

Francisco d'Anaconia in Hell

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Context matters. In human affairs, there are no vacuums – we are the air and soil of our lives, each to each other. To have a future, the world must first have a history, and that history is the lives of everyone, everywhere.

I am not Ayn Rand. I will show you the gun, where it was made, and how.

The gun was designed in Nazi Germany, by the Uranverein and Reichsforschungsrat – the Uranium Club and the Reich Research Council. It was designed by Werner Heisenberg and Kurt Diebner and Erich Schumann, and others.

The designs were stolen by the Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del, the NKVD, the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs in 1942. They were given over to the physicists, Yakov Zel'dovich and Yulii Khariton. Stalin loved the idea of the Bomb. He poured the intellectual and industrial might of the USSR into the Bomb.

The first atomic weapon was detonated in Siberia on November 3rd, 1943. The second was detonated over Berlin on December 24th. A second targeted Munich on Christmas Day.

Nazi Germany surrendered, unilaterally and unconditionally, to the USSR by the end of the year. Japan, two weeks later.

After the war, the USSR controlled everything from Portugal to Japan. They dominated the rest of Western Europe, they dominated East Asia, they controlled the oil fields of the Middle East. Stalin had the fucking Bomb.

The United States would be more than a year away from producing an atomic bomb. Fear of nuclear fire caused the Americans to abandon their own nuclear projects. No one doubted that Stalin would use atomic fire to lay waste to the United States with the least provocation.

The Iron Curtain was closed over all of Europe, all of Asia. Socialist governments in much of the rest of the world, as people sought to curry favor with the USSR. Even the United States rushed to curry this favor, because Stalin's gun was loaded with atomic bullets.

This is what Rand did not say: this is the gun, it is owned by a madman, it is loaded with uranium, and it is aimed at our heart.

The big guy was Hooky Rothman. He wasn't there to talk. When Benny Siegel – don't call him Bugsy – and Meyer Lansky went to the Gulch, they brought Hooky with them. Benny and Meyer didn't ask anyone for permission. No one thought to stop them. People at the Gulch did not understand people like Benny Siegel and Meyer Lansky. They had no idea what it took to be successful as a poor Jewish kid from New York in the Great Depression.

Meyer Lansky understood. Meyer was a brain, he knew things Benny didn't. For instance, Meyer understood what Francisco d'Anaconia meant when the Argentine swell's mouth was open.

Francisco: "It was necessary to bring down the economic collapse of the corrupt socialist government in the United States."

Benny asked Meyer, "I don't get what this mark is saying. What's this mark saying, Meyer?"

Meyer was gruff. "He's saying that he hates commies."

"Everyone hates the fucking commies. But Uncle Joe has the fucking Bomb. What's a person to do?"

"He believes that by sabotaging the US government that he is striking a blow against the Soviet Union."

Francisco said, "That's not . . ."

Benny: "Hooky."

Hooky hit Francisco. Hooky hit hard. Francisco was skinny, the roughest sport he played was clay court tennis. He took the shot to his liver, he crumpled in pain, to his knees. Francisco wanted to stay up, but he had never been hit, not like that, and not in such a sensitive place. His vision swam, he gasped for breath.

Meyer continued, "Hush, Mr. d'Anaconia. You're in enough trouble as it is."

Francisco: "Why . . . are . . . you . . . doing . . . this?"

Benny grabbed Francisco by the hair, jerked up his head, spat in his face. "That stunt you pulled in San Sebastian? You remember that?"

Benny let go. Francisco's head dropped to his chest. Hooky grabbed the epaulets of Francisco's jacket so he wouldn't fall on his face. Francisco nodded, worked on getting his breath back.

Francisco said, "Yes. Why are you upset about that?"

"Meyer and me, we lost five million dollars on that fucking junket," Benny said. "Five fucking million dollars. Because you decided that you wanted to punch Mexico in the fucking nose."

Francisco looked at Benny. Francisco knew he was far more intelligent than Benjamin Siegel. Francisco did not know if he was more intelligent than Meyer Lansky. He correctly identified Meyer as the real threat. He surmised, correctly, that Meyer had orchestrated all of this. Francisco knew that he had to appeal to Meyer Lansky. Francisco did not want to get hit, again. Having never taken a hard hit, he did not before know how it could change a person's life, how physical the reaction would be, and how powerful the urge to avoid not only the pain, but the humiliation, the feeling of utter and very real helplessness.

Francisco said to Benny, but for Meyer's sake, "It does no one very much good if the looters and moochers grow so powerful that they steal all of our productivity. Our losses are temporary. When the collectivist governments of the world have fallen past all use, when their lights are out, and food deliveries stop, we will save them because we know that it is only through our selfishness and productivity that humanity advances."

Meyer Lansky looked into Francisco's clear blue eyes. Lansky's eyes were brown. Lansky thought that Francisco would have been accepted in Nazi Germany or Stalin's Russia, places where men like Meyer Landsky could not go. By his look, alone, Meyer would have been marked as a Jew. Francisco was as fair as an SS officer.

To be fair, Meyer had considerable sympathy for Francisco's position. As an intelligent Jew who believed in free markets, he hated Stalin with every inch of his being. Benny shared his disgust with Stalin and communism. But they were both realists, in their way. Uncle Joe had the Bomb. America did not. The US could not win a fight with the USSR. It was that simple.

But both of them found that you could do business in the a socialist United States of America. People still wanted heroin. They wanted to gamble. They wanted prostitutes. Socialism didn't change that one iota. And the current regime could be more easily bribed than America's republican government officials, because business had so much less money and power. Siegel and Lansky paid what they needed to pay, hid when necessary, and killed when required. They made a lot of money, and the people at the Gulch did not understand the extraordinary violence they used to secure their money. They saw Meyer Lansky and Benny Siegel as capitalists like themselves.

Meyer: "You took our money. We believed you to be a man of honor, Francisco. Can I call you that? You can call me Meyer."

Benny: "My friends call me Benny."

Francisco: "Meyer, Benny . . ."

"Hooky."

Hooky dragged Francisco up, flailing. Hooky hit Francisco in the liver, again. Francisco's lights went out, overwhelmed by pain, and when he regained his senses, he was vomiting. Hooky Rothman still held his coat.

Benny: "You're not my fucking friend, you fucking spic." Benny slapped Francisco, who was more humiliated than hurt by the blow, and Benny's slur. Francisco considered himself different than brown-skinned Hispanics, he considered himself to be a nobility both ancient and modern. Benny did not care about any of that.

Francisco found himself nodding. "Yes, Mr. Siegel."

Meyer: "When you took our money, Francisco, when we bought stock in your company to develop San Sebastian, you entered into a contract with us. It was your responsibility to your stockholders to act in their fiduciary best interest. Not according to your plan to destabilize the Mexican and US economies, but in the monetary best interests of your stockholders. You broke your word with us, Francisco. You stopped being a man of honor."

Francisco hadn't realized that he had taken Lansky's money. He had accepted money from many different groups for the San Sebastian – including groups such as Taggart Transcontinental and Rearden Steel. He had taken it as axiomatic that strong individualist capitalists would understand his reasoning

and accept the losses, even though he did not warn them beforehand. Equally axiomatically, people who did not understand and accept his actions were not worthy of his consideration – he was glad to have hurt or destroyed them, because he believed himself to be safe from their recriminations in the sanctuary of the Gulch.

What Francisco did not understand is that some of the people he robbed would neither accept being the pawns in his plans and would gain access to the Gulch. A thought occurred to him which terrified him: that Benny and Meyer had gained entrance to the Gulch with the specific plan of recouping their losses. He had thought himself above terror, because he had never had to face the consequences of his actions. He had always been protected by his immense wealth and, then, by the many defenses of the Gulch. He had not understood that men he admired might not admire him, or his motives, and could seek him out in the Gulch.

He had underestimated Meyer Lansky and Benny Siegel.

Therefore, Francisco found it easy to acknowledge that he had done them an injustice. He said, "I will get you your money. Five million, was it?"

Benny: "Oh, we're past that, Frankie. We're well past that."

Meyer nodded. "It's not just the money. You robbed us, Francisco. You owe us a great deal more than five million dollars."

Francisco tried to square his shoulders, despite the throbbing of his torso. He looked Meyer in the eye. "How much do I owe?"

Meyer: "The majority of your family's wealth is in South America, the bulk in Argentina, which has no extradition treaty with the United States or the Soviet Union. That means that it is legally irrelevant to your South American interests that you've been convicted of sedition and espionage against the United States. You still own your businesses, yes?"

"Yes," Francisco said.

Benny laughed. He took out a sheaf of papers. "You're gonna sign it over to us."

"All of d'Anaconia Copper," Meyer confirmed.

"And all of your estates and real property that we know about, all that shit that is located outside of the Soviet bloc and the US."

Francisco was horrified at the idea. Not since the d'Anaconias had left Spain had a single generation of d'Anaconia's left the family poorer than the previous generation. He had no intent of being the first, much less of utterly ruining his family. But that was what Meyer and Benny were demanding. Yet, he did not want to be hit again by Hooky Rothman, who very much wanted to hit him.

Francisco said, softly, "I cannot."

Benny got angry. He grabbed Francisco's head, again, "You can and you fucking will, you fucking spic cocksucker! If you do not, not only will I throw you into a fucking meat grinder feet fucking first, I'll destroy you! And you'll sign because when you're going into the grinder, you'll do anything to stop it!"

Meyer: "I do not think you know your situation, or perhaps you believe we are unaware of it. Since the US government has locked you in here, it is very questionable if you have a future. For while there is no extradition with the United States, you are in the United States. Until you can leave, you cannot command your business, and your organization is headless.

"In specific, your debts are considered risky. We will be able to buy them for pennies on the dollar. Then we will go to Argentina . . ."

Francisco said, "You can't escape. The government cordon is complete."

Benny: "Fuck you, spic. You can't go anywhere. Do I look like a spic?"

Meyer: "Believe me when I tell you, Mr. d'Anaconia, we are well provided with allies in the US military and government, with whom we are already in contact. We may leave whenever we please."

"How do you think Howard Hughes gets his fucking heroin? Who do you think makes it snow cocaine in here?" Benny said.

"Do you imagine, Francisco, that we would submit ourselves to this level of risk if there wasn't more than five million dollars on the table?"

"That is reasonable," Francisco said, his head nodding slightly, out of his control. His mouth was dry, and his body was throbbing in time with his heart.

"After we have acquired your debt, we will cash it in, in full. But we have to move quickly, because others will do it if we do not. We will cherry pick your best assets, of course."

Benny: "And after that? What you'll have left will cost more to run than it's worth. You've got no fucking idea how dependent your business is on you. All that shit about how everyone is beneath you? Biting you in the ass. There's no one who knows how to run your business, you prick!"

"Because you are a highly skilled businessman, and it is remotely possible you will escape from this prison, and it is therefore possible that you will be able to rebuild if we leave you with anything at all. So we will not. With the assets that we have acquired on the cheap, we will buy all the failing remainders of your business. We will then shutter them and break them apart and sell them off, refusing to run them at a loss for even a minute, even if someone such as yourself could run them at a profit."

Meyer's vision was Francisco's version of hell.

Francisco had to try several times to speak. He had never had such a dry mouth. He finally said, "What's in it for me?"

"You'll be alive," Benny said.

Meyer nodded. "If, some day, you do escape from this prison, you will be alive. Perhaps you will even be able to rebuild something. You'll owe us nothing."

Francisco raised his chin. "Then I would rather be dead than see my business brought low by criminal scum such as yourself."

Benny said, "Suit yourself, Frankie. Hooky, let's get him to the kitchen and that big fucking meat grinder. Let's see how tough he is when he's watching his toes turn into sausage."

Terror shot through Francisco's body, he made an involuntary keening sound. Meyer touched Benny's arm. Benny motioned for Hooky to stop. Meyer studied Francisco.

Meyer: "I believe he's telling the truth. He would rather die than be shamed like this. We will let him live."

Benny: "What the fuck?"

"Soon enough, this place will be a nightmare in the flesh. There's not enough water, there's not enough food. That's a good punishment. Plus, living, we'll be able to keep Francisco up to date on how we're dismantling his little empire. He'll live to see how we're tearing down everything he built. And if, some day, he does get out of this? Then you can have him, Benjamin. Even if he escapes, he'll be broke and alone, and he can survey the damage he's caused because he crossed us – and he will be all yours."

The gangsters let him go. They kept their word. News came to the Gulch that d'Anaconia Copper was being sold off, piecemeal, that the d'Anaconia fortune was gone, and Francisco never saw the outside of the Gulch. But he lived a good long time, and along the way he discovered heroin . . . but that's a story for another time.