

**Book 2 of the  
Pawns Series  
Fallout**

**by doc mike**



**Can't Put it Down  
BOOKS**

Book 2 of the Pawns Series  
Fallout  
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*This novel is dedicated to my wife*

# Forward

## **September 11, 2001**

American life changed forever on the morning of September 11, 2001. The terrorists hijacked four commercial jetliners, crashing two into the World Trade Center towers in New York City. Overall more than 3,000 people died in the terrorist attacks September 11, 2001.

America was suddenly at war. The government shut down all air traffic for two days as fighter jets patrolled the skies. National Guard troops were deployed on the streets in New York City and Washington, D.C. The major stock exchanges were closed.

The event traumatized the nation. As the 21st century began, most Americans had thought their country virtually unassailable. With the Cold War long over, America's status as the world's lone superpower seemed secure. But as millions watched the catastrophe unfold on television, it was clear that the country was vulnerable in ways that most people never imagined.

I want to tell you a story of what happened after the 9/11 attacks. What if, unknown to the general public, the crash foiled a massive financial coup on the USA? Remember, this story is a fictional supposition, supported by no known facts.

Of course, you can decide for yourself if any of it really happened.

# Chapter 1

**Four days after September 11, 2001**

**Franklin Lakes**

As usual the five-foot, ten-inch redheaded man, known to his colleagues as Red, was the first to arrive. He proceeded to the library and found someone new. The young, blond-haired man with steel-blue eyes, was the son of his former boss. Red shook hands with the young man but didn't know what to say to him about the loss of his father, so he silently headed to the bar to prepare himself a drink.

A short time later Red's associates, Max and Numbers joined them in the library. Last to arrive was the small but wiry Cyn. Unlike the others, he did more than just silently shake the young man's hand.

"I'm so sorry to hear of the death of your father and one of the finest men I have ever known," he told him, patting him on the back before heading to the bar to get his own drink.

When they all held drinks in their hands, Cyn said, "Let's raise our glasses to one of the most brilliant minds in the criminal world."

"Hear, hear," was the unanimous response. But a memorial service was not the real reason for the meeting, and Cap would have been disappointed in them all if they had not quickly gotten down to business. His son knew that, and wasted no time taking over the conversation.

"We set up one of the biggest coup ever, and we were interrupted by some covert operation of Osama bin Nadel, the man we had built up to gather the followers of the Ali Ki," he said, summing up the fiasco that the world was already coming to call "9/11." The date would always have a different meaning for these five men.

"We made a critical mistake," the young man continued, and while an observer might have been surprised that this man, who was not yet 30, could speak to the other, older and more experienced men in this way, such was the respect they had held for his father, that it seemed only natural that he should be their new leader. There would be no

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questioning of his decisions, no juggling for power.

“We will not make that mistake again,” he continued, looking around and catching each one’s eye. “Our intelligence gathering was woefully missing. This will not happen again. In about ten minutes, you will meet someone who will not let that happen ever again. The identity of this man must be kept secret at all cost. Whenever we meet, no one will mention our real names even here in the library.”

“Do we really need to do this?” ask Cyn.

“Yes, we do. Our guest, John Harrison requires it. That brings me to a must-be-understood point. We need to do just what he says and ask no questions. He does not know anything about our operations, and he needs to know nothing. He is simply our security man and intelligence source. There will be no social talk with him. Everything is strictly security with respect to him. When he is with any of us, it is strictly him doing the talking. We say nothing unless he makes a request.

“Gentleman, what I have just stated is imperative. Anyone having any problems with these arrangements, please speak up now.” He again glanced around the room as everyone murmured their agreement.

“What do we call you?” asked Max.

“How about Cisco, the name of your horse,” Red, who had often ridden with his father, suggested.

“I like that,” said the young man, with a smile.

At that moment there was a knock at the door and Johnson stepped into the library. “Your visitor is here, sir.”

“Please show him in.”

John Harrison, a short man wearing a bespoke suit, entered the library. He, too, wasted no time as he quickly glanced around the room, sizing up the occupants, and began to explain to them his requirements.

“Gentlemen, I have your private mobile phone numbers. If I need to contact you, you will address me as John Harrison, and I will address you with the name that has been given to me. I do not need to know who you really are, nor what you do. None of you are to contact me directly except you.” He nodded at the young man.

“You can refer to me as Cisco.”

Harrison nodded again. “I doubt that I will need to contact you, but in the case that I do, please follow the protocol. Also, any contact will be short, no longer than 35 seconds. As of now, Osama bin Nedal is in Afghanistan. He is moving from one cave location to another. He has dozens of couriers who he uses to send orders and requests to his key personnel—who literally are stationed throughout the globe. All

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communication to and from him is through the couriers.

“Over the next six months, the NATO countries in a cooperative intelligence effort will track down approximately ten of Nedal’s key personnel. Most likely they will initiate missions to capture those men. The probability that they can capture at least half is about seventy-five percent. We will gain a great deal of intelligence from these covert missions. The information that I send you will not have a source identified. All of you must resist the temptation to inquire from where or by whom this information has been acquired.”

All responded that they understood, and Harrison continued.

“The reason that I am here personally is to assure you that I do exist, and that the information that I deliver has an extremely high probability of being correct. This is the last time any of you will see me. I leave you with one major thought that is part of my agreement. None of you shall take any actions to circumvent or interfere with any actions of the NATO coalition. If that happens, our arrangement will become null and void. I will leave now. Good day.”

John Harrison turned and silently left the room as Cisco took over the conversation.

“Gentlemen, what is the status of our ability to reinstate the Big Kill?” he asked, referring to the operation that had failed on September 11.

Red gave a status report. “Anu Ladin, who was known in this country as Tom Rowe, implanted his information into the ActSof predictive accounting software works, so even though he died in the Towers, we can easily continue. I ran the test exercise just before I left this morning. We already have a second location set and ready to go, except for one thing. In order to activate the entire system, we need the password key. We don’t have it. Anu Ladin was the only person who did. This means that we need to implant a new person into ActSof and find the password key that Anu Ladin set up.”

“Red, are you telling us that we are dead in the water without this password key?”

“That is right, Cisco. However, when we set up Anu, we already had a backup person ready to go in case Anu did not complete his work. ActSof is aware of our backup as a person with similar skills to the man they knew as Tom Rowe. They have already contacted him. He should be working at ActSof within a week at the latest.”

“Red, who is this new man, and how does ActSof know that Tom Rowe is deceased?”

## Fallout 5

“As Tom Rowe, Anu told them that he was going to see an old colleague in the Twin Towers that day. When Tom did not return to ActSof they tried to find him and came to the obvious conclusion, as we have, that he was one of the casualties of 9/11.

“Our new man’s name is Pat Sherman. His credentials are impeccable. We have been grooming him for the last four years. He is single, he lives in the Hoboken area, and has the expertise needed to take over for Tom Rowe.”

“That is well done, Red,” said Cisco. “Now, Numbers we need to ensure that the FBI cannot trace the demised office at the Towers to us.”

The prim and proper man with steel rimmed glasses responded. “I can say with certainty that the FBI nor anybody else can trace that office to any of us or to the group.”

“I am glad to hear that, Numbers. Max, we need to get more implants into the NYPD. As usual, these implants are for information gathering only, and only when we contact them. They have to be very much below the radar. No patterns must be seen. No connections must be made by personal contact.”

“That will be done within the next two weeks. We will have all of New York City covered along with Northern New Jersey.”

“Cyn, you need to reestablish the implants we have with Ali Ki. We need to find means to have contacts not only in Iraq but also in Pakistan and Afghanistan. We also need to beef up your contacts in Munich—the ones with connection to Interpol.”

“I agree, Cisco. It is going to take some time to make all these arrangements, but I know they will pay dividends down the road.”

“Max, find out who or what uncovered Abu Ladin, our FBI plant who was masquerading as Saully Omara.”

“Consider it done.”

“All right, gentlemen. The Big Kill is back on the table and once again at center stage. We have too much invested to let it slip through our fingers. We will meet again in a week.”

After the men had left, an attractive well-dressed woman, joined her son in the library.

“Were you able to hear everything, Mom?” asked Cisco.

“Yes, it went very well. Your Mr. Harrison made quite an impression. You might have been a little too quick when you asked Max to get more implants into the NYPD since that really is more of Cyn’s domain. Likewise, even though Cyn is tightly connected to the Mideast and the Ali Ki, it’s Max who usually carries out the operation. Don’t



## Fallout 6

worry, you'll pick it up as you go along. Even so, they know what to do because they communicate with each other when carrying out operations.”

**September 18, 2001**

### **NYC FBI Headquarters**

Bob Hollis was head of the Special Task Force that had been investigating a suspected financial coup. They had been warned by the CIA that the coup would occur in Manhattan on Sept. 11. It hadn't happened. Had it been connected to the attack on the Twin Towers? Or had one terrorist group accidentally thwarted another terrorist group's plans? These were the questions Bob pondered as he assembled his team in a conference room in their New York office to go through all the reports and come up with some conclusions.

“After a lot of work and following of leads, we actually have very little to tell us about the financial coup on Manhattan,” he told his task force members. “Our investigation into whoever rented the office space on the 87th floor of the North Tower is still underway. Our people performed an extensive but unsuccessful search to unearth who rented the office. What they have found is one paper company after another finally ending in Luxemburg. It's a dead end.

“Discussions with officials in Luxemburg have been initiated. However, the possibility of discovering anything is extremely low. The CIA have not been able to give us any more intelligence on the financial coup. The disappearance of Sauly Omara has been also investigated and it is believed that he vanished in the office on the 87th floor when the commercial airliner crashed into the North Tower. How he had been able to obtain employment in the FBI is still under investigation. Preliminary findings indicate that a very clever and well executed plan had altered necessary information.

“Some information points to a possible conclusion that the man we thought was Sauly Omara was really Abu Ladin, the son of Mohamed Ladin, the suspected leader of an antigovernment group based in Cairo, Egypt.”

Bob paused and raised his hands to quell the astonished mutterings that accompanied his announcement that the man they had all thought of as a colleague had turned out to be a plant.

“It is also believed that Abu Ladin had undergone surgical procedures to look like the true Sauly Omara. What part of the financial coup Abu Ladin had is unknown at this time. One speculation is that Abu

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Ladin was a deep mole placed to keep his benefactors informed of the FBI's and to some extent the CIA's knowledge of the planned financial coup.

"Our friends at the NYPD have not been able to give us any information about a possible financial coup in Manhattan. All in all, we just have very little information to go on right now."

"Bob, what does Horton think about all of this?" asked John Thompson, one of two key men reporting to Hollis.

"He is as frustrated and in the dark as we are. Even though he is our boss and has privy to many more things than we have access to, his upper management is at a loss."

"That's not a good sign. It seems there is an unknown somebody who is pulling all the strings and watching us as we jump through the hoops."

"You know, John, that is an interesting thought. If somebody is planning a major financial coup right here in Manhattan, they just might be close by."

"Right, and their financial attack is probably with software, not a hardware shutdown," added John's partner, Cory Carlson. Cory, unlike the more thoughtful John, was known as a bit of an eager beaver to the task force. He was often willing to jump to conclusions while the rest of the group was still doing research. His intuition, Bob knew, sometimes led him to the right conclusions long before the others.

"What makes you think so, Cory?"

"Think about what has been happening over the last couple of years. Let's say they are the ones responsible for putting Abu Ladin as a mole inside our group. Maybe, just maybe, they have been the ones responsible for some if not all of the recent terrorist attacks planned on Manhattan." Also, they could have planted other talented people in other places like a software company whose products are used by the companies in the financial world."

"That is a lot of ifs and maybes, Cory," Bob said skeptically. "John, what do you think about Cory's ideas?"

"I believe that Cory is onto something. We need to find some patterns in all the things that have been happening in the last couple of years. I suggest that we turn this task over to our software people to see if they can find some patterns in the information that we just haven't been looking for in the past."

"Excellent idea, John. I will get with Horton and pass this by him." Bob began to gather his papers as he added, "Well, gentlemen we have

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some new avenues to pursue. Let's get to work."

Bob headed to see his boss, Jeff Horton, the head of the Division and inform him of the task force's new ideas.

"Jeff, I have just had an enlightening discussion with John and Cory," he said as he entered his boss's office. They believe that we have been looking in the wrong places to uncover the financial coup on Manhattan."

"This I would like to hear since just about everything we have done seems to have totally missed," Horton said, looking up from his paperwork.

"The guys believe that there exists a powerful group that has been maneuvering and manipulating things over the last couple of years to setup their plan to perform this financial coup on Manhattan. Why Manhattan? There are many financial centers in the U.S. not to mention around the globe? So maybe, they are nearby. Maybe even under our very noses."

"Wow, that is an interesting idea. The CIA told us that they stumbled onto the information about the financial coup while eavesdropping on the Ali Ki. So are you telling me that this group must have some tight connection to the Ali Ki and that maybe they have been manipulating the Ali Ki?"

"Right, I know it sounds a little wild, but it is another avenue that we have not even considered in the past. We think it's a good idea to look for patterns in the information we have collected over the past few years."

"You know, Bob, that is sounding more feasible all the time. I'll set up a meeting with my software man, Fred Newman."

"Thanks, Jeff. Oh, one more thing. Since we lost Sauly Omara, I need to get another Mideast expert."

"I'm ahead of you on that one. We hired one of the people that you interviewed when you selected Sauly Omara. I'm getting her transferred to your group. Her name is Janet Orr."

"Great news. When can I expect to see her?"

"That's what I am working on."

Back in his office, Bob called Cory. "You have the go ahead, Horton will set up a meeting with his software people."

"All right, I would like to have Thompson in that meeting. Actually, he thought up the idea and talked to me about it two days ago."

"No problem. I'll get back to you as soon as I hear from Horton."

## Fallout 9

**September 22, 2001**

**Bronx, NY**

“Well Sister, my wedding day has finally arrived.” Shelly turned slowly in her wedding gown so her sister could see her.

“You are a beautiful bride, Shelly. You’ve chosen a very good man. You two have so much in common. So now, let’s get ready to meet your man at the Church.”

“I love Damian very much, but I am a little nervous.”

“It’s to be expected.”

At that moment Shelly’s brother-in-law walked in the bedroom door. “Well girls, we need to get a move on. Damian is very patient, so let’s not tempt him to walk.”

“Oh Bob Hollis, sometimes you make me so mad. We will go when we are ready. Mother should be here any minute. Then we can proceed so as not to worry Damian,” his wife and Shelly’s sister Louane said.

“That’s my girl. I just heard a car pull into the driveway. I will check to see who it is. Who knows, it maybe somebody who came all the way from Paris, France,” Bob laughed and pretended to be mysterious.

“Go!”

Bob was heading to the front door when it opened and his mother-in-law, Margo Nasser, appeared.

“Hello Mom, you are looking as radiate as ever,” he said, giving her a hug.

“Flattery will get you anything. Now where are my daughters,”

“They are anxiously awaiting your arrival.”

“Well, that can be taken care of easily enough. Please let me go so I can join them.”

“Why all the hurry?” Bob teased.

“We don’t want to keep that young man waiting too long. A little wait is good enough.” As Margo hurried up the stairs, she called, “Louane, I am anxious to see my soon to be bride Shelly.”

“Come up and see the radiant bride-to-be.”

“Oh my goodness, you are truly radiant. So let us go meet your husband to be.”

As the wedding party arrived at the church, a large crowd awaited them, smiles on their faces on this overly cool September day. As Shelly walked down the aisle, her father, VJ Nasser, was at her side. VJ had postponed a very lucrative business meeting in order to be in New York for his daughter’s wedding, of which he’d paid for in its entirety.

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After the ceremony, they all went directly to the reception. Nearly all of ActSof, the company where Shelly and Damian worked, were there, along with some of Damian's schoolmates. Also in attendance were the Cigar Team and about a dozen NYC FBI personnel. Unknown to most of the attendees was a heavysset man named Kachen Mihad, a terrorist with connections to the Franklin Lakes Group.

"Damian, I heard you are having a variety of food."

"That's right, Warren," Damian told the Cigar Team member and boss of an energy management crew. "We actually have two different sets of serving tables set up. One for Italian food and one for Mediterranean food."

"That sounds delicious. Did your mom and dad have anything to do with the Italian food?"

"Absolutely. Can you imagine me having Italian food at my wedding without consulting my parents?"

"Actually, no I could not see that happening. It looks like you are being summoned. I'll catch you later."

Damian turned to see his new sister-in-law, Louane, a very attractive Middle Eastern woman, calling him.

"Damian, we need to take the pictures now. Everybody else is there."

Yes, everybody was there including VJ Nasser, who rarely had his picture taken. However, this was a situation that he could not avoid. In the past, he had strongly protected his anonymity. The fact that he was allowing his picture to be taken was a major break in his stringent protocol.

Kachen sat quietly in a corner, observing. Cory noticed the guest sitting by himself and approached, holding out his hand. "Hello, my name is Cory Carlson. I work with Shelly's brother-in-law, Bob Hollis. I know many of the guests but I have never seen you before. Are you a friend of Damian?"

"I only met Damian once. I know Shelly. She has helped my cousin with his accounting for his bookstore. She is very smart and one of the most cordial young persons I have ever had the pleasure to meet," Kachen spoke in a formal manner that showed English was not his first language, despite his lack of a noticeable accent.

Cory's antenna suddenly started to hum at the mention of the bookstore. "What bookstore is that?"

"It's in Brooklyn and deals mostly with different cultural history. My cousin could not attend the wedding today and wanted me to be here

## Fallout 11

for Shelly. He thinks the world of her. She has helped him to straighten his accounting books and to stay out of trouble with the IRS.”

“Well, that sounds like Shelly. Bob says she is as a very giving person.”

“My cousin can vouch for that. By the way, have you tried the Mediterranean food?”

“Yes, Bob has talked about Mediterranean food and how much he enjoys his wife’s cooking. You know she was born in Egypt.”

“Was Shelly also born in Egypt?”

“I believe so.”

“Do you know where in Egypt?”

“She and her family lived in Cairo.”

“Is that where her father is from?”

“Yes, VJ Nasser was born and raised in Cairo.”

Kachen was well aware that VJ Nasser was born and raised in Cairo. He also knew that VJ was a very cunning businessman who used his Merchant stores as a front for his many business dealings that had nothing to do with his stores. What Kachen had not realized that the girl who had been such a help in his cousin’s bookstore was VJ’s daughter.

“It has been great talking to you, Cory, I am going to try some more of this fine Mediterranean food,” he said, standing up.

“Enjoy yourself, Kachen.” Cory said and quickly headed to find John Thompson.

As Kachen was partaking of the baklava, Pat Sherman approached him. “I see you like the baklava. I’m here for my second helping.”

“Young man, you need to be careful, baklava is a very rich dessert.”

“I know, a friend of mine named Tom Rowe already alerted me.”

“He sounds like a good friend. What else has he told you?”

“Many things.”

“Maybe someday we will need to get together and talk about Tom Rowe.”

“I would like that, Kachen.”

Kachen was very surprised to hear that this young man knew his name. “How do you know my name, Mr. Sherman?”

“A man who knows the Benefactor told me your name and said that you would be here.”

“Yes, indeed we need to get together. Now I believe that I will need some hot coffee to help me enjoy my first serving of baklava. This is my card, please give me a call soon.”

“I look forward to it.”

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On the other side of the room, Cory found John Thompson. “John, I just met a man named Kachen who knows Shelly because Shelly helped his cousin with his accounting at a bookstore in Brooklyn.”

“Well, we need to have a conversation with our boss about Kachen and his bookstore cousin. Let’s be patient and catch him at work. That will be a better place to talk.”

“Good point, John.”

Moving to the coffee table, Kachen overheard an older man telling Bob about a meeting “to discuss patterns” that was set up for next Tuesday. Obviously, this man was also from the FBI, maybe Bob Hollis’ boss. What Kachen didn’t understand was the reference to patterns, although it obviously meant something because Hollis looked happy about the meeting. *I wonder if this young man Pat Sherman may know something about patterns. It appears that Shelly’s brother-in-law could be very high up in the FBI. Hm, could it be that Shelly has been a mole at my cousin’s bookstore? Maybe I could give her some bogus information and see if the FBI comes to investigate.*

Kachen started to move away from the coffee table as Shelly and Damian approached him. “I am so happy to see you have been able to be here,” Shelly said.

“I would not miss such an event for someone so deserving as you. It is good to see you, Mr. Narpati.”

“Please call me Damian.”

“Yes, I will. I have not seen your friend Mr. Rowe. Is he not here?”

“Unfortunately, we believe Tom may have been in one of the Towers when the planes hit. We have heard nothing from him since that time.”

“Oh, I am so sorry to hear that. You know he came back to the store for some other books. We talked for awhile. He really loved his mother. He said he told her everything. There were no secrets between them.”

“Wow, that is good to hear of such love. Do you know where he was living with his mother?”

“I do not know. I believe he said that his mother had returned to England some time ago, so he was probably living by himself. He said he would get a little nervous because he had some sensitive information at his mother’s house.”

“Did he say what it was?”

“No, he just seemed to be a little nervous about it—I believe I see someone who wants to get your attention.”

“Oh, that’s my dad. He wants Shelly’s sister to meet the guys in our

Cigar Team.”

“Cigar Team?”

“Just a group of us who get together about once a month to chat and smoke a cigar.”

“Well, I think your dad is becoming more anxious for Shelly to meet his friends.”

“Yes, it has been so good talking to you. Shelly and I need to get over there before my dad has a heart attack.” Damian laughed.

“I wish you both the best. Now go see your dad.”

As Damian and Shelly left him, Kachen had a smile on his face as he pondered if the FBI was searching for Tom Rowe’s mother and the house in which Tom had sensitive information stored away. Kachen knew where Tom lived; he would have some of his people stake out the house to see if the FBI showed.

Damian reached his dad. “Shelly is getting her sister and her husband to meet the Cigar Team.”

“Oh, that is a great idea.”

“Really, Dad. You have been bending my ear for weeks to have the Cigar Team meet Louane and her husband.”

“Has it really been that long? Oh, here they are. Louane and Bob, this is the Cigar Team.”

“Pleased to meet you. My name is Warren Baron,” a tall lanky man with a bald head and athletic build. “Roy has been telling us for months about you and your family.”

“I am also pleased to meet you. I’m Reuben Steinber,” a stocky man about 5 feet 10 inches with short arms and legs held out his hand. “My job is to keep Warren from shaking anybody’s hand too long.”

A third man moved up. “Hello, I have been looking forward to meet the two of you. Damian has told us that you two are some of the nicest people he has ever met. Oh, I’m John Lipton,” an energy manager with a nationwide hotel consortium.

“I second John’s comment. I’m Cosmo and pleased to make your acquaintance.”

“I’m doc mike,” one of the older members of the Cigar Team who usually did the most kidding around. “As you can see, we are all very fond and proud of Damian. We know he would only choose a very special person as his bride. We have had the pleasure of meeting with Shelly several times. Now it is heartwarming to meet Shelly’s family. You have a beautiful and a very caring sister.”

Louane blushed, and her voice choked as she replied. “You are such



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wonderful people. Shelly has told us how much fun she has had with all of you. She often talks about the relationships among all of you and how wherever you go, so many people know you and enjoy seeing you.” Tears start to form in Louane’s eyes. Pardon me, I am overwhelmed.”

Bob hugged Louane. “All of you have touched my wife’s heart. When we met Damian, we knew that Shelly had found someone wonderful. As time went on, she told us more and more about the Cigar Team. We have wondered who all of you are. A group of people who had made a lasting impression on Shelly. It is our honor to meet all of you.”

“There is one member of the group that we have noticed is not here at the reception,” mentioned Warren.

Bob responded, “Who’s not here?”

“Tom Rowe, a fellow worker with Damian.”

“Damian, did we not invite Tom Rowe?”

“Sir, after the attacks on the Twin Towers, we have not heard from Tom Rowe. He was on vacation on that day and said he was meeting an old friend in the Twin Towers. We tried to contact him to no avail. We believed that he died in the Twin Tower attacks.”

“Really Damian, why didn’t you tell us?” stated Warren with a quizzical look on his face.

“Warren, we really weren’t sure. We didn’t want to say something without really knowing what happened, so we decided to say nothing.”

“Wow, I really liked Tom. He seemed so interested in our energy work.”

Bob’s FBI training kicked in. “What were the things that interested Tom Rowe the most?”

“He spent most of his time with Warren.”

“That’s right, Tom spent most of his time with me. We talked about cooling systems for the computer centers for large buildings. There are many subsystems that perform the cooling. Tom was interested in the large chillers. He couldn’t believe they didn’t work as simply as an on-off switch.

“Louane, I see your mother is signaling to you,” Bob said, interrupting Warren..

“Yes, she wants Damian, Shelly and myself to talk with my dad. Come on you two, that time has arrived.”

“You three go ahead, I’ll be here talking with the Cigar Team. Was Tom interested in other items?” Bob asked, turning back to Warren.

“We talked about the other parts of the cooling system including

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what kind of information was being sent to the maintenance control center.”

“Did that really interest him?”

“Actually, he seemed more interested in the information that was not sent to the control room. Damian said that Tom was their network expert and could connect many things together so that all could work together instead of colliding with each other.”

“Did Tom spend much time with the people in the control room?”

“Actually, Damian spent the most time in the control rooms. At times, Tom and Damian would get into some conversations. However, it meant little or no sense to me.”

“I’m with you on that count,” Bob smiled. “The software world is an enigma to me. Actually, I would like to talk to all of you more, but I know that Louane will be expecting me to show up any minute. I would like to join you sometime when you meet.”

“We would enjoy that. Damian can cue you in when we will meet.”

“Sounds like a plan. Now I need to go do my duties.”

Kachen had moved to a table next to the Cigar Team. He heard the conversation between Hollis and the team. *What did I just hear? It sounded like Hollis did not know about Tom Rowe. I just told Shelly about Tom. She had no time to talk to Hollis. So maybe they really didn’t know about Tom. There is too much here. Somehow, I need to find out what they know. The Benefactor needs to be told.*

“Well doc, what do you think about my new in-laws?” Damian’s dad asked.

“Roy, you hit the jackpot.”

“Right, Nancy and I are very proud of Damian.”

“Now you have two in your family who can help you with your computer problems.”

“Yes, and I hope there will be more on their way.”

“By the way, where are they going on their honeymoon?”

“Shelly’s mom has a chalet outside of Paris. She has set up everything for them to stay there for the next two weeks.”

“Is Shelly’s mom going to be there with them?”

“No, she is going to visit Shelly’s dad in Egypt. Apparently, they get together for a couple of weeks about twice a year.”

“How long have they been separated?”

“Many years, I don’t know how long. Even so, they stay somewhat connected.”

“That’s a little unusual.”

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“Yes, there is a lot more there than meets the eye, but I get the sense that it has to do with his businesses.”

“What about his businesses?”

“I don’t know. It may be the type of people that he deals with.”

“I hope this is not a fairytale with a bad ending!”

“You’re not the only one.”

Kachen also heard the conversation between doc mike and Roy Narparti. *Things are starting to get a little sticky. What do they know about VJ Nasser? I must get to the Benefactor.*

“Bob, did you have a good time with the Cigar Team.”

“Yes, I had a great time with the guys, Shelly. They’re an interesting group and I intend to meet with them. Damian will be my link to the Cigar Team.”

“Is that right, Damian?”

“Yes, it is, dear. In fact, I believe I have another soon-to-be Cigar Team member. Bob, I’d like you to meet Pat Sherman. He is replacing Tom Rowe at ActSof.”

“I’m pleased to meet you, Mr. Hollis.”

“Please, Pat, call me Bob, and please do not try to explain to me what you do at Actsof because I wouldn’t understand a thing you said.”

“Don’t worry, Bob, ActSof wouldn’t let me. I have some big shoes to fill but I do understand good cigars as taught to me by my dad. As far as you not understanding what I do, it is really simple, I connect the different accounting locations of a company so that all the changes and updates to each system appear as if they are happening in real time.”

“Wow, now that is what I would call a simple and straightforward answer. I assume that is very important to a company that has many locations.”

“Absolutely, it saves them valuable time and therefore in the long run a great deal of money by having a more efficient and effective accounting system across their company.”

“I can tell from the tone of your voice that you truly enjoy what you are doing.”

“I do. Your sister-in-law, along with Damian, can then project and forecast the company’s ledger sheets so they know the financial health of the company.”

“That’s impressive. What if somebody hacks into your system or network or whatever you call it? What could happen then?”

“That’s the danger. Somebody could truly foul up everything and

## Fallout 17

put the accounting system far off track.”

“I see; that is scary. How do you stop that from happening?”

“Actually, that is out of my expertise. We have security people who handle that end of the business. We count on them to keep things safe.”

“Sounds like a lot of pressure lands on their shoulders.”

“It is; we are constantly looking for threats to the system.”

“Bob, I need you over here,” called his wife.

“Excuse me, Louane has something else I am supposed to be doing. I have enjoyed our conversation. Thank you for simplifying things for me.”

Still quietly observing everything, Kachen was ready to hit Pat alongside the head. *What do you think you are doing you idiot? You are giving the FBI an insight into what the Benefactor has paid dearly to keep quiet. I need to give him a stern warning.*

“Warren, Bob seemed very interested in learning about Tom Rowe.”

“Yes, I wonder why.”

“How much did you tell Tom about the chillers?”

“Actually, I told him just about everything I know about them, both the old ones and the new. We talked a lot about the sensors on the chillers. How they worked, what they were measuring, what would happen if the sensors gave the wrong information.”

“This is sounding very suspicious, Warren.”

“Reuben, did you talk much with Tom Rowe?”

“At first, I didn’t think so, but now I am wondering if I told him a lot more about the chillers than I thought I had.”

A serious look was on doc mike’s face as he addressed the Cigar Team. “Guys, it was shortly after we had taken Tom and Damian into Manhattan with us that the chiller sabotages started.”

That’s right doc, did we show him how to sabotage the old chillers?” asked a worried-looking Warren.

“That’s a distinct possibility. Warren. We need to mind our Ps and Qs from now on.”

“I agree with you, doc.”

“Roy, do you know more about Tom Rowe?”

“Well, you know, he said his father was Egyptian. However, he never really talked about his father, or say why his mother and he left Egypt.”

“I would hate to believe that Tom Rowe was a terrorist.”

“Me too, doc. He seemed like a true down-to-earth person. I asked

## Fallout 18

him to help me find Damian a girlfriend. He helped Damian and Shelly meet.”

“Yes, I agree, that doesn’t sound like a terrorist unless he was trying to fit in with the Cigar Team because he wanted to learn as much as he could about shutting down computer centers in Manhattan.”

“Do you really believe that, doc?”

“It’s hard to believe he joined the Cigar Team because he knew he could learn enough to shut down computer centers. If that wasn’t his original motive, what was it? Could it have something to do with ActSof?”

“Doc, you are well beyond me.”

“Same here,” replied Warren.

“Okay guys, we are at a wedding, not reading a mystery novel. Let’s just have some fun.”

“You’re right, doc, I need another beer.”

“I’ll join you, Warren.”

Kachen finally found Pat and pulled him aside. “Don’t you realize that Bob Hollis is the FBI and you are blabbing your mouth off about things you should not be saying to people. You could ruin everything.”

“Yes sir, I didn’t mean to ramble so much. It just came spilling out.”

“You go spill more out of your mouth and I will shut it for good. Do you understand?”

“Yes sir.”

Let’s get back and enjoy the festivities.”

“Absolutely!”

A shaken Pat Sherman tried to re-enter the festive evening, but his pale face and slow stiff walk made him look like a sore thumb.

“Pat, are you all right?”

“Yes Damian, I think I just drank the wine too fast.”

“Well, pull it together, we are going to step outside for the fireworks and cigars. Personally, I am going to have some brandy.”

“In that case, I’ll have some pasta to settle my stomach and join you later.”

Across the way, Louane brought Bob to her mother and father. “Well I see you two have been having a nice quite time by yourselves.”

“Yes, we have, daughter. I see you have finally gotten Bob away from the cigar smoking clan.”

“Actually, VJ it was enjoyable and quite enlightening. How are your businesses doing?”

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“The businesses are doing very well. I wish my country was doing half as good.”

“Yes, we notice the unrest, especially in Cairo, itself. I recall some months back that three officials were assassinated.”

“That is very true. However, they were corrupt and part of the cause for all the turmoil.”

“Really, do they know who planted the bombs?”

“The police know that it was the work of the rebels. It has caused a big stir within the government because the corrupt faction believes that any one of them can be a target and that nobody can protect them all the time.”

“Has all of that helped to curtail the corruption?”

“It has suppressed some of the more overt activity, but it will start up again.” VJ wasn’t usually this talkative about his affairs, he was a tough businessman who walked a gray line between legal and illegal.

“What about the positions of the officials? Have they been replaced?”

“Only on a temporarily basis. The leading official was an elected position. His replacement will have to be elected before this year is out.”

“Do you see any true candidate on the horizon?”

“I have a favored candidate and I have been working with many of my business associates to support his campaign.”

“I hope you are successful.”

“We have better than a 50/50 chance—but enough of this, I am so happy to see Shelly has found an outstanding young man to marry. I have had some brief conversations with his parents. They seem to be well rounded people with strong moral standards. I expect Shelly and Damian will have a fruitful life ahead of them. They are both very sharp minded and seem to be well established in this high technical computer world.”

“Yes, it almost seems to come to them naturally.”

“I would say the same. It is almost as if they are always on the same page all the time. They know what each other is thinking. It appears that they have already formed a union between themselves.”

“That is a great way of stating their relationship. They both seem to be on a fast track to success in their chosen field.”

“That is for sure. I have briefly talked to Damian about his company’s software accounting products. I intend to follow through with Damian and set up my businesses with their accounting products.”

“That’s outstanding, I can see it now, when Damian and Shelly go to

## Fallout 20

Cairo to install their software accounting products, Louane will be right there alongside of them.”

“That’s a definite possibility.”

“Bob, they are getting ready for the fireworks. We need to get everybody outside,” Louane interrupted.

“Okay, Louane.” Hollis walked through the crowd and announced that a surprise was planned on the patio. The crowd gathered, chattering excitedly. Across the wide expanse lawn fireworks started. All eyes turned to watch. Damian, Pat and the Cigar Team lit their cigars and sipped their brandy as they watched the fireworks.

“This is a great touch, Damian.”

“Yes it is. Warren, it is VJ’s idea.”

“I haven’t had a chance to meet him.”

“That can be arranged. He’s coming over to have a cigar and meet the team.”

“Wow, we are becoming popular.”

At that moment, VJ arrived and Damian handed him a cigar. “Please Damian, introduce me to your friends.”

The team made the rounds of introductions again.

“Who is this young fellow over here standing next to Roy?” VJ asked doc mike.

“I’m Pat Sherman,” he said, overhearing the questions. I work with Damian at ActSof.”

“You are the one working on networks or something like that.”

“Yes, that is me, sir.”

“Please, call me VJ.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Now I can use a little brandy. I hope you all have enjoyed the fireworks.”

“Nothing like smoking a cigar, sipping some brandy while watching fireworks.”

“I’ll drink to that, doc.”

At that moment, Hollis joined them. “Well VJ, I see you have met the Cigar Team.”

“Yes, and they can help me save some money on my utility bills at all my stores.”

“Have a cigar, Bob.”

“Thanks, Damian. Do you have a light? Thank you.”

“You need to sip some brandy while your smoking a fine cigar Bob.”

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“Thank you, Warren. I hope all of you are enjoying the fireworks. VJ insisted that we had to have fireworks. Great move VJ.”

“It appears that the rest of the crowd are also enjoying the fireworks.”

“Yes, it seems so. It has become a part of our American culture.”

“That is why I wanted them Bob. It’s a lot better than gun fire.”

“I wish these were the only kind of explosions that we would have.”

Bill Tilghman, the president of ActSof, joined the group. “I have been waiting for this the whole night.”

“Have a cigar, Bill.”

“Thank you, Damian. Do I finally get to meet your cigar smoking friends?”

“Yes sir, this tall fellow is Warren Baron, he is the foremen for the energy conversion crews. Be careful, he might shake your hand off. This is John Lipton, he is an energy manager of a holding company that own a string of hotels. This fellow standing next to my dad is Cosmo Iacanari, the football player I have told you about. He is boss of the energy company where I worked. This is Reuben Steiner and doc mike. They along with my dad do the engineering work for the energy company.”

“Gentleman, I toast you all with this fine brandy and great smoking cigar.”

“Here come my girls,” VJ said as Louane and Shelly whisked VJ away.

“Dad, we see that you have been mixing with the Cigar Team and Mr. Tilghman,” Shelly said to him.

“Yes, I have been enjoying myself with their company. I haven’t had time to talk with your Mr. Tilghman. I would like to talk with him more.”

“In a little while, now Mom wants to have another picture of the four of us together. She has cornered the photographer and is waiting for us.”

“Another picture. Soon I will go blind from all those flashes of light.”

“Now Dad, we know you do not like to have your picture taken, but as you have said, this is a very special occasion, and these pictures are just for us to see.”

“I have spoiled you two girls terribly. Let’s go find your mother and the captured photographer.”

Bob continued his conversation with the Cigar Team. “Bill, I have been talking to your new employee, Pat Sherman. He is taking over for a



## Fallout 22

Mr. Tom Rowe?"

"Yes, we lost Tom. We believe that he must have been in the Towers when the planes hit. We haven't heard from him and have no one we can contact to find out if they know anything. Tom was very good at this near real time networking technology. That is one of the key pieces that we needed for a next generation product line. We have already started to roll out that entire product line due in a great part to Damian and Shelly."

"Somewhere I heard that Tom was from an Ivy League University."

"Yes, in fact, that is how we found Tom. Our research people were tracking several different technologies and came across two of Tom's papers. They were just what we were looking to find, so we quickly made contact with him."

"Seems like providence was shining on you."

"Actually Bob, that is a very good point. Not only were we so fortunate with Tom, but we also found Shelly through Tom."

"Really, how did that happen?"

"I'm surprised that Damian or Shelly didn't tell you. Tom, who was born in Egypt, wanted to pick up some literature on the country. He found a bookstore in Brooklyn that had the book that he wanted, and he and Damian went there on a lunch break. At the store, the book was set aside in the backroom. When Damian and Tom followed the clerk into the backroom, Shelly was at the computer and her radio was playing one of Damian's favorite songs. Damian struck up a conversation with her about artificial intelligence. This is one of the key technologies we need. Damian invited Shelly to talk with some of our research people. That was all they needed. Shelly and my people immediately started to bond in their tech world. As far as we at ActSof were concerned, we found a gem in the rough. So, yes, providence has shone down on us."

"That is quite a story Bill." *In fact, it is very interesting. This is too big of a coincidence. I need to check into this more. Is it possible that somehow this could be part of the financial terrorist act that the CIA has been talking about?*

"It is much more than just a story to ActSof. It has propelled us into the forefront of near real time network accounting."

"So, finding Tom and Shelly has made a significant difference in your company's ability to produce the capabilities that you had been working for your next generation of products."

"You hit the nail on the head, Bob."

"Even so, having the products is one thing, but getting companies to

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buy them seems to me to also be a very big task.”

“Once again, providence has shone upon us. Even though we only have a small marketing group, we must have been at the right places at the right time with what these companies needed and wanted.”

*This is way too big a set of coincidences and dumb luck. Something else is happening. I really need to find out what that something is.* “Bill, maybe you just have the Midas touch.”

“I believe I just have good people who really enjoy their work.”

“Oh, speaking of enjoying, the time has come for Damian to whisk his bride away.”

“You’re right Bob, there they go.”