



BLUE HERONS

by

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(Sometimes called High Altitude Array Radio Propagation, references can be found on an Internet search.)

A weather warfare treaty, originating in the United Nations, was signed in 1977 specifically prohibiting the use of weather modifying technology. Article 1 of the treaty reads that each State Party undertakes not to engage in military or any other hostile use of environmental modification techniques having widespread, long-lasting or severe effects as the means of destruction, damage or injury to any other State Party. The treaty further defines the term “environmental modification techniques” to mean any technique for changing, through the deliberate manipulation of natural processes, the dynamics, composition or structure of the Earth, including its biota, lithosphere, hydrosphere and atmosphere, or of outer space.

CHAPTER 1

“Looks like a storm coming,” the crewman said to the captain of the fishing boat. “I hope we can make it to port before it hits.”

“I read you on that,” the captain said. “I don’t want to be trying to cross the Potato Patch in this sea. You better pull in the lines.”

“I wonder where this storm is coming from?” the captain asked, as he fought the ship’s wheel, keeping the boat from broaching in the following sea.

“That’s a good question,” the crewman said. “The forecast was for clear weather all this week. I don’t understand it.”

The crewman went out of the cabin and began reeling in the first of four trolling lines. He had a hard time keeping his footing as the boat rolled from side to side, almost on its beam ends.

He was reeling in the last line when the wave hit. It was a monster wave, one the seamen call a rogue. It came from nowhere, and hit the small boat when it was in the middle of a recovery from the last big swell.

The wave smashed the small cabin, and tore it off the boat, taking the captain with it.

The boat rolled completely over.

The crewman was washed overboard.

Four days later, when the unexpected storm passed, the boat washed up on the rocks near Lime Cove, almost carried into the bay on the strong flood tides.

Neither crewman was seen again.

The girl was less than ten years old. She held her father's hand as they crossed the airport lobby, heading for the ticket counter.

"Are we going on one like that, daddy?" she asked, peering out the windows at the plane on the runway.

Her father looked out the terminal windows, at a jumbo jet lifting off the runway on its way to somewhere important, with passengers exuding hope and wishes, thinking of their ultimate destination.

The weather was clear when the airliner loaded, but by the time it finished taxiing, the clouds formed with unbelievable speed, thick and gray as lead.

The weather was not supposed to be a serious consideration for an airplane loaded with the electronic navigation and flight systems built into it. That's why it was cleared for takeoff.

However, the clearance proved to be a fateful, tragic decision. The plane was no more than two hundred feet into the air, when the sudden storm hit with torrential rains. A massive lightning bolt struck the plane on the wing, shorting out all the electronic gear.

The lightning was followed by a tremendous roar, not from thunder, but from a tornado that appeared among the storm clouds. It caught the airplane, and the once proud flying machine spun out of control. Within seconds it plunged into the ground and exploded. Pieces flew everywhere.

The girl screamed.

Waiting passengers stared, cried, numb with shock.

The storm ended as quickly as it rose. An hour later, there was no sign of bad weather.

A freak phenomenon, the newscasters called it on the six o'clock news.

The boss of a secret organization smiled when he heard the news.

The chemist poured over his lab table, studying the carefully worked out formula. He was running out of time to correct the flaws in the formula. The first and second mixes worked, but they were too easily dissolved, easily diluted to ineffectiveness when deployed. He had to have the reformulated solution prepared before the next meeting with the directors.

He finished working on the formula, and sat erect on his lab stool. He tweaked the ends of his ornate handle bar mustache while deep in thought. He was certain the formula would work with his corrections. He only had to re-set his lab piping to make the new mixture.

CHAPTER 2

It was after ten in the morning when Penn forced himself out of bed, and looked out the window to appraise the weather.

The day was already hot, although some clouds were forming in the distance. The morning rays glimmered through the hotel window, lighting the room like penetrating rays of stage spotlights.

“I thought this was supposed to be the tourist season,” Penn commented to himself. “There isn’t supposed to be any bad weather this time of the year in Nicaragua. Just my luck to be confronted with unpleasant weather on my last day in paradise.”

He sauntered into the shower for his morning toilette, and when finished, went to the closet. He selected a pair of jeans and long sleeve shirt. The shirt selection wasn’t made to protect from any rain that might turn up, after all, rain in the sub tropics was never cold. It was more for protection from the sun. He hated sunburn, even though his doctor suggested, almost demanded, that he take in more sun in order to increase his too low level of vitamin D.

A few minutes later he entered the veranda of La Mansion, the former residence of the wife of the country’s former dictator. Or was it his mistress? He could never remember which.

In any case, the stately house faced the beach in San Juan Del Sur, and was converted into a hotel when the new political regime realized a capitalism form of government was more productive for their personal wealth than the former government’s socialism and nepotism.

The verandah-café area was lined with windows that overlooked the deep blue waters of the Pacific inside the bay. The ample and well maintained swimming pool was installed between the street and the front of the building, which meant sitting in the café also afforded a view of the bikini clad tourists – most of the women – who frequented it for relief from the afternoon’s sun.

Unfortunately, although the weather was typically hot, the sky was not typically clear. A number of clouds were forming over the hills to the east of town.

The conversion proved to be a good business choice, for it was quite successful, particularly in the tourist season. There were times when Penn tried to visit the country on short notice, and couldn’t get a room. The only rooms available during the season in the resort town were in the less expensive – a term synonymous with seedy – motels in the center of town. He was wise enough this year to make his reservations two months in advance.

“Buenas dias,” the comely young woman with the flashing black eyes and raven colored long hair greeted him as he sat at his favorite table in the veranda. “¿Café?”

He nodded. “Café, y desayuno, por favor,” he said. Coffee and breakfast, please.

“¿Quieres saber que esta en el menu?” she asked. with an alluring smile. Do you want to know what is on the menu?

Penn grinned at her, wondering whether her question meant more than the spoken words. She always seemed to be friendlier to him than to the other tourists in the hotel. Sure, he mentally argued, chastising himself for his lecherous fantasy. A young girl, barely eighteen, at best, would hardly be interested in having any fun with an old man like me.

Oh, well, he reconciled his libidinous exaggerations. At least I won't have to make up some story about fidelity to tell my girlfriend when I get home. He gave the waitress his order. "Huevos revueltos y jamon," he said, returning her smile. Scrambled eggs and ham.

She nodded, and returned to the kitchen.

He gazed out at the bay. There was an odd breeze blowing. It seemed to be blowing from the sea into the westward facing bay. That was unusual, he noted, for the wind in southern Nicaragua generally blew from east to west in the warm winters, not the other way around.

The coffee was served before he had much of a chance to consider the situation. He was amused, or should it be said surprised, by the fact the coffee was served by a man in his thirties, instead of the attractive young girl. Oh, well, he silently laughed at himself. She probably has more important things to do.

"Buenas, Senor Gwinn," the man greeted as he placed the saucer and coffee cup on the table. "Sin leche y azucar," he added, confirming that Penn drank his coffee without cream and without sugar, rather than in the half coffee half cream, sugar saturated style more common in the country.

Penn appreciated the gesture, but wasn't sure how the man knew the way he preferred his coffee. The ability for the personnel in the hotel to make their guests feel at home was one of the things he always liked about the place, and thought the man must have previously spoken to the other service personnel. The one thing he learned early in his first visit several years ago was that most all Nicans were generally friendly, particularly in the service industry. He believed the man's desire to follow that pattern justified the action.

He finished his breakfast, signed the receipt for the credit card charge, and stood. He handed a tip of two American dollars, an equivalency of 42 Cordobas, the local currency, and was about the leave, when the server approached.

"Perhaps we can talk, somewhere, later?" The server asked.

The question confused Penn. "That seems like an interesting question," he responded. "I hope there's no devious suggestion in it," he added with a touch of a frown.

The server shook his head in a somber manner. "No," he said. "I'd just like to talk."

"Talk? About anything in particular?" Penn asked. He didn't discard his sense of caution. In fact, the hair on the back of his neck tingled. It was a sign, a not easily understood subconscious omen which warned of danger. He suddenly did not want to talk to this man outside the hotel, but he felt compelled to in spite of the omen.

"About some things I think you will find to be of great interest, according to your background. Or, what I hear of it, that is."

That was another confusing statement, but it did arouse Penn's curiosity. "Perhaps, sometime," he cautiously said.

"You will be in Timon's restaurant this evening, as usual?"

Penn wondered how this man had any information on his activities, or on his background, for that matter. He decided it might be a good idea to speak with him.

"About five thirty this afternoon," the man suggested.

Penn thought for a second or two before nodding his head, and leaving the veranda.

Penn spent most of the day speaking to the local fishermen and boat owners near the

marina, having a beer or two with some who were old friends from prior visits, and some who were new acquaintances.

It was just before five when the rain began. The most of the people in town hurried for cover. Some made it, some didn't. Penn was one of those who did. He entered the restaurant just in time before the abnormal deluge, and made his way through the throng of locals waiting the downpour under the restaurant's eaves along the sidewalk.

"Ah, Senor Gwinn," the owner of the restaurant greeted him. "Your favorite table?" He motioned to a table, leading the way.

"Good afternoon, Timon. Yes, please." Such an interchange wasn't really necessary, for Penn was already pulling out the chair at the table, the one he preferred whenever he ate there, and whenever it wasn't already taken by other patrons. However, he mused, Timon meant a ship's wheel in Spanish. Perhaps that's why Timon seemed to enjoy steering everything.

The table was at the edge of the wood plank floor overlooking the beach. There was no outside wall along the street, or along the beach. It afforded a view of the entire sweep of the white sand curved beach, from the sloping hillside to the north to the hills to the south at the edge of town. The view covered another view of bikini clad beauties who sunned themselves in the afternoon, even into the evening. The sun set late in the Southern climes.

However, his expected view of beauty was blunted. It was just his luck that the rain drove them indoors on the last day of his visit.

Timon snapped his fingers, and one of the servers quickly responded with a cold Nicaraguan Tonya beer, Penn's favorite. It was his habit, if he could be considered to be a person of habit, to drink that particular brand at Timon's. It went best with seafood, the specialty of the restaurant.

The man from La Mansion entered promptly at five-thirty, which was a surprise to Penn. Most people in the Latin American countries, and Nicaragua was no exception, found exact time keeping of appointments to be a nuisance.

The man walked directly to Penn's table, pulled out a chair, and sat, barely nodding to Penn in the process.

"Please excuse my directness," he said, beginning the conversation. He was interrupted by the arrival of the server, and ordered a beer. He continued when the server left.

"A vortex cannon is being built..." He paused when he noted something on the beach, out of view behind Penn's back.

"A what?" Penn asked, unsure he heard the man correctly.

"A vortex cannon," he continued, still mindful of what ever he saw on the beach. "It is a device invented by the Germans near the end of the Second World War. It was a device that transmitted sound in a whirling wave, or vortex. If it had been perfected and used, it would have proven to be a devastating weapon."

Penn was utterly confused. Here was a man, supposedly a local citizen, yet his use of English was as clear as any normal English speaking person, cautioning him about something he didn't know anything about.

"Why is that important?" The man continued before Penn had a chance to respond, and paused. His eyes went wide. He sprang from the table and sprinted out of the restaurant, through the crowd avoiding the rain, and down the street.

The man was out of sight before Penn got over his surprise, so he didn't bother with trying to follow.

"Now, what in hell was that all about?" he asked no one in particular.

A shot rang out. It came from somewhere not far away.

Penn couldn't restrain his curiosity. He hurried to the street. It was not hard to push his way through the crowd, which dwindled to the last few who didn't brave the rain, but it was hard to determine the location of shot's origin. However, the people running down the street half a block away was a good indication.

He hurried toward the fleeing people. He rounded the corner of the intersection, and stopped.

The server from La Mansion leaned against the side of a building, bleeding from a gunshot wound in his upper abdomen. He gasped for breath, barely alive.

Penn knelt in front of him, wishing there was something he could do, but aware he was too late.

The man opened his eyes. "Penn," he muttered through the blood seeping from his mouth. "You must stop the vortex cannon from..." He choked. "...from being..." He tried to take a breath, couldn't, and died.

Penn stood, thinking of the man's dying words. I must stop the vortex cannon from being. From being what? Built? Used? What the hell is a vortex cannon, anyway? Something that controls sound waves, as the man said? He doubted that. His further mental questioning was interrupted by the arrival of a policeman who gently pushed him out of the way.

A second policeman arrived. "¿Conoces el hombre?" he asked Penn. Do you know this man? "How long are you knowing him?" He renewed his question with his moderate knowledge of English, realizing Penn wasn't a native.

"I don't know him," Penn responded, although his answer was only partially true. "I was walking down the street. I heard a gunshot. This man staggered around the corner and crawled up against the building where he died."

The policeman had some difficulty understanding Penn's English. It showed in his expression.

"No conosco," Penn replied in his broken Spanish. I don't know him.

The policeman frowned, and turned his attention to helping his confederate.

Penn took advantage of the opportunity to discreetly leave.

Five minutes later, he returned to his table in Timon's, somewhat relieved the usually very attentive busboys did not clean his table.

"Did you know the man who joined me and ran out?" he asked Timon, when the man came to his table to inquire about the unusual incident of departure.

Timon nodded. "He is a member of the Nicaraguan Secret Police," he said.

"How do you know that?" Penn asked with more than a little curiosity.

"Because," Timon began. He paused, and began anew. "Well, in my business you learn many things."

Penn canted his head in silent question.

"There was a gunshot," Timon continued, ignoring Penn's questioning expression. "Did that have anything to do with your running outside?"

Penn frowned, and nodded. "It was him," he said. "But why? Something he was working on, maybe, if he was who you say he was?"

"You say was, not is?"

"He's dead."

Timon shrugged, seeming to take the information in stride, if not with a slight sigh of relief. "I hope the very unfortunate incident will not spoil your evening," he said. "Your dinner, it will be,

how you say, on the house,” he added as he rose and returned to the kitchen.

A server arrived, took Penn’s order for a lobster tail cocktail, and left.

Penn finished eating, finished his beer, and decided he was finished with everything else for the night.

The server wouldn’t accept payment for the meal, in accordance with Timon’s directions, and Penn returned to La Mansion. He wanted to get some sleep, to forget the entire incident, and be refreshed in time to take a taxi to Managua and the airport the next morning. But, it turned out to be an incident he would not forget.