cole took one more look at the dead men in front of him and swallowed the bile rising in his throat.

Tommy was right almost all the time, Cole thought as he taxied down the runway, shots audible behind them. This time for sure.