

## ***The Anvil of the Craftsman* by Dale Amidei**

From: Chapter 8 – PsyOps

“Mr. Colby, may I introduce you to Lieutenant General Peter McAllen. General, I present Mr. Thomas Colby, Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs.” The Ambassador moved back slightly as McAllen extended his hand.

“Mr. Colby, the Ambassador was just telling me of your initiative. It is ... *ambitious*, sir, considering recent events.”

Colby nodded and transferred his drink to his left hand, freeing his right to shake with McAllen. “It’s a pleasure, General. I see that we’ve heard of each another.”

Dinner at the Embassy, this first evening in Baghdad, was usual. Colby recognized it as unavoidable though a hardship from which he could spare all but his most necessary staff. Schuster was here, and surprisingly the man was enjoying himself. Colby had tried to give his Chief Electoral Administrator, Carol Addams, the night off but she was irrepensible. She circulated now giving not a clue of having endured the same trip as he. Carol, who had insisted that Colby not attend without an escort, was working her set of people across the room. He had his own territory to defend.

The Ambassador looked pleased to have brought them together. “General McAllen could be of immense help to you, Tom. Few people in Iraq, much less one so accessible to us here, have as good a grasp on what is happening at any moment.”

“You’re too kind, sir. I have the benefit of an outstanding organization that has devoted as much talent as it can spare to the theater.” In his formal blue mess uniform, miniatures of McAllen's many awards stretched down his lapel, topped by his Parachutist and Combat Infantryman badges.

Colby and the other civilians were in black tie and evening dress and made for a show here in the Embassy, one of many former Presidential palaces in Baghdad now under new management. He took the Ambassador’s cue. McAllen was someone he would need on his side. Information was power, a fuel that could move mountains, and a shield that could save lives. Diplomacy and intelligence intertwined wherever they roamed. The problem was that they did not often share coordinated objectives, Colby thought, except perhaps this time. “We hope to be of assistance to the military as well, General. Hearts

and minds, if that isn't too trite a phrase, are what will *eventually* transform Iraq into a peaceful nation, and an allied nation," he offered.

McAllen looked thoughtful. "Your objectives, Mr. Colby," he said after lowering his voice, "this direct engagement of the tribal influences in the provinces, and especially the one that you seem most interested in, is unprecedented."

Taken off guard, Colby glanced at the Ambassador, who shrugged with a "don't look at me" expression on his face. The bastard was enjoying this, Colby thought. "General, I'm impressed. We have just arrived, but that is our objective stated most succinctly. We have people already working to maneuver us into positions of trust in the rural areas."

As Colby could tell, McAllen was not trying to be intimidating or overbearing but merely attempting to broach the nuances of his situation as gently as possible. "I can appreciate your efforts, Mr. Colby, and to an extent you are correct. Understand something though, sir. If I know, *they* know. I am speaking of political elements, here and back home, who might not benefit from your success. Intelligence elements exist with a greater native depth than we have available, some of whom may share your goals and some of foreign influence that will not. Your team will not remain hidden from any of them if you make progress in building up your contacts as you expect. *They* will know. I hope you can appreciate that."

Colby sipped his single-malt Scotch. The General's advice had the tone of a warning. "Risk comes with any worthwhile endeavor, General. I hardly need to say that to a man with your experience. Not doing can cost as much as acting recklessly. What we want to do needs to be done. If we can achieve it this year so much the better in the lives that are spared, in the financial resources that could go into rebuilding instead of prosecuting campaigns, and in the stability of the region. We will be as careful as we can be, sir. There's not a martyr among us."

McAllen looked grave. "If there is anything I know on the subject, it is that you pick out the martyrs after the fact, Mr. Colby. Gentlemen, it is getting late for an old man or an early riser, and I'm blessed to be both. If I can be of any use, do please let me know. I wish you a good night."

Colby and the Ambassador nodded then watched him slip out of the sizable room gracefully, making a stop or two where he said his good-byes. Colby felt unsettled. The

Ambassador turned his attention back to him. “You did well, Tom. He’s worth listening to, but he’s a soldier not a diplomat. His world is uglier than ours.”

“Is it, sir?” Colby wondered aloud. “It’s all the same world. Diplomacy can be war in slow motion. War is the most aggressive form of negotiation. Politics may be the thousand-foot view of both.”

The Ambassador raised his glass. “Tom, you understand Iraq better all the time.”

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