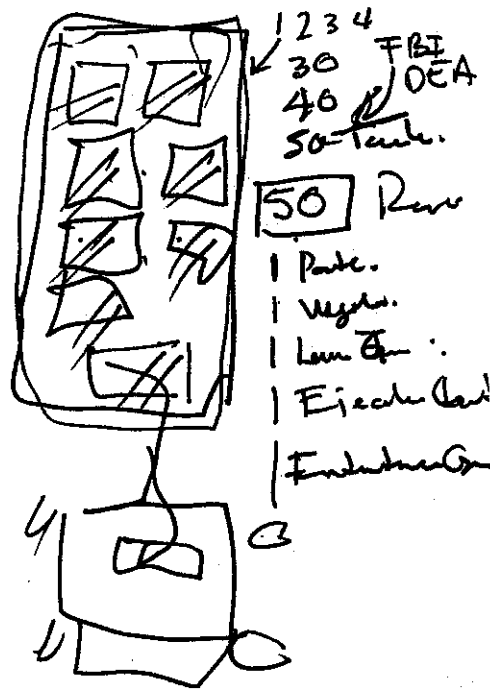


FROM: EL SICARIO
EDS: MOLLY MOLLOY & CHARLES BOWDEN
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BEGIN

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When dealing with marijuana. . . It is incredibly blatant, the way they transport it. They barely make any effort to hide it. They hitch a flatbed trailer to a pickup truck with a tow-bar. The trailer is stacked with boxes of marijuana, and these trucks will travel all over the city as if they were hauling boxes of any other material. We are not talking about one, two, three, or four . . . no, we are talking about thirty, forty, or fifty tons of marijuana that will have to be transported, stored, and guarded.

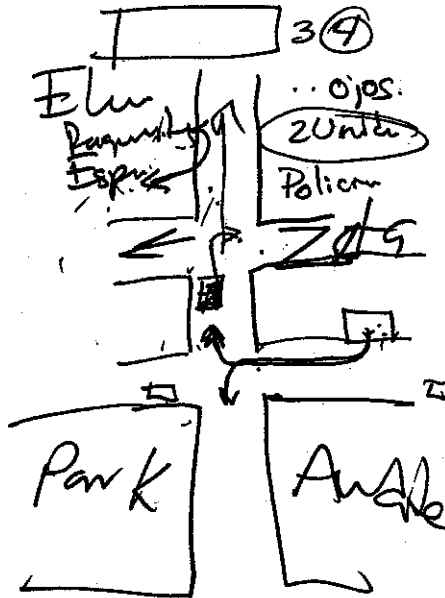


In the recruitment that they carry out in the academy, of the fifty graduates who are actually on the payroll of the narco-trafficking organizations, each has their function in the operation. Some are assigned to guard the safe houses. Others are assigned to keep those guys under surveillance. Another group is assigned to kidnap people who owe money or who have gone to work for another gang or rival group. Others specialize in executing people. And another group is assigned to bury the people who have been executed. All of the functions are separated into these different groups with different assignments.

Why is it arranged this way? This is what I learned, and there's a really good saying that describes it: "Never mix up Christmas with New Year's." For example, if you are assigned to kidnap someone, then you deliver the victim to another person, "El Dos" [Number 2], who delivers him to "El Tres" [Number 3], who will deliver him to the person who executes him, who then delivers him to the person who buries the body. It would seem like a simple kind of triangulation—that the people who do the kidnapping, interrogating, killing, and burying would be able to figure it all out—but that's not the way the narco-traffickers operate. What they want from this system of exchange in all these functions is to obscure the knowledge of where all of these bodies are buried.

It takes a number of years working for the organization before the director of the cell has enough confidence in you and enough wisdom to say, "Here's what you must do. You kidnap the guy and deliver him to this one and that one, and you wait here until he is buried and that's it."

*While he is speaking, he makes a drawing
of the operation he is describing.*



So, for example, here is a street. Here a park, and over here, this is an auditorium. The person who is going to be kidnapped will be watched for three or four days beforehand. For this, two people will be used who are called *ojos*, "the Eyes." They will keep watch on the person's house for several days from different vantage points. They will see exactly when the person comes and goes, where he goes, who he goes out to eat with, and so forth. . . . They will follow his routine, wherever he goes, for a whole week or longer.

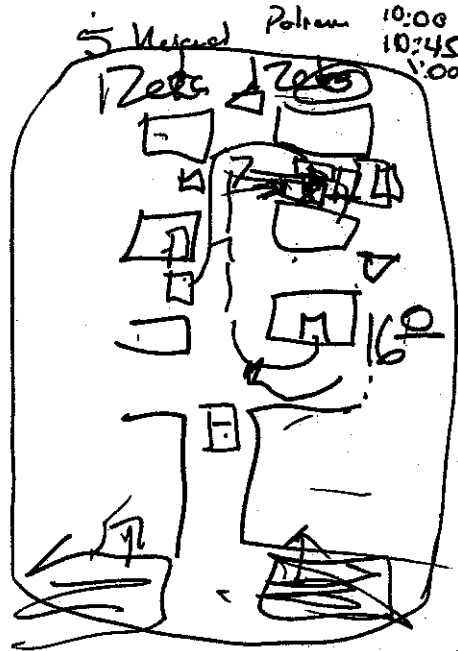
These Eyes will be supported by two cars. And these are not private cars, but police cruisers. When an ordinary citizen goes somewhere and sees an official patrol car following him, with its sirens and insignia, the person will never suspect for a moment that he will be kidnapped or disappeared. Because, of course, the

police are there to serve the community and protect the community. The police are not there to kidnap people. What this person never suspects is that members of the police force are recruited from their time in the academy, bought and paid for by the narco-traffickers, to carry out specific jobs in the criminal organizations.*

There are two methods used in these operations. After a week of surveillance, noting where the target goes and all of the routes he takes, a team is designated. This team is composed of five vehicles that are stationed at various points around the person's house. The Eyes keep doing their job. On the day that the act will take place, first of all the police are notified to get all of the patrol cars out of this sector. And this notice is not given to the patrolling officers in those cars, but to the director of the police. For instance, someone will call the director and tell him, "We don't want any police in the area for a certain time period." Or they tell the director to call a meeting of police personnel for a certain time, say, ten to ten forty-five. The message will be: "We don't want any police on the street. . . . We are going to work."

The target leaves his house. There are one or two police cars that look identical, but these are not really police cars, and they go to work. They follow the objective, and they stop him. There are times when the target will not stop. Sometimes, if the guy is a real *plebe malandro*, just a very bad dude, and he knows he owes money to the boss and that it is not going to go well for him, he

* People who worked for the narco-trafficking organizations would carry out these tasks whether they were on or off police duty. In another interview, the sicario described paying off dispatchers with a few hundred pesos to avoid interruption while partying or while engaged in criminal activities.



will probably not stop for the patrol car. That's why there are five cars stationed around him, like this.

He draws the plan out in a notebook—one, two, three, four, five cars as little blocks, like a football coach diagramming a special play.

The Eyes follow behind. Of all these cars, only one will be used to kill the guy or kidnap him. If the patrol car is not able to get him to stop, the other cars will block his way even if they have to cause a crash in the street. The problem here is how the boss wants the target: alive or dead? If the boss wants him dead, that's easy.

The Eyes move, the second car moves out, the one that stops him stays behind, one closes him off from the front. You never

have to worry about crossfire. One car pulls up from the side, shoots him, and that's it. Everyone retreats. In less than three minutes, all five cars are six or seven blocks away guarded in safe houses that are nearby. You just walk away from the scene and get picked up by another vehicle and go to eat at a restaurant nearby, calm and tranquil, as if it were nothing.

Since all the police patrols had been called into a meeting, it takes the police an hour or more to get to the scene. So for more than an hour, the scene of the crime is open to people walking all around, checking out what happened, and messing up the evidence left behind. And there are always some clever folks hanging around who pick the pockets and steal the wallets of the onlookers. This is all part of our strategy.

But there are some cases when the person is wanted alive. And this requires a different strategy.

You have to watch the target very carefully from the time he leaves his house and wait for a suitable place to stop him and force him to get out of the car. When he gets out of his car, you have to immediately get him into your car. Physically, you sense that it is not fear exactly, but adrenaline that rises up in you. It's human nature. . . . And being human, you know that it is not enough to just say to the guy, "Hey, come with me." And expect him to obey.

He isn't going to come. So you get there, and you are going to have to grab him, beat him, handcuff him, and put him in your car by force. But this car is not traveling alone. There are three more cars ahead and another two behind. If an actual police patrol car dares to intervene along the route, one of these cars may have to ram it, and if they still don't get the message, then you may have to shoot up the police car.

That's why these days* the police have been so persecuted and criticized. If they had been given the word back at the time they were in the police academy, that they were being trained to serve a certain person or organization, well, when the time comes and they receive orders from that person who is a boss at some level in the drug-trafficking organization, they know that they have to carry these orders out or they will be killed. This is what is happening now. It is one thing to just tell them to get out of the way. But if they get the order, they have no choice except to "*get the fuck out of the way!*"

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Up until a few years ago, the narcos respected the lives of women and children. But starting sometime in 2008, it seems that this practice of respecting the lives of women and children has been forgotten. Why? Because the narcos started to recruit women to work as debt collectors for them. And those women try to protect themselves by using their children as shields. And so the agreement no longer functions. There is no longer any plan. Before, if a targeted person left his house with a child, as soon as it was known that a child was present, the mission would be aborted. The killing would take place another day when the guy was alone. But now, such agreements have all been terminated.

Where would kidnapped people be taken? Let's say you pick up a person. Take him out of his car, put him in another car. Always, always, the safe house would be no more than five blocks—that is the very farthest that it would be—from the scene of the

* The sicario is referring to the current climate of extreme violence that began in January 2008.

kidnapping. The car will pull into the closed garage of the safe house, the person will be taken out of the car, and the interrogation will begin. And often, after an interrogation, the person will still be alive. Depending on what they owe and on what they have, they may remain alive for fifteen minutes, or they may be kept for six months or any amount of time in between. Imagine: six months kidnapped, held in a closet, and given one meal per day.

During all this time, we are working with the family of the kidnapped person, forcing them, extorting them, to hand over all of his property—cattle, ranches, other real estate, jewelry, yachts—whatever they have. Everything that they have. When we plan the kidnapping of a person who owes money, we already have an exact list of his property and what we are going to take away from him. And we send the family a video, after a month or two months or three months, to let them know that their loved one is alive, so they will have confidence that he will be returned to them.

But once everything has been taken away from him and his family, he will be killed right there. It is what they call a *carne asada*, a barbecue. There are people who work in the department called “refrigeration” or “cold meats.” These are people in charge of killing, cutting up, and burying the body. People are not always buried in the same place where they are killed. This is very difficult. What happens is that the people are executed, and then they are taken in vehicles to the places that in recent years have been called *narco-fosas*, or narco-graves. I think that here in the border region, that . . . well, let’s say that if there are one hundred of these narco-fosas, maybe only five or six of these places have been discovered.

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How did I get to the point where I no longer felt any scruples for the people that I killed? I had come to a point in my career and in my life when I was getting paid so much money. This

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moment comes when they tell you, "We are going to give you \$5,000 per month as a salary." But there are some people who are very heavy, very important, and they have a lot of security around them. So then the boss comes back and says, "Let's make a deal. Get rid of this person and we will pay you \$45,000. Get your team together and take care of it."

Good.

At some point, when you have all the training, the skills, and the experience, you can do these jobs with no more than four people. But when you are working with a team of only four, none of them can have any fear. If even one of the team is afraid, then the job will fail. When someone is afraid, nerves fail, and the job cannot be carried out. On more than two occasions, we had to cancel a job because of one person who lost his nerve and could not be counted on.

What did we do to be sure, to prepare for the job? First of all, we hardly slept and we took a lot of drugs. We would go for several whole days drinking and taking drugs. Suddenly we get a call. "The person that you are looking for is eating in a certain restaurant." Okay.

So we go, the four of us in two cars, with a third car following in case something goes wrong. One person gets out, another guards the door, and the others look out for the police and for the getaway. What do we want to do with the guy now? This determines what our options are. The first option: confront him and execute him.

*He bangs five times on the table,
as if to make the sound of gunshots.*

That is one option. Another possibility is that we will have to interrogate him, in which case we need to take him alive. And if we were ordered to take him alive, we would have to take him

alive. And there was yet another option: grab him, beat him up, torture him, but not kill him.

The most difficult thing to understand—and one of the most difficult orders to carry out—is that sometimes, when you are in a safe house with a person who is really beaten up and the grave is already dug, then you get the call not to kill him. “Don’t let him die.”

I remember that on some occasions it happened that they sent us to kidnap someone. Not to execute him, but just to pick him up and to kill him later. So what did we do? We picked the guy up, brought him to a secure location, and then began the work of executing him. When all of a sudden the phone rings. “Wait, wait, it’s the boss. . . .”

“Yes, sir. What are your orders, sir? Yes, sir, yes, sir, yes, sir. . . . Yes, yes, yes, sir.”

“Stop! Stop!”

The order on this occasion was to revive the person when he was already at the point of death, right on the edge, just seconds away from asphyxiation. We had to revive him, shake him.

“Revive him.”

“It’s not possible. Sir, we need a doctor, we cannot get him up, the work was very advanced, sir. Yes, sir.”

For the narcos, there are no limits.

In just a few minutes a doctor arrived—not an ambulance, of course, but a qualified doctor. The doctor revived the person and left him there with us in stable condition. And we took charge again.

Five, ten, fifteen, even thirty days can go by, and it is no problem, because our job was just to keep the person alive. That is what we were there for—to watch over and guard him, to keep him alive until we received another call.

When this happens, it is a liberation, for us as well as for him.

"Yes, sir, what are your orders? We are here, sir, waiting. No, no, he is fine. He's eating. What is he eating? *Ha!* No, no, he is okay . . . gaining strength. Ah, ah. Okay, sir, as you wish."

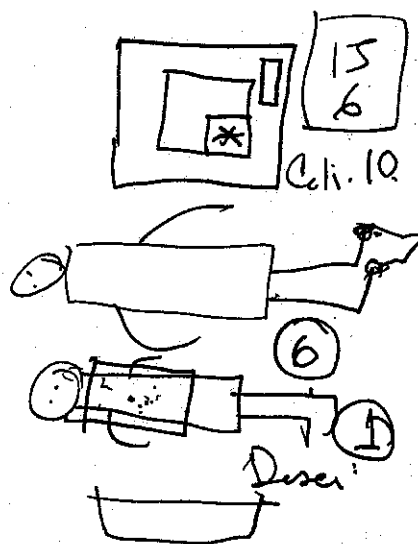
This time, our friend was not so lucky. It could be that his family had already paid. It could be that to keep him alive was just to be safe, for insurance, or perhaps he was needed alive for a time, to talk to the family. . . . But the work and the order that followed after the call was: Do away with him. Finish him off.

Now, after he had already been saved once at the point of being strangled to death, this time there was no turning back. This time there was no second call. This time we had to pull the string, and pull it hard.

The sicario begins to describe the ways of torturing people to get information, and he draws in the notebook as he speaks.

Now, there are various ways of killing these people. And none of them are very agreeable. The easiest is just to shoot them. But almost none of the bosses wants them to die quickly or easily. So what do you do? Suffocate them, make them suffer, take out their fingernails one by one, put needles under their fingernails. There are techniques to make them talk.

Here is the body, for example. You soak the clothes with water and then connect ten-caliber cables from the body to the electrical outlet so that it will withstand the voltage from the electricity . . . these cables are attached to their big toes. And you connect this to the electrical power. After two applications of this for ten seconds each, the person will tell you whatever you want, whatever you want. There were some who were very strong who could withstand this. So, for them, there is another technique.



The person is lying down completely naked. We cover the body with a sheet, sprinkle gasoline or alcohol onto the sheet, and when it is soaked, light it with a match. As the fuel burns, it removes up to three layers of skin from their bodies. Their backs would be left completely raw. We might use a liter of alcohol on them. The suffering is enormous.

And there are other forms of interrogation, things that you cannot imagine.

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Sometimes there were people who we would have to care for as long as six months. There were mistakes, and we would get orders to heal these people before we could let them go back to their