



A DEADLY TANGO

A spy thriller novel
By

Michel Poulin

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A SPY THRILLER NOVEL

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MICHEL POULIN

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WARNING TO POTENTIAL READERS

THIS FICTION NOVEL CONTAINS GRAPHIC DESCRIPTIONS OF VIOLENCE AND SEX, AS WELL AS COARSE LANGUAGE AND CONTROVERSIAL SUBJECTS WHICH ARE UNSUITABLE FOR CHILDREN. ALSO, THIS IS A WORK OF FICTION. WHILE MANY PERSONS MENTIONED IN THIS NOVEL EXIST, THE WORDS AND ACTIONS ATTRIBUTED TO THEM IN THIS NOVEL DO NOT CORRESPOND TO REALITY OR TO PAST HISTORY.

ABOUT THIS NOVEL

This novel is a sequel to FRIENDS AND FOES and continues the adventures of two CIA action agents, Erik Johnson and Dean Price, tasked with some of the most difficult and violent clandestine missions in the service of the United States.

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CHAPTER 1 – CIA ACTION AGENTS

19:49 (Mexico Time)

Friday, September 11, 2020

Private jungle road near Dimas

Sinaloa State, Mexico



The Sun was getting low on the western horizon, making shadows spread at the feet of the trees and bushes in the dense forest lining both sides of the private gravel road. That suited just fine the two men hiding among the trees, just off the road. Both men were separated from each other by a good thirty meters and had taken camouflaged positions along the southern side of the gravel road, next to a sharp turn which led towards a large, luxurious-looking villa situated atop a low hill. Each man also had an assortment of weapons and equipment next to them, ready for instant use. The man nearest the road turn, in a position that allowed him a direct view of the property on the hill, then spoke in a low voice in his light radio headset's microphone while keeping his binoculars at eye level.

"Get ready, Stryker: Lopez' convoy has just left the villa. I count four escort vehicles full of thugs, plus one probably armored four-door beige Mercedes sedan."

"Understood, Sparrow! I'm ready for them." replied on his own radio the second man, using like his partner their codenames rather than their real names. That man, a muscular and solidly-built, 185 centimeter-tall Caucasian with brown hair cut very short, then grabbed one of the two ready-to-fire AT4-CS anti-tank rocket launchers lying next to him in the long grass and shouldered it after taking its safety off, then made its front opening stick out between branches of the bush hiding him. His partner, a fit-looking but lean man with medium-length brown hair and a short, carefully trimmed beard, also took the safety off his own weapon, a FNH SCAR-H 7.62mm automatic rifle equipped with a day/night scope and a laser dot sight, then flipped away a protective cover on a small black box to which a thin wire leading towards the road was attached. He then waited patiently as the convoy of five vehicles approached from the direction of the villa. His prey today was named Juan Manuel Lopez, a top enforcer of the powerful Sinaloa Mexican drug cartel and a man truly worthy of the qualifier of 'human monster'. Lopez

and his thugs had tortured, killed and dismembered literally hundreds of people in the past, be they rival drug dealers, policemen, journalists, judges, politicians or simple common citizens who had made the mistake of opposing the Sinaloa drug cartel or of objecting to its activities. A number of American federal agents, mostly from the Drug Enforcement Agency, or DEA, had also been killed by Lopez, most often after being horribly tortured to make them reveal the names of their informers. Lopez had even tortured young children in front of their parents in order to make the latter talk. Worse, Lopez was known to often participate in those torture sessions and was said to show sadistic pleasure in them. Someone in Washington had finally said 'enough' and had sought the help of the CIA and of its Special Activities Division in order to get rid of Lopez. That in turn had brought Erik Johnson and Dean Price to this spot of Mexican jungle, ready to dish out his just reward to Lopez.

The small convoy, with a jeep and a pickup truck full of armed thugs in the lead and with the Mercedes sedan sandwiched between the two pairs of escort vehicles, soon arrived at the turn in the gravel road. It however had to slow down significantly in order to take the sharp curve. That was what Erik Johnson was precisely hoping for. Letting the two leading escort vehicles pass first, he then waited until the Mercedes sedan, in which he could see Lopez' inside, sitting on the back seat, arrived over a spot on the road under which a culvert passed in order to let rainwater drain down one of the shallow drainage ditches dug alongside the road. Erik's left thumb then pressed the red button on the small box he was holding. The sixty kilos of Semtex plastic explosives previously placed inside the culvert by Dean Price detonated just as the belly of the Mercedes was above it. The armored body of the car then could do little to protect its occupants from the tremendous explosive blast, which ripped open both the floor and the gasoline tank of the vehicle while projecting the Mercedes in the air. The gasoline inside the tank ignited at once, with its flames filling the inside of the car through its ripped open floor. The Mercedes sedan, transformed into a flying torch, flipped around and did two full rotations before crashing back down belly-up on the road. Knowing that nobody could survive that kind of hit, Erik let drop the improvised explosive device's command box and quickly grabbed a sort of handle with trigger lying in the grass to his left, while starting to point his rifle. The drivers of the two escort vehicles following the Mercedes understandably braked hard at once in order to avoid the flaming wreck now blocking the narrow road. As eight heavily-armed Sinaloa thugs jumped out of their

vehicles, Erik then triggered the Claymore mines actuator he was now holding. A total of eight directional fragmentation mines, four on each side of the road in the segment before the curve, then exploded, sending tens of thousands of deadly steel fragments in overlapping arcs completely covering a good fifty meters-length of the road. The eight thugs, along with their two drivers who had stayed at the wheel, were instantly shredded and killed or severely wounded by the shrapnel. With that part of the problem taken care of, Erik then shouldered his rifle and pointed it at the two lead escort vehicles, ready to support his partner. However, Dean Price proved to be in no need of help. As soon as the Mercedes had been blown in the air by the hidden I.E.D., he had fired his first AT4-CS anti-tank rocket at the jeep leading the convoy, having kept it in his launcher's sight as soon as it had turned the sharp corner in the road. The driver of the jeep did not have time to react to the destruction of the Mercedes other than by looking in shock at his rearview mirror before the rocket, designed to destroy light armored vehicles and bunkers, hit the front radiator of his vehicle and exploded, sending a hot jet of plasma through the engine block which burned its way to the jeep's interior. While the blast and fragments from the shaped charge rocket killed the three passengers of the jeep, the unfortunate driver was also run through by the hot plasma jet, which instantly incinerated its internal organs before exiting his back and cutting off the legs of one of the two thugs sitting in the back. The jet finally penetrated the gasoline tank of the jeep, making it burst in flames. With the flaming jeep careening off the road and crashing in the northern side drainage ditch, Dean quickly threw away the now empty AT4-CS launch tube and grabbed his second ready-to-fire AT4-CS, shouldering it and aiming it at the second escort vehicle, a Toyota pickup with six armed thugs aboard it, braked hard while veering to avoid the destroyed leading vehicle. To his credit, the driver of the pickup reacted correctly for these circumstances and did not stop, instead accelerating once past the flaming jeep in order to escape what was obviously a well-prepared ambush. That however didn't save him or his comrades from getting hit by the second AT4-CS rocket fired by Dean. The 84mm caliber, HEDP 502 High Explosive Dual Purpose warhead of the rocket impacted the windshield of the pickup truck and penetrated it, literally slamming into the chest of the driver before exploding. All the occupants of the truck were killed instantly by the blast and fragments from the 440-gram charge of Octol high explosive. The now driverless vehicle, its engine still roaring, then sped by Dean's position before leaving the road and smashing against a tree, snapping it in two. Dean smiled briefly at that sight.

“Those crazy Mexican drivers...”

He however became serious again at once and looked up the road, towards where Erik was hidden, while speaking in his radio microphone.

“The two front escort vehicles are now neutralized. How are you doing on your side, Sparrow?”

“The three other vehicles of the convoy are also neutralized. Quickly throw away your empty launcher tubes in the jungle and then join me in sweeping the field to check for any possible survivor. Then we will start phase two of our mission.”

“Understood!”

Grabbing the two empty AT4 launch tubes he had used, Dean then ran inside the jungle, covering a good seventy meters before stopping among the trees and looking around him. Seeing a thick bush which had grown close to a large tree, Dean approached it and looked in the space between it and the tree. He smiled with satisfaction on seeing that thick, long grass covered that surface, mixed in with other plants. Taking his empty AT4 tubes, he carefully laid them on the ground and rearranged the grass and leaves in order to hide them from visual sight. Now, it would take a very deliberate and careful search covering a large area away from the road to discover them. Even if someone discovered them, it would not mean much then, as the serial numbers and other identifying markings had been removed from them before the mission had started. Once done with that task, he ran back to the road, where he found Erik crouched against a tree on the northern side of the road, wearing his equipment backpack.

“Get your pack, Dean: we will want to move before the goons left in that villa send someone to check on this ambush scene. I already checked the bodies around: they were all dead, save for one wounded bastard whom I finished off with my knife. We will put silencers on our weapons before advancing towards the villa.”

“Got it!”

Less than a minute later, the two CIA paramilitary agents entered the jungle and started marching quickly at a crouch among the trees, heading for the villa while staying within sight of the gravel road leading to the property. As they were starting to be able to see the villa through the trees, Erik made an urgent hand signal for Dean to stop and

hide. Maybe twenty seconds later, two pickup trucks filled with armed thugs sped by them on the road, prompting a smile on Erik's lips.

"Thirteen less thugs left inside the property. Let's use this to break in. Follow me!"

Dean did so, staying about five meters behind Erik, until the latter stopped and crouched behind a large tree next to a clearing in the forest which hugged the villa's iron fence. Moving slowly and cautiously, Dean joined up with his long-time partner and friend and took out his binoculars to examine the villa and its surroundings.

"Hum, it seems that this Lopez bastard built his villa like a fortress: there is at least fifty meters of vegetation-free ground between the fence and the villa and its annexes, with a further twenty meters of open ground between the fence and the forest. I also see two widely-separated mirador towers built into the villa, each occupied by one visible man."

"Correct, but there is more: I see a power cable coming from the villa and connected directly to the iron fencing. My bet is that this fence is electrified. Also, I see two surveillance cameras mounted high on swiveling bases atop the corners of the fence, plus a guardhouse at the gate that looks more like a bunker than a simple hut. Lopez did take his security seriously."

"With the number of people hating his guts? No shit! What do we do now?"

"We eliminate the sentries, then we run to the villa via the main gate. You take care of the man in the gate hut, while I will take care of the mirador watchmen. Get ready... On the count of three... One, two, three..."

Both rifles, their barks drastically muffled by the oversized silencers used by Dean and Erik, fired at nearly the same instant. The man in the gate guardhouse was first to fall, his head exploding from the impact of the 7.62mm bullet from Dean's FNH-SCAR rifle. The watcher in the western mirador tower was next to drop a mere half second later. The other watcher in the eastern mirador tower was able to hear the faint detonation from Erik's rifle but, with the origin of the noise made very hard to locate thanks to the silencer Erik was using, was still looking frantically around when he too was killed by a bullet to the head. Quickly inspecting the windows on the façade of the villa with his rifle scope, Erik saw one more armed man posted behind an upper floor window, his head and the muzzle of a rifle barely visible. Without further delay, Erik fired his third shot, killing that hidden guard, then spoke quickly to Dean.

"Let's go!"

Running into the open and going around the gate guardhouse and through the opened gate, all the while keeping their automatic rifles raised and aimed, the two CIA action agents hurried to the main entrance door of the villa, getting to it in less than half a minute and briefly stopping outside on each side of it in order to listen for a moment. The only thing they heard was the frightened voices of two women speaking to each other in Spanish, somewhere inside the house. Dean, who spoke fluent Spanish, in contrast to the still rough Spanish of his partner, who had specialized in Russian, German and Arabic instead, spoke softly to him.

“Sounds like two frightened female domestic employees. They are wondering if they should hide or flee. Do we spare them?”

“We will give them one chance to live but, if they start screaming, shoot them at once. We will however gag and tie them if we don’t kill them. Time to put our masks on.”

Imitating Erik, Dean unrolled the balaclava tuque they were wearing, covering his face with it. He then raised his rifle, ready to cover his partner’s entry into the house. Cautiously testing the door’s handle first and finding it unlocked, Erik then pushed it open and hurried to step away from it, in case a shooter was waiting inside. Nothing happened, so he ran inside with his rifle pointed, ready to shot any threatening person inside. What he found inside the frame of an open door connecting a room with the entrance lobby on the left side was two mature women wearing the distinct dresses and white aprons of domestic aides. Dean immediately put one index up across his mouth, signaling the terrorized women to keep quiet. The younger of the two women, who was still at least forty years old, did speak, but kept her voice low.

“Please, don’t kill us: we are only cooks and servants.”

“We won’t if you keep silent, madam.” replied Dean in Spanish. Despite that, the woman spoke further, still in a low voice.

“Are you Federales¹? One of your officers is being held in the basement. We could hear her screams as Señor Lopez was torturing her.”

Erik and Dean exchanged a quick glance on hearing that. Their goal now, apart from getting rid of the remaining thugs serving Lopez, was to look for an American DEA agent who had disappeared four days ago while investigating the drug enforcer’s operations in

¹ Federales: Common popular term to designate members of the Mexican Federal Police.

the region. If they would have to help other captives, then that could greatly complicate their job. Taking a quick decision, Dean asked a question to the younger woman.

“Where is she held exactly?”

“There are cells and other reinforced rooms in the basement, down a staircase past that door at the far-right corner of the lobby.”

“Thank you! However, we will have no choice but to gag and tie you now, just in case some of Lopez’ men show up. I will ask you both to stay up and face the wall while putting your hands behind you.”

The two maids nervously nodded their heads, then did as he had said, allowing Dean to tie their hands in their backs with plastic cuffs. He then gently led them inside a large kitchen and made them to sit down in a corner out of sight of the door. Next, he tied their ankles as well and used the women’s aprons to gag them, before smiling to the maid who had talked with him.

“Thank you for your help, madam. Just be patient and someone will come to help you. By the way, do you have a cell phone?”

The maid nodded in the affirmative, then looked down at the front chest pocket of her uniform, prompting Dean into searching it. He did find a cell phone in it and pocketed it before smiling again to the Mexican woman.

“Thank you for the cell phone: we will give it temporarily to that female Federales once we will have delivered her. You should get it back within a day or two.”

Dean then straightened up on his feet and looked at Erik, who was watching the outside through a window of the kitchen. Since there were witnesses present, he spoke to his partner in his own rough Russian.

“There are basement cells, with a staircase in the far-right corner of the lobby.”

“Then, our agent should be down there as well.”

Erik then left the kitchen and crossed the entrance lobby, his rifle at the ready. The two agents didn’t encounter anybody else and were able to get to the far-right door without incident. Opening that door cautiously and listening for a moment, Erik heard what sounded like muffled crying. Having heard such kind of crying before, his heart sank for a moment.

“I can hear tortured people crying. Be ready but also be careful where you shoot, Dean.”

“Understood!” replied his partner, his expression hardening: he, like Erik, hated anyone using torture, for whatever reason, even if the torturer was an American agent or

police officer. Now doubly cautious, he followed Erik down the concrete steps of the staircase, to finally emerge in a fairly large room which was apparently used as a kind of guardroom, with a small table and four chairs, two steel lockers and a camp cot in one corner. A steel door was visible along one wall, with a set of keys hooked nearby to the wall. Grabbing the set of keys, Erik then looked through the small peeping hole in the steel door.

"This looks like a cell block to me. Nobody is visible in the hallway. Let's check it out. You check the left side cell doors while I check the ones on the right side."

Unlocking the steel door, Erik then entered the cell block and saw that there were six steel doors on each side. Searching the place with Dean, he found that the first door on the right was that of what was obviously a torture chamber. His jaws tightened as he looked around at the various instruments inside, including whips, pliers, car batteries and blowtorches.

"Fucking bastards!"

Walking out of the torture chamber, Erik went to the next door, finding this time a small concrete cell. His heart jumped in his chest when he saw a young woman, naked and crying, lying on the hard floor inside. Quickly unlocking that door, he hurried to the woman and crouched next to her to examine her. She had obviously been tortured hard, with whip marks all over her body and traces of electrical burns on both her nipples and clitoris. The woman, who was maybe in her late twenties, opened the one eye that had not been shut by blows and looked up at Erik, speaking in Spanish.

"Please, help me! Help me or kill me, but don't leave me here alive."

Erik thought of himself as a hardened man who could control his emotions. However, that desperate plea nearly broke his heart and he caressed the woman's forehead with one of his gloved hands.

"We will take you out of here, miss. Are you a Federales?"

"Yes! Lieutenant Felicia Chavez. You don't sound like a Mexican. Are you American?"

"No, Russian. Let's say that Lopez tortured and killed one person too many."

Erik then looked towards the hallway and shouted out in Russian before Dean could blow away his lie by speaking up in English.

"I FOUND THE MEXICAN FEMALE OFFICER. DID YOU FIND OUR MAN?"

Understanding quickly Erik's subterfuge, Dean answered back in Russian.

"YES, BUT HE IS DEAD. HE DIED FROM HIS WOUNDS."

"ANYBODY ELSE IN THE CELL BLOCK?"

"NOT YET! LET ME LOOK AT THE LAST CELLS."

Returning his attention to the Mexican woman, Erik spoke softly to her in his rough Spanish.

"Can you walk, miss?"

"I...I'll try." said Felicia Chavez, who then sat up first, wincing from the pain of the whip marks on her back and buttocks, then tried to get up. However, she then fell back on her bum while agony showed on her face.

"My...my feet! They pulled my toenails out."

Looking down at Felicia's feet, Erik saw that her toenails were effectively missing, with caked blood covering her toes.

"Svoloch²! Don't worry, miss: we will carry you out of here."

Taking the Mexican woman in his arms, he then lifted her off the floor and straightened up. Thankfully she was a fairly small woman and didn't weigh much, making it relatively easy for him to carry her. He then got out in the hallway and met Dean there. His partner gave a pained look at the tortured naked woman, then spoke to Erik, still using his limited Russian.

"Nobody else. I took photos of our man. We go?"

"Yes! Lead on!"

With Dean in front of him, Erik carried Felicia out the cell block. However, before going back up, he went to check the steel lockers sitting in one corner of the guardroom. While one contained some food and water, the other contained two boxes full of clothes. Felicia then spoke urgently at the sight of one of the boxes.

"My clothes! They are in there."

Temporarily sitting her on the small table in the guardroom, Erik then pulled out both boxes, one of which contained female clothes. Emptying it on the table, next to Felicia, Erik however kept for him the snub-nosed revolver inside it, while he examined the police badge and I.D. card held in a leather holder. The woman was indeed a Mexican federal police officer. Keeping the revolver but giving her the leather holder, he eyed Dean, who had extracted a pistol and a badge holder from the other box and was

² Svoloch: 'Bastard' in Russian.

pocketing them. One look back from Dean told Erik that those had belonged to the now dead DEA agent. Erik in turn looked at Felicia.

“Please dress quickly! The rest of Lopez’ goons could return any time now.”

Felicia did her best to comply, but her wounds, particularly her pulled out toenails, made that both painful and difficult. Erik finally told her to forget about her shoes and asked Dean to carry her on his back. Dean did so, holding both of her legs at waist level, while Felicia, now resting over his backpack, wrapped her arms around his neck.

“Okay, let’s go now!” said Erik in Russian once Felicia was on Dean’s back. Going back up the concrete stairs with his rifle pointed up, Erik arrived at ground floor level to find the lobby still deserted. However, as the trio was approaching the front door, he heard the engine noise of two vehicles approaching rapidly. Signaling to Dean to quickly put Felicia down inside the kitchen, Erik looked outside by a window of the lobby and saw two pickup trucks as they were about to stop in front of the main entrance, with the thugs in their back ready to jump out. Taking a flash decision, he switched at once the safety switch of his rifle to ‘auto’ and stuck the muzzle of his weapon out of the window, aiming quickly before firing a long burst of 7.62mm fire. That burst swept the leading pickup truck with deadly effect, killing or wounding the five men sitting or standing in the back of the truck. The driver of that vehicle then braked hard in order to stop and be able to jump out, but only managed to make Erik’s second burst more accurate. Both the driver and front passenger had only time to open their doors before being cut down in a hail of bullets. With still half of the bullets in his fifty-round C-Mag being available, Erik started switching his fire to the second pickup truck, but was beaten to it by Dean, who fired his ready 40mm grenade from the grenade launcher attached under the barrel of his assault rifle. While small, that 40mm explosive-fragmentation grenade was enough to cause a butchery aboard the truck. The thugs who were not killed outright were then finished off in successive volleys of deadly accurate rifle fire from the two CIA agents. Both agents then cautiously went out on the porch to check for survivors, ending up finishing off four gravely wounded thugs. As Erik completed the tour of the fight scene, Dean then walked quickly to the large, four-door garage attached to the villa, and entered it via a side door. Maybe three minutes later, one of the garage doors opened up and Dean rolled out at the wheel of a white minivan, stopping next to Erik and rolling down his driver’s window before smiling to his partner.

“Your taxi is here, mister.”

“Good job! Let’s get the poor Lieutenant Chavez. We will also bring out those two maids. Make sure to keep your face masked until we drop them off.”

With Dean stepping out and going back inside with him, both of them first took care of carrying Felicia Sanchez inside the minivan, installing her as comfortably as possible in one of the rear seats. The Mexican woman couldn’t help look with wide eyes at the carnage in front of the main entrance door.

“Dios mio! You two are positively deadly.”

“Pah, routine stuff for us, Lieutenant Chavez.” replied Dean in Spanish while grinning to her. “As we said earlier, Lopez pissed off the wrong government, so we were sent to do a little cleanup.”

With Erik staying with Chavez and the minivan, Dean then returned inside the villa and went inside the kitchen, where he quickly cut the plastic cuffs tying together the ankles of the two maids, then politely helped them to get up on their feet while speaking to them in his fluent Spanish.

“If you will please follow me, ladies. We will leave this place and will drop you off in Dimas.”

“What about those cuffs around our wrists, mister?” asked the older maid, still less than reassured. Dean smiled at that question.

“We will cut them off just before dropping you off, madam. Sorry if we are a bit cautious still. This way, please: your taxi is in front of the main entrance.”

Partly reassured by Dean’s friendly tone, the two maids followed him outside, only to stop and look with big eyes at the dead bodies and wrecked vehicles littering the front porch of the villa. Tapping gently their backs, Dean encouraged them towards the minivan, where they sat next to Felicia Chavez. The younger maid eyed with sorrow the torture marks visible on Felicia as Dean took place at the wheel and started the engine.

“I am truly sorry for what they did to you, miss. Unfortunately, we couldn’t alert anybody without risking the lives of our whole families.”

“I understand, madam: too many people live in fear of that Lopez bastard.”

“LIVED in fear.” corrected Dean from his driver’s seat. “Lopez is now roasting in Hell, along with his goons.”

“I hope that the Devil will be especially harsh with him.” pronounced the eldest maid, making the two other women and Dean nod in approval.

Going down the gravel road linking the villa with the main road to Dimas, they were soon at the site of the ambush, where Dean had to slow down to a crawl in order to avoid the various vehicle wrecks and the crater in the road caused by the I.E.D. As he was slowly zigzagging around those obstacles, Felicia stared at the bodies and wrecked vehicles before looking at Dean and Erik.

“You two are a mini-army! Who the hell are you exactly?”

The answer from a smiling Dean was only one word.

“Spetsnaz³!”

“Whoever you are, you did a good deed in the eyes of God.” replied the older maid before rolling down her window and spitting at the still burning Mercedes containing the cremated body of Juan Manuel Lopez. “May you roast in Hell for eternity, you sadistic bastard. Now, I won’t have to cook anymore for you and your thugs.”

The rest of the drive to Dimas, a small town near the Pacific coast, was spent in a much more relaxed atmosphere after that. However, instead of rolling into town, Dean stopped the minivan in front of a small convenience store at the eastern limit of Dimas, next to a gasoline station, then pointed a nearby taxi stand, where two taxis were parked, to the two maids.

“We will drop you here, so that you can take taxis to wherever you need to go, ladies. Here is some cash money to pay for the taxis. I will ask you at the same time to accompany Lieutenant Chavez to the nearest medical clinic first and help her until she is in safe hands.”

The younger maid looked with disbelief at first at the pile of Mexican pesos, which was equivalent to over 200 American dollars, then smiled to Dean.

“You are most generous, mister. Uh, what about my cell phone?”

“Right!” said Dean, fishing out that cell phone from one pocket. He however gave it to Felicia Chavez instead of to the surprised maid, while explaining himself.

“Let’s allow Lieutenant Chavez to make a phone call to someone she can fully trust, before we drop you off. One call, Lieutenant, and do not describe us or this vehicle

³ Spetsnaz: Popular abbreviation for the Russian words ‘Spetsialnovo Nazhacheniya’, meaning ‘Special Purpose’. Title given originally to Soviet special forces units of the GRU, the Soviet military intelligence department.

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