

W.VANCE

XIII

J.VAN HAMME

**TOP
SECRET**





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EVERYONE REMEMBERS THE INFAMOUS DAY OF THE BLACK SUN, DURING WHICH PRESIDENT WILLIAM B. SHERIDAN WAS ASSASSINATED BY A FORMER SPADS OFFICER, CAPTAIN STEVE ROWLAND. WE NOW KNOW THAT ROWLAND WAS PART OF A VAST CONSPIRACY AIMED AT SETTING UP A FAR-RIGHT REGIME IN THE UNITED STATES, THE CONSPIRACY OF THE XX, WITHIN WHICH HE BORE THE NUMBER XIII.



INTENDING TO MAKE THEM BELIEVE THAT ROWLAND WAS STILL ALIVE, HEIDEGER FOUND IN HIS AGENCY'S RECORDS THE FILE OF ONE JASON FLY, ONCE RECRUITED BY THE FBI, WHOSE AGE AND MORPHOLOGY WERE A PERFECT MATCH FOR THE LATE CAPTAIN. BUT, AFTER HAVING SPENT A YEAR IN CUBA-FOR UNKNOWN REASONS-IN THE SIERRA MAESTRA GUERRILLA SCHOOL, UNDER THE NAME KELLY BRIAN, THE MAN HAD JOINED THE SANTOSISTA REBELLION IN COSTA VERDE, A SMALL CENTRAL AMERICAN COUNTRY WHOSE DICTATOR GENERAL ORTIZ WAS BACKED BY THE UNITED STATES.



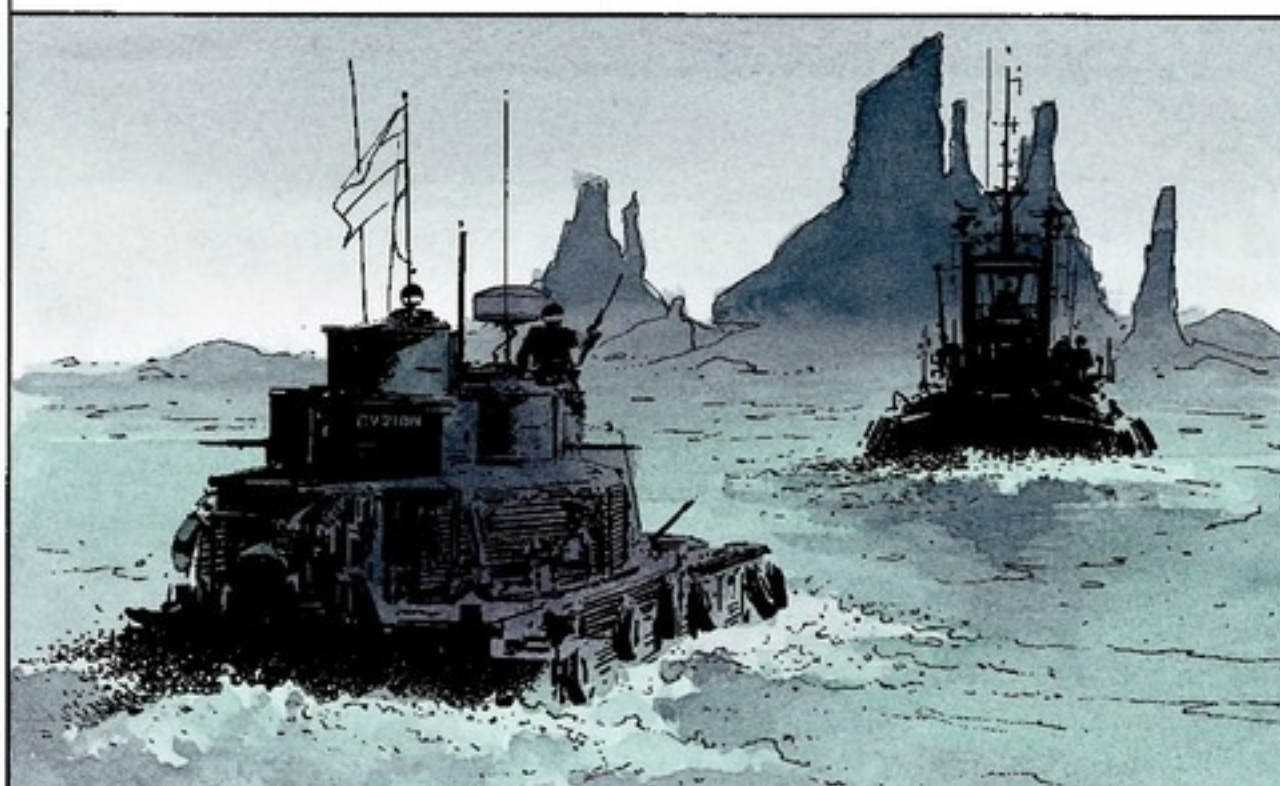
THE ADMIRAL LEFT LITTLE CHOICE TO THE MAN HE'D JUST PULLED FROM THE JAWS OF DEATH: COOPERATE, OR BE SENT BACK TO COSTA VERDE AND A FIRING SQUAD. AFTER HAVING HIS FACE SURGICALLY ALTERED AND A NUMBER XIII TATTOOED ON HIS SHOULDER TO MAKE HIM A PERFECT COPY OF THE LATE STEVE ROWLAND, HEIDEGER MADE FLY SPEND SEVERAL WEEKS ALONE WITH KIM ROWLAND, WIDOW OF THE ASSASSIN AND ONLY DAUGHTER OF GENERAL CARRINGTON, SO THAT SHE WOULD TEACH HIM TO SPEAK AND BEHAVE LIKE THE MAN HE WAS SUPPOSED TO BRING BACK FROM THE DEAD.



WE ALSO KNOW THAT HE WAS SHOT IN TURN BY A PROFESSIONAL KILLER NAMED THE MONGOOSE, BY ORDER OF THE CONSPIRACY'S LEADERS, WHO WERE EAGER TO REMOVE ALL ELEMENTS THAT MIGHT LEAD BACK TO THEM. THAT WAS WHEN THE FATHER OF THE MURDERED PRESIDENT, BILLIONAIRE HENRY SHERIDAN, THE CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS, GENERAL BEN CARRINGTON, AND THEN-DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE, ADMIRAL HEIDEGER, HATCHED A PLAN DESIGNED TO FORCE THE REAL CULPRITS OUT IN THE OPEN.



AN EXCEPTIONAL MAN OF ACTION, FLY-A.K.A. BRIAN-HAD PULLED OFF A STRING OF DARING OPERATIONS THERE THAT HAD EARNED HIM THE NICKNAME EL CASCADOR. BETRAYED BY ONE OF THE LEADERS OF THE REVOLUTION, THOUGH, HE'D EVENTUALLY BEEN CAPTURED, AND WAS ROTTING INSIDE A GRIM FORTRESS AWAITING EXECUTION. CONVINCED THAT HE WAS THE MAN THEY NEEDED, SHERIDAN AND HEIDEGER SECRETLY BOUGHT HIM FROM THE COSTAVERDEAN AUTHORITIES FOR A MILLION DOLLARS.



WHEN STEVE ROWLAND'S DOPPELGANGER WAS READY AT LAST TO DO WHAT WAS EXPECTED OF HIM, HE WAS RELEASED INTO THE WILD. HIS MISSION DIDN'T LAST LONG, HOWEVER. BETRAYED BY KIM, HE WAS SHOT IN THE HEAD BY THE MONGOOSE AND LEFT FOR DEAD OUT AT SEA. THE PLAN HATCHED BY HEIDEGER, HENRY SHERIDAN AND GENERAL CARRINGTON WAS A COMPLETE FAILURE.



AND YET, BY SOME MIRACLE, FLY SURVIVED. HOWEVER, HIS INJURY HAD CAUSED COMPLETE AND IRREVERSIBLE AMNESIA, AND HE DIDN'T KNOW WHO HE WAS OR WHERE HE CAME FROM. HUNTED BY THE MONGOOSE'S HENCHMEN, FORGING AHEAD BLINDLY IN HIS SEARCH FOR HIS IDENTITY, HE WAS QUICKLY CAPTURED BY COLONEL AMOS, THE AGENT IN CHARGE OF THE INVESTIGATION INTO PRESIDENT SHERIDAN'S ASSASSINATION. UNAWARE OF HEIDEGER'S PLAN, AMOS WAS CONVINCED HE HAD THE MURDERER HE SOUGHT.



HOWEVER, THE FAKE NUMBER XIII MANAGED TO SLIP THROUGH HIS FINGERS AND AVOID THE MANY TRAPS SET FOR HIM. AFTER NUMEROUS ADVENTURES, AND WITH THE HELP OF LIEUTENANT JONES, GENERAL CARRINGTON'S BEAUTIFUL AIDE, HE EVEN MANAGED—BARELY—to FOIL THE CONSPIRACY OF THE XX'S AND GET ALL ITS LEADERS ARRESTED. EXCEPT FOR NUMBER I.



CONTINUING TO SEARCH FOR HIS IDENTITY, AND STILL HUNTED BY THE MONGOOSE, THE MAN WITH THE TATTOOED SHOULDER DISCOVERED (OR THOUGHT HE DID), USUALLY IN DRAMATIC CIRCUMSTANCES, THAT HIS REAL NAME WAS JASON MCLANE (AFTER HIS ADOPTED FATHER JONATHAN MCLANE), THAT HE WAS THE SON OF ONE SEAN MULLWAY (A DISTANT COUSIN OF JONATHAN'S WHO HAD FLED TO COSTA VERDE AFTER BEING ACCUSED OF MURDERING HIS WIFE 30 YEARS EARLIER) AND THAT FIVE YEARS EARLIER, HE HAD MARRIED MARIA ISABEL DE LOS SANTOS (NOW PRESIDENT OF COSTA VERDE AFTER THE FALL OF DICTATOR ORTIZ).



FLY (OR RATHER MCLANE), STILL HELPED BY NOW-MAJOR JONES, FINALLY FOUND OUT WHO THE NUMBER I OF THE CONSPIRACY OF THE XX WAS: WALTER "WALLY" SHERIDAN, THE YOUNGER BROTHER OF THE MURDERED PRESIDENT, WHO'D BEEN ELECTED TO THE OVAL OFFICE IN TURN. IN THE MEANTIME, THOUGH, HENRY SHERIDAN, ADMIRAL HEIDEGER AND KIM ROWLAND HAD DIED, COLONEL AMOS HAD BECOME A FUGITIVE, AND MCLANE, GOING AFTER THE MOST POWERFUL MAN ON THE PLANET WITHOUT ANY EVIDENCE, HAD PUT HIMSELF FIRMLY IN THE SHOES OF A DEAD MAN WALKING.

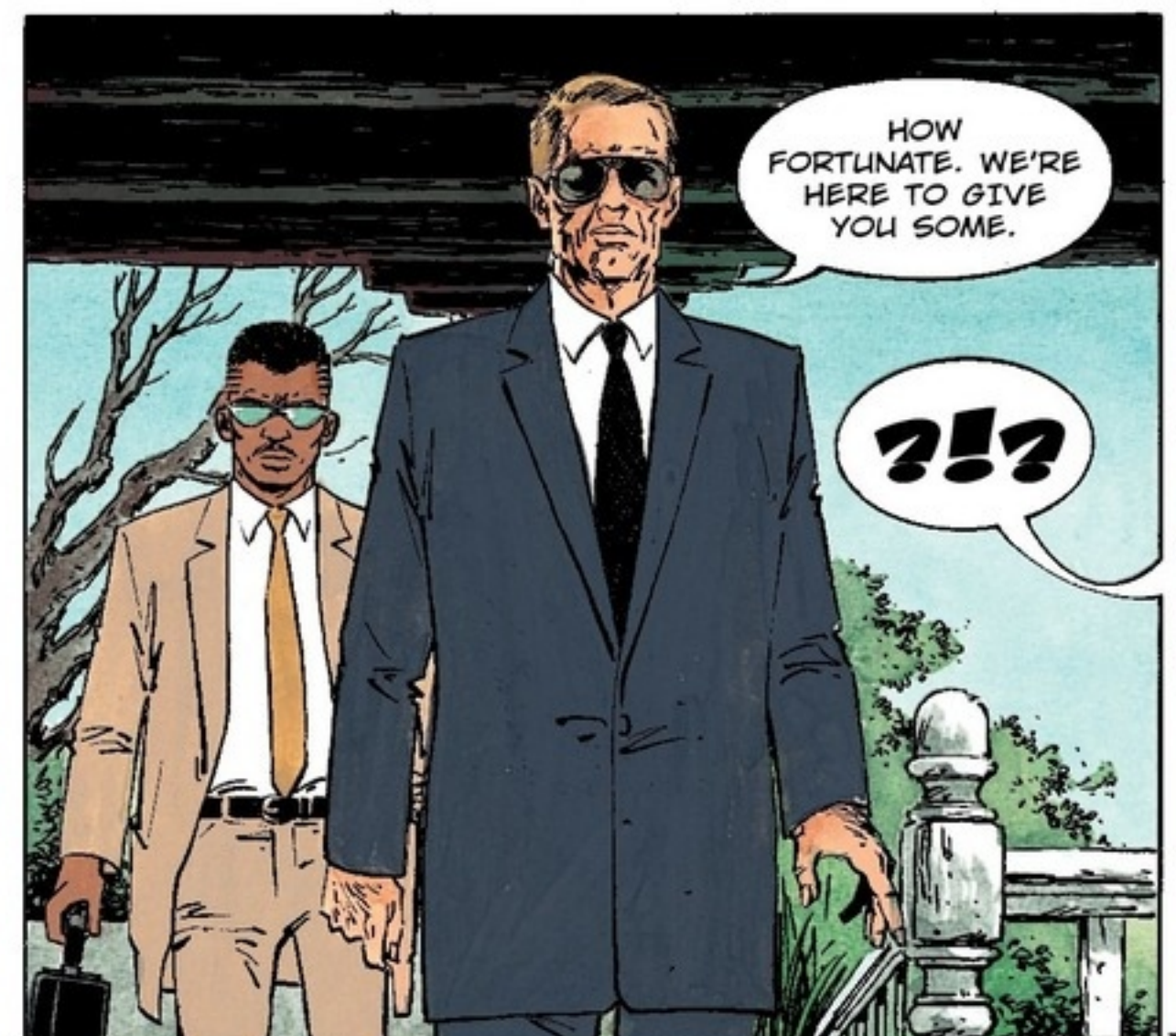


THAT WAS WHEN GENERAL CARRINGTON, TO AVENGE HIS DAUGHTER WHO HAD BEEN MURDERED ON ORDERS FROM WALLY SHERIDAN, PUT IN MOTION AN INSANE PLAN WITH THE HELP OF AMOS: TO KIDNAP THE PRESIDENT AND "TRY" HIM LIVE ON TV FROM INSIDE AN OLD MILITARY BASE IN NEVADA, WITH A SPECIAL APPEARANCE BY THE MONGOOSE, CAPTURED BEFOREHAND BY JONES AND MCLANE. THE PROFESSIONAL HIT MAN, BEFORE BEING SHOT BY SHERIDAN, CONFIRMED THAT THE LATTER WAS INDEED NUMBER I. THE PRESIDENT, HAVING MANAGED TO ESCAPE, WAS MISTAKENLY KILLED BY FRANK GIORDINO, THE MACHIAVELLIAN HEAD OF THE NATIONAL SECURITY AGENCY.

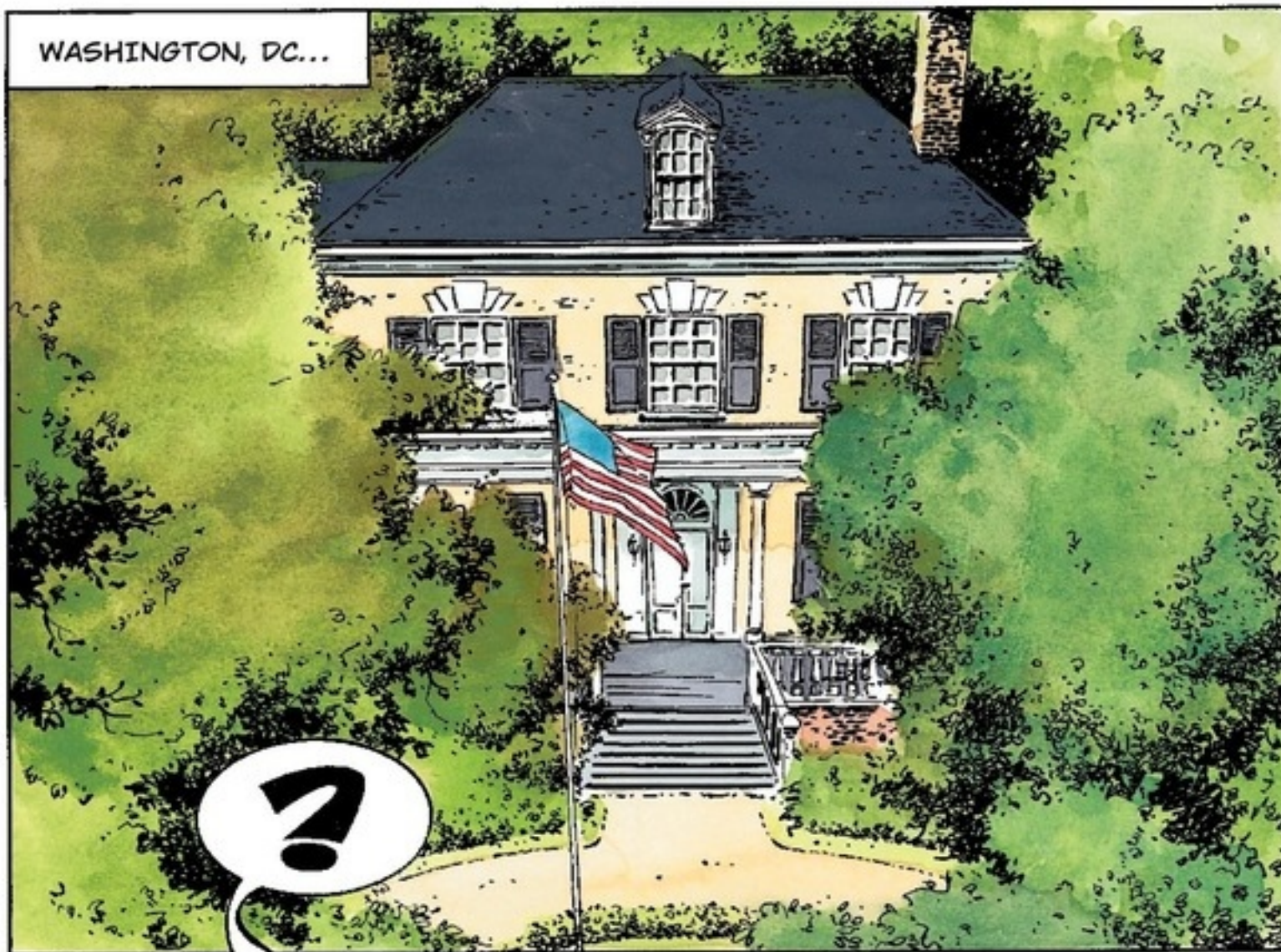


THE AUTHORITIES HURRIEDLY PROCLAIMED THE "TRIAL" A HOAX IN THE WORST TASTE AND ANNOUNCED THAT PRESIDENT WALLY SHERIDAN HAD DIED OF A BRAIN TUMOUR. CARRINGTON, AMOS AND JONES SUCCESSFULLY FLED THE UNITED STATES TO SEEK REFUGE IN SAN MIGUEL, A SMALL COUNTRY ADJACENT TO COSTA VERDE, WITH THE MARQUIS ARMAND DE PRÉSEAU, A BANANA PLANTER. MEANWHILE, OUR NUMBER XIII GOT HIMSELF SECRETLY ARRESTED (AGAIN) BY GIORDINO, ON CHARGES OF BEING A CUBAN AGENT GUILTY OF THE KIDNAPPING AND MURDER OF THE PRESIDENT.





* GO WITH GOD.



BUT IF WE EVER SEE YOU AROUND HERE AGAIN, YOU WON'T GET AWAY WITH IT SO EASILY.



I WANT TO SEE HIM ALONE...

MR PRESIDENT, YOU CAN'T...



THAT'S AN ORDER, CLYDE. AND ONE MORE THING: IF THERE ARE ANY MICROPHONES, WHICH IS MORE THAN LIKELY WITH OUR NSA FRIENDS, HAVE THEM TURNED OFF IMMEDIATELY.

I... VERY WELL, SIR.



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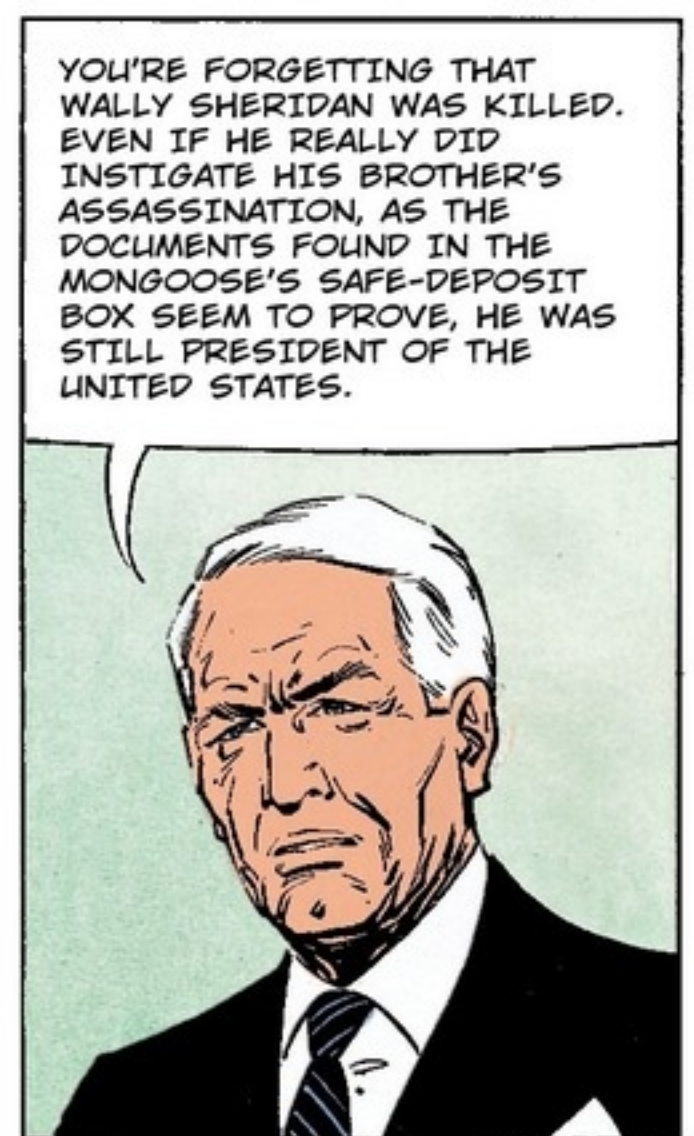


THE NEW PRESIDENT HIMSELF. I'M HONOURED. DID YOU FINALLY REMEMBER YOUR PROMISE TO ME, MR PRESIDENT*?



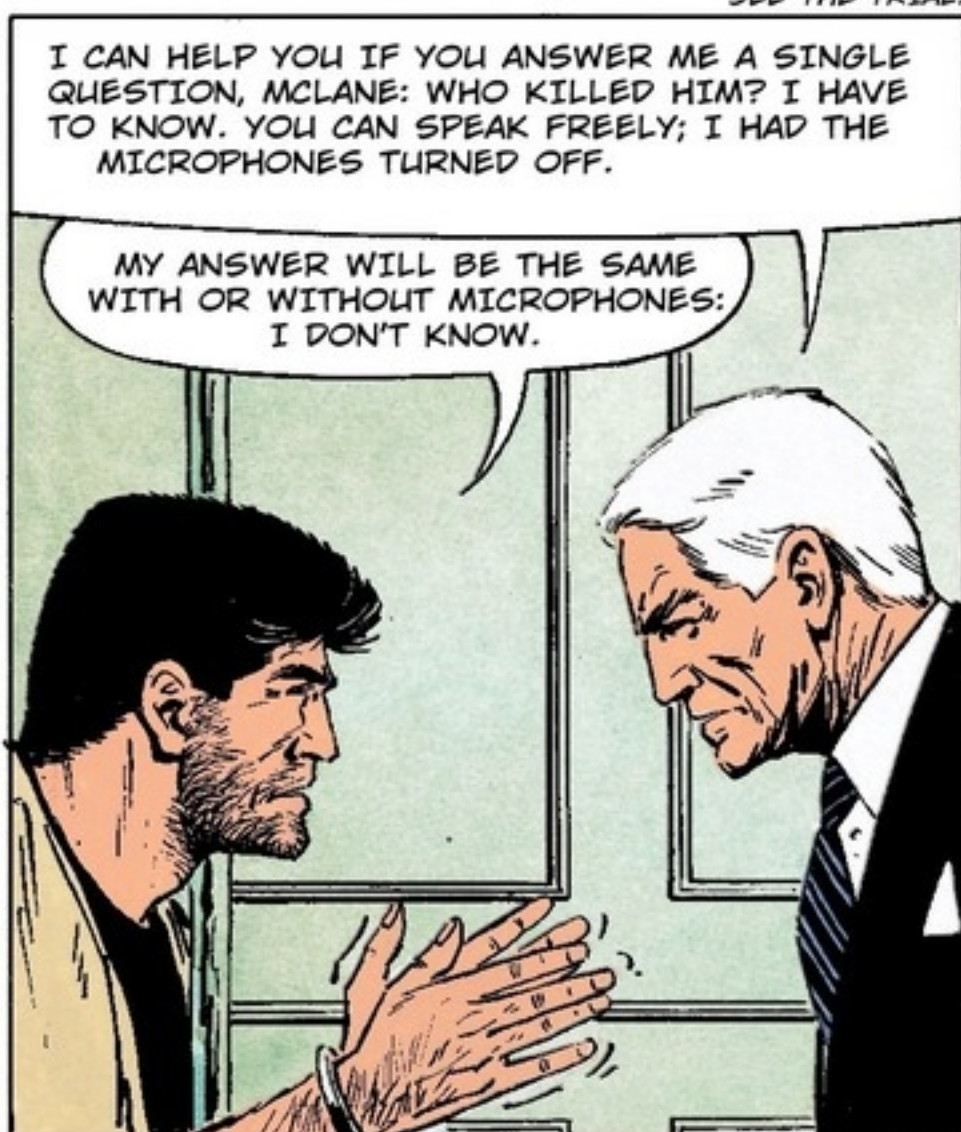
THINGS DID NOT GO QUITE AS PLANNED, MR MCLANE. OR SHOULD I CALL YOU KELLY BRIAN?

CALL ME ANYTHING YOU WANT, BUT GET ME OUT OF HERE!



YOU'RE FORGETTING THAT WALLY SHERIDAN WAS KILLED. EVEN IF HE REALLY DID INSTIGATE HIS BROTHER'S ASSASSINATION, AS THE DOCUMENTS FOUND IN THE MONGOOSE'S SAFE-DEPOSIT BOX SEEM TO PROVE, HE WAS STILL PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.

*SEE THE TRIAL.



I CAN HELP YOU IF YOU ANSWER ME A SINGLE QUESTION, MCLANE: WHO KILLED HIM? I HAVE TO KNOW. YOU CAN SPEAK FREELY; I HAD THE MICROPHONES TURNED OFF.

MY ANSWER WILL BE THE SAME WITH OR WITHOUT MICROPHONES: I DON'T KNOW.



WALLY WAS KILLED BY A REMOTELY-TRIGGERED EXPLOSIVE CHARGE. SOMEONE HAD TO PUSH THE BUTTON. WHO WAS IT? CARRINGTON?

I'M TELLING YOU I HAVE NO IDEA. ALL I KNOW IS THAT IT WASN'T ME.



IN THAT CASE, THERE'S NOTHING I CAN DO FOR YOU, MCLANE. THIS WHOLE CASE IS CLASSIFIED. TOP SECRET. I'M AFRAID NO ONE IS EVER GOING TO HEAR FROM YOU AGAIN.

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