

**another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory**



**Farallón** by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) | March 2019

## **Farallón**

by Mike Bozart

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“Sam, we’re going to have to pass on Half Moon Bay [California] for now,” a nervous, fidgeting, bright-blond-haired, former cocaine-running, mid-forty-something, now-pot-bellied, already-thrice-divorced Caucasian male said while seated at the helm. “It’s just too precarious at the moment. We saw the running lights of a vessel behind us that seemed to be following us. It may be the [United States] Coast Guard. We can’t risk them searching this Skater 36. [an extremely fast, twin-hull speedboat] We’re going to head northwest and get at least a dozen miles [19.3 km] offshore.” *Why does he want to get out of territorial waters? I just knew that Pete would flake out on us. Never should have picked him and Ernie for such a high-stakes gambit. A massive mistake. / Bet I got him all worried.*

“Are you sure that you’re not just paranoid, Pete?” the slender, thirty-nine-year-old Chinese American asked with an opening sigh from his white 2016 Mercedes c300 sedan in the Pillar Point Harbor parking lot at twilight – a very serene-appearing 7:17 PM – on Saturday, September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2017.

“No, I’m not paranoid. I just don’t want to make an avoidable, ten-to-fifteen-years-in-a-federal-pen blunder, Sam. We’ll try to come back in to port in a couple of hours.” *Just fucking great! What am I going to do for 120-plus minutes? Juanita [Sam’s thirty-five-year-old Colombian American girlfriend] is at work until ten. Don’t want to drive back to Mountain View and then back here again. I guess that I could hang out in that brew pub across the street. [Capistrano Road] Yeah, just nurse a pint of porter. Hell, I’ll just walk over there and leave the car here.*

“But, everything went ok at the Santa Cruz Wharf, right?” Sam then enquired after a four-second pause. *Wonder if the land courier was trailed.*

“Yeah, Sam, we didn’t seem to attract any attention. We were casual but quick. We were out of there three minutes after it was on the boat.”

“Ok, I’ll be on standby. Over and out.” *Sure hope no one gets that multi-million-dollar rectangle of niobium. Ah, the allure of the AI [artificial intelligence] lure. The ultra-lure.*

*“Later.” Why are they heading northwest instead of due west? Ah, the Farallon Islands. I smell a rat. If Pete doesn’t call in by nine o’clock, I’ll have to shift to plan B. And pronto.*

Sam walked past Barbara’s Fishtrap, a small seafood restaurant on the bay, and then alongside a small beach that was vacant, save for some wafting fog wisps. After a few more paces, he crossed the street to arrive at Half Moon Brewing Company. *Good, it doesn’t look super-crowded yet.*

Once stool-perched at the inside bar that offered a view of the mooring harbor, Sam checked the San Jose area news on his brand-new iPhone 8 Plus while waiting for someone to take his drink order. He was shocked by what he saw. *Wow! Roadblocks have already been set up on Route 1, west and east of Santa Cruz; on Routes 9 and 17 to the north; and on the surrounding mountain roads. Maybe the Coast Guard or a police boat is really after them. Need to tell Pete. Now.*

*“Hello Sam. We’re already approaching Southeast Farallon Island. I can see the lighthouse beacon up on the foggy ridge; though – thankfully – I can no longer see any lights behind us. I think we’re in the clear.” Sure hope so.*

*“That’s great to hear, Pete. However, some words of caution: evidently our world-class con-artist-slash-magician’s sleight-of-hand ploy at the convention tripped an alarm. That Meta-Q-biquitous<sup>®</sup> quantum chip must have a tracking hitchhiker.” Yeah, I bet it does. Maybe the North Farallon Islands are out of range. Need to head up there. Plus, there are some scientists on the lighthouse island. Not good. The northern islands are uninhabited. Need to keep going. Yeah, let’s get out of here. Wonder what Farallón means. [sea pillar/cliff in Spanish] Need to look it up later. Later, when I can relax my mind.*

*“Ok, well, we’ve got the little ornament in a tin mints box, buried under some life jackets. I’ll have Ernie stack some metal items over it.” Excellent.*

*“Smart move, Pete. Oh, get this: roadblocks were set up over an hour ago all around Santa Cruz. The demented IT [information technology] dazzler knows that it has been stolen. Your paranoia may indeed be warranted. Therefore, stay alert out there on the high seas. And, I wouldn’t bother*

coming back here tonight. It's way too risky." *Oh, boy. Things just got real ... interesting.*

"So, what do you want us to do tonight?" Pete asked, fearing Sam's answer. *Please don't say 'stay in a holding pattern until dawn'. No, not that. I'm kind of hungry already. And thirsty.*

"How about heading to Sausalito? I could meet you there at our *favorite* harbor dock at nine-thirty."

"Ok, that will work, Sam. We have enough fuel. Oh, by the way, why did they place the chip in that Christmas-tree-like ornament? It doesn't look like a container for the world's ultimate quantum chip."

"Exactly." *Did he expect them to store it in a see-through necklace case?*

"Got ya. Out and about." Pete looked at the baleful islands ahead. *Where are those shoals located? Need to be careful. Slow 'er down.*

"Trouble, boss?" dark-haired, olive-skinned, mustachioed, thirty-seven-year-old Ernie asked, who was seated to the left of Pete. *This aint going as planned. Something is not right.*

"Maybe, maybe not," Pete curtly replied as he scanned the increasingly fog-laden, darkening horizon. "We might have an attached or integrated bug." He then glanced over his right shoulder. "Oh, fuck! Not again!"

Ernie snapped his head around. "Who is that, boss?"

"Not sure," Pete replied. "But, I think it's the same boat." He then opened up the throttle. "Hold on. We're getting the hell out of here, mate. See ya later, suckers!"

Soon the catamaran-style powerboat was skimming across the oil sea at 82 MPH (132 km/h). They opened up a sizeable gap. In seven minutes they had reached a granitic pair of exposed peaks of underwater mountains. *Already here. Blew those fucks away.*

Pete slowed the craft down and used his headlight to scan the all-rock shoreline of the western mini-isle. He looked to the rear again. There were no lights. But just 17 seconds later, the lights were back in view. *Oh, shit! What rotten luck! Who the fuck screwed up?*

“Ernie, I think it’s the Coast Guard; they’re tailing us. Fleeing is futile. I’m sure that they have alerted the nearby ports. How about I let you off and you hide the chip under a rock. I just know that they will rip this boat apart searching for that damn bauble. And if/when they find it, we lose. Bigtime.”

“Ok, sure, boss,” Ernie answered with some trepidation.

Pete inched the bobbing boat up as close as possible. Ernie, now on the bow with the colorfully disguised quantum chip in his jacket pocket, prepared to leap to a water-surface-level, almost-horizontal ledge. *Hope I can land in the trough between waves.*

“Just a little bit closer, boss. Ok, right there. Stop!” Ernie gave Pete a thumbs-up and promptly jumped from the starboard side of the bow. His left shoe splashed and immediately immersed four inches (10 cm) into the chilly seawater. *This water is freezing!*

“Hurry!” Pete barked as he shifted into reverse. *Easy for you to say, boss.*

Ernie scrambled up the craggy slope. Thirty feet (nine meters) up he placed the chip-lure under a loose mini-slab. “Ok, all done. I’m coming back down, boss.”

<BANG> <BANG>

The mysterious boat that had been shadowing them was now shooting at them. And this 59-foot (18 meters), massive-yet-sleek motor yacht was now only 125 feet (38 meters) behind Pete’s Ferrari on water. *Holy fuck! What the hell is going on?! / Would the Coast Guard be shooting at us? Sincerely doubt it. That boat is trouble. Serious trouble.*

Pete ducked down. *Well, that’s obviously not the Coast Guard. Dazzler has sent his private navy after us. Going to have to leave Ernie for now, or we’ll both be killed. Maybe they didn’t see him. ‘Just lie low, pal. And, good luck. Sorry, but it’s time for me to push this lever all the way forward before I become bloody Swiss cheese.’*

<Vroooooom>

The Skater 36 rapidly scooted away like a skimming rocket. However, the fog was now quite dense. At a speed of 56 MPH (90 km/h), the gray wall of tiny dihydrogen monoxide droplets suddenly – and quite shockingly – yielded to the

northernmost, black-as-no-tomorrow rocky islet, which local day-trippers sometimes called The Crescent or Cat and Canary (an adjacent-to-the-feline's-mouth tiny outcrop).

<BOOM> *Holy cow! What the hell was that?!*

The Salinian Block cat's tail completely destroyed the personal performance watercraft. Pete was dead upon the bomb-like impact, or mere nanoseconds thereafter. Thousands of carbon-fiber splinters and S-glass shards littered the lightly undulating swells 1,542 feet (470 meters) from Ernie. *Holy shit! Did an engine blow? A bilge explosion? No, it sounded more like a collision. He hit something – something hard and unmoving, like a just-above-the-waterline or semi-submerged flank. Bet poor old Pete is dead. Yeah, I'm sure of it. No way that boss survived that. What do I do now? Need to stay hidden until that diabolical yacht is gone. Or, I'll be the next death out here. Wonder if they saw me climbing. Sure as hell hope not. Nowhere to go if they did.*

After a cursory search of the shoreline, the large motor yacht zipped past Ernie and proceeded to the wreck site. They then shined several searchlights on the water, which illuminated the red-and-white flotsam. But, there was no sign of Pete. His remains had already sunk. An opportunistic great white shark devoured the mangled corpse in four chomps.

Ernie could just faintly see, and only every once in a while, the searchlights through the draping fog. *What happens now? Do they come back and carefully search the rock I'm on? And then shoot and kill me? I'm stuck here. Or, am I? That island over there would be a good place to hide for a while. Need to see how far away it is. Maybe I could swim to it. Doubt they would search it. I'd be safer over there. Yeah, need to check it out. Staying on this island is much riskier.*

Since the north face of the extant island was nearly vertical, Ernie decided to just keep climbing, as moving laterally was very dangerous, if not impassable in places. In eight foothold-finding-and-hand-scrabbling minutes, he had reached the pockmarked summit, 154 feet (47 meters) above the foreboding Pacific Ocean. He gazed eastward at the sister island. *Looks to be about 80 feet [24.4 meters] across at the narrowest passage. Could I make it that far in that cold-as-ice seawater without locking up and drowning?*

*Don't think so. And even if I were to survive the swim across, I'm then soaking wet and freezing with no towel or change of clothes. Hypothermia would surely set in. I'd slowly teeth-chatter my way to death. What a pitiful, wimpy ending to my life. No, I need to stay on this chunk of rock. Really have no choice. Wonder how far I am from San Francisco. Wonder what the cell service is like here. Is there any reception at all?*

Ernie extracted his silver smartphone. He was happily surprised to see that he had two bars (out of four). Google Maps was soon lighting up his face. *Ah, so I'm on the Island of St. James. The other one doesn't seem to have a name. Oh, it's 'the' North Farallon Island. Sure didn't think that I'd be here tonight when I woke up this morning. I've got myself in a really bad fix – a life-and/or-death dilemma. Oh, there's where Pete's boat crashed. Kind of looks like a comma. But for Pete it was a period. The end of his life sentence. His nautical game-over moment. Well, he sure went out with a blast. Such a risk-taker he was. At least his maritime death was instantaneous. No years of drooling, silent, loss-of-mentality agony in a nursing home. Wait. Could he still be alive? Has that yacht found his body floating on the water? Are they torturing him right now because they can't find the quantum chip? No, he's a goner. Has to be. Wonder when they will come back by here. And look for me? Shit!*

Just then Ernie heard the low-frequency drone of the motor yacht's inboard diesel engine. Then he saw the cabin window lights. He crouched down and remained motionless in a small, damp, cold, dark crevasse. The once-menacing, life-threatening vessel passed without incident, and soon disappeared into the fog-strewn southeastern darkness. *Whew! Glad those gun-firing assholes are gone. One big problem self-eliminated. But, I'm still stuck on this frigid-water-surrounded rock. For how long? For at least the night. Or longer? How much longer? I'll at least need some water by morning. Or, I'll start to dehydrate. I really could quite literally die from dehydration on this overgrown sea stack. It's probably the most likely scenario. No, let's not think negatively. Don't want to start a downward spiral of grim thoughts. Hope it doesn't rain. But, I would then have some freshwater to drink. I could cup my hands and harvest the raindrops. Harvest the raindrops? Must use that phrase in my next novella. Never told Pete that I was a writer. I know that he would have laughed about it. 'A writer? Well, aint you*

*special? Ernie, a bestselling author. Ha-ha-ha.' I think Pete was afraid of written words. He didn't trust them; he didn't trust his mind in quiet, idle, introspective moments. It was all about hard-charging at the target straight ahead for the maximum adrenaline rush. Screw the periphery. That was his life. All his women eventually grew tired of it. No wonder he had three divorces. No, rain would be totally miserable. It would make my body cold – very cold – dangerously cold. Hypothermia could easily set in if I got soaking wet out here. There's no place to get out of the rain. No shelter anywhere. Not even a single tree to get under. Ah, let's check that radar website. Yes! No precipitation tonight. Thank God! Though it sure would be nice to have a sleeping bag or blanket. Well, at least I have my jacket. Let's see ... what to do right now? I could call Cindy, [a 33-year-old Lebanese lady that he was on the verge of asking out] I suppose. But, what could she do? She doesn't have a boat. And, no one that she or I know does. She certainly can't call the police; they would just arrest me. I've got the prized chip. Yeah, I've got the grand prize alright, but I'm in the grand trap. Wonder what happens when that Sam guy doesn't see us in Sausalito tonight. Glad he doesn't have my number. Or, does he? Maybe Pete gave it to him as a backup. Maybe he demanded it as a safeguard. Well, we'll soon find out. Wish I had his number right now. I could explain what happened, and he could send a boat out to pluck me – and the coveted chip – from this fog-frigerated [sic] stone in the drink. Well, I've got plenty of time to kill. Let's research this place some more.*

*It was now 8:18 PM. Wikipedia was now on Ernie's three-inch (7.62 cm) square screen. So, I'm approximately 30 miles [48.3 km] west of the Golden Gate Bridge and 20 miles [32.2 km] south of Point Reyes. Sure can't see the lighthouse tonight. Woah! Was that it for a millisecond? Pea soup to the northeast now. The Farallon Islands, also known by sailors as The Devil's Teeth. Well, Pete sure ran into a fatal fang tonight. The Egg War of 1863. All over uncommonly desired common murre eggs. People will kill over anything. Nuclear waste dumped off the Southeast Farallon Islands from 1946 to 1970. What in the world were they thinking? What a flawed species we iz. [sic]*

*He heard a seagull and looked west-southwestward. Between a momentary parting in the fogbank, he saw the waning gibbous moon. It was setting, and almost down to the horizon. Is this the last time I see the moon? Sure hope*



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