

THE CONFISCO

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The Confisco

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ABOUT THIS PIECE

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CHAPTER ONE

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'Balance Blocked, Balance Available'

The hangover was still clouding Max's mind when he woke up that day to a thin sliver of light coming through the window. The party was small, but it was enough to target his eyes, taking away his sleep and giving him a terrible headache. Confused, Max rubbed his face with his hands and looked around. The room was exactly the same as he remembered: the bottle of Jack Daniel's was on the bedside table without its cap; fortunately, it hadn't tipped over. The glass, half full, was far from indicating something good, as the saying went. On the contrary, it was the result of the trauma of the night before.

The ad. That bizarre plan coming out of that crazy woman's mouth. Did she really get to be economy minister? No one can even understand what she says, thought Max, getting up. He opened the fridge. It was nearly empty. There was a solitary egg along with half a bottle of milk, and Max took both. He fried the egg and mixed the milk with Jack. 'I need to do some shopping,' he said.

He went into the living room and took out his cell phone to open the delivery app. He would go to the market, but not now. He didn't

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know what the streets were like after the announcement the day before, but he could hear the shouts of his next-door neighbor who, from his tone, was also looking to buy food.

‘What?! What the fuck? How come I can only spend 50,000? There’s twenty times that in my account!’ Pause. Silence. ‘But...’ said the neighbor before pausing again.

Max waited, his ears to the wall and his eyes searching for his favorite dish: a portion of carne de sol with salad and fries. The best way to cure a hangover. He heard a bang in the kitchen: the egg was burning.

The neighbor spoke again. ‘What news? I haven’t heard anything! And I don’t care. I want access to all my fucking money. Fifty thousand barely pays for lunch!’

The egg was burnt, a reminder of how good Max was in the kitchen. As good as the president is at choosing ministers, he thought, putting the egg on his plate and heading back to the living room, picking up a glass of Jack and Coke on the way. He took a bite: it was awful, but it was what he had. At least the drink relieved the hangover and woke Max up, reminding him of what had happened the night before.

The announcement. The minister. One sentence. And that shout from the neighbor. Max went back to the app and clicked on the cart to finalize his purchase. The card didn’t go through. This was a nightmare.

Apathetically, Max opened the bank app and read his account balance. He didn’t like using credit cards and getting into debt, so he kept an eye on his checking account, but occasionally he found

himself short of cash because he'd gone overboard. Yesterday was the perfect day to go overboard. The bank app opened and displayed the following information:

Total balance: DR\$ 3,452,000

Blocked balance: DR\$ 3,402,000

Available balance: DR\$ 50,000

What do you mean? Max asked himself, looking at the symbols on the screen and getting a real fright. There was something very wrong with that screen. A telephone hit the wall next door, followed by another muffled noise. The neighbor punched the wall. Having only DR\$50,000 in the account causes such reactions, thought Max, closing the bank app. He would have to go to the supermarket to try to buy something cheaper and cook. Flipping the Jack 'n' Milk in one go and finishing off the last piece of egg, Max put on a T-shirt, grabbed his keys, and left. Just before he went, he took a quick peek out of the window and saw people running everywhere, a huge queue at the supermarket, and a bunch of people in front of the bank branch. There was a riot police battalion guarding the place with guns, but Max didn't know if they were real guns or fuses. He turned around, closed the curtain, and prepared to face the streets.

Queuing at Morrigan's

Everywhere he went, Max looked at the headlines of the newspapers that were still on the stands or lying in the middle of the street. They all contained the same headline: **PRESIDENT BLOCKS THE MONEY!**

It could be a lack of creativity, but I think it's shock, thought Max. He decided to pick up the pace, as the dirt in the streets and

the people already running down the alleyways in desperation indicated trouble. On the way, Max came across a series of notices linked to the city's largest bank, Morrigan's, which was his destination. They all mimicked the uncreative newspapers, but at least they were more detailed:

GENERAL BLOCKING OF ACCOUNTS! WITHDRAWALS LIMITED TO DR\$50,000 UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE! CREDIT OPERATIONS REMAIN UNCHANGED!

Max's great fear was that neither the newspapers nor the headlines carried anything more than that. 'What the hell can someone do with 50,000 bucks?' he exclaimed. As he walked, his brain took advantage of the fact that the way to the bank was etched in his mind to make him think about the bills that were still outstanding and how that damn 50,000 wasn't going to help at all. Someone tapped him on the shoulder from behind. Startled, Max turned abruptly and grabbed the stranger's collar, ready to fight, when the familiar face stared back at him in fright:

'Hey, Max, slow down! Are you going to hit a policeman?'

Ah, it was just Kevin, his colleague at the police department. Like Max, Kevin wore civilian clothes — he must have been in plain clothes or off-duty — and looked out of breath as if he had run a marathon. He had his gun in his holster and laughed when he saw Max's expression of relief and annoyance, and he punched his colleague lightly in the chest.

'No. If I get arrested, I won't be able to get to Morrigan's in time to stop a robbery.'

'What? They're robbing Morrigan's?'

‘Yes. And from what it says in the papers, they stole all our money.’

Kevin looked at his friend with a confused expression that turned into a huge laugh once he understood everything.

‘Max, you son of a bitch, you’re brilliant! You’re right, let’s go before the robbery takes place.’ The two of them made their way to the bank.

‘When did you hear about this whole mess?’ Kevin asked.

‘This morning, after the hangover wore off.’

‘Did they block yours too?’

‘Yes, more than 3.4 million Drex.’

‘Jesus, man, 3.4 million? What sons of bitches!’

Max nodded, remembering that this was the money from the month’s fair. ‘Our money is already worthless and these bastards still steal most of it. How much did they confiscate from you?’

Kevin took out his phone and showed his friend his account balance:

Total balance: DR\$ 1,200,000

Blocked balance: DR\$1,150,000

Available balance: DR\$ 50,000

We’re in the same boat, buddy, thought Max as he made his way towards the bank, but his thoughts were interrupted when he came to a sudden stop. Both Max and Kevin were at the top of a steep slope, and at the bottom of the slope, almost like a dragon’s mouth on a toboggan about to swallow its prey, was the large branch of Morrigan’s, the biggest bank in town. The bank always seemed like an imposing colossus to Max when he had to descend the slope, but this time the dragon’s mouth found a worthy rival: a snake.

The snake of dozens of people that wrapped around the bank like a boa constrictor was formed of the large queue of citizens. Max and Kevin made their way to the end of the queue and positioned themselves behind the last person.

The Broken Window Pane

BANG!

With their cop instincts activated, Max and Kevin quickly tucked their hands into their waistbands before realizing two factors. Firstly, they were in that queue as civilians and were going to a bank that didn't allow armed customers, which Max dismissively called 'the perfect recipe for creating a honeypot for criminals'.

Secondly, when they looked more closely, they saw that the noise didn't come from someone with a gun shooting at the customers in the queue. In fact, the noise came from the bank itself: someone had thrown a chair against the window of Morrigan's, shattering the front of the bank and causing panic among the customers at the front. Screams came from all sides, some of fear, others of fury; people tried to push against the broken pane to get into the bank.

BANG!

This time, there was no doubt: it was a gunshot. The security guard at Morrigan's pulled out a revolver and fired into the air, glaring at the crowd. Two of his companions stood on opposite sides of the hole where there had once been a pane of glass, pointing their guns at those still in the queue.

'Everyone, please be quiet! Let's not cause a tragedy!' shouted the shooting guard. Max approached the window and was met by the barrel of a revolver:

‘Get back in line, sir. Let’s not create a commotion.’

‘I’m a policeman. What’s going on here?’ Max asked, showing the badge in his hand. The security guard relaxed and asked him to come closer, asking tensely, ‘Do you have experience with negotiation?’

‘Yes,’ said Max. ‘What’s going on?’

‘Come with me, please. My name is Bryan and we need help.’ said the guard, stepping aside for Max to pass.

A customer is desperate in here, he wants his money back. He freaked out when the manager told him about the confiscation of the DREX and flew into a fit of rage. The chair that destroyed the window pane — that was him. And now..’

The policeman pointed to the counter of Morrigan’s, which was once luxurious, but was now covered in broken instruments, dust, and torn pieces of paper. A man was desperately trying to open a bottle, pushing people out of the lobby, while giving water to a woman who had fainted. Bryan told Max that the woman had been threatened by the customer, who was demanding his money back in full. He was at the back of the bank, holding the manager at knifepoint and threatening to kill him if anyone came near. With caution, Max approached, making eye contact with the man.

‘Good morning, friend. What’s up?’

‘Good morning to whom, idiot? Who lost their money because of incompetent idiots like this?’ He pressed the knife into the manager’s neck, who grimaced in pain.

Generate empathy, thought Max, remembering the first rule he learned at the academy. The guy wasn’t a thief, he just wanted back what was his, and he had freaked out when he didn’t succeed.

‘Michael Douglas did worse in that movie.’

‘You’re right, a shitty day. That piece of shit there,’ he said, pointing at the manager, ‘blocked me from more than DR\$3.4 million. I’ve lost my entire life savings.’

‘So you won’t mind if I want my money back, right?’ he asked the man.

‘What’s your name?’

‘Josh... Josh Weiland.’

‘My name is Max, Josh, and no, I don’t care. You have every right to get your money back, just like I do. But you have a knife pointed at the neck of the only person who can help you.’

‘Of course, and I’m going to stay like this until he gives me my fucking money back!’

‘But for that, I’m going to need you to let him go, so that he can return your money and mine. Can you do that?’

‘And who’s to say this idiot will do it once he’s released?’

‘I’ll do it, I promise!’ said the manager, terrified but following Max’s game.

‘You’ll both get your money straight away.’

There was no way of knowing whether it was the tension of being out of money, or whether Josh decided to trust Max. The fact is that he loosened the knife around the manager’s neck (who, according to his badge, was called Ron), but didn’t let go. He put him in the chair and demanded that Ron give him back all the money: DR\$6 million in cash. The manager had no choice but to go to the safe and, instructed by Max, put the money in two bags, as Josh had asked him to.

However, Ron made the mistake of taking the bags directly to meet Josh at the bank's reception, in full view of all the customers who were still waiting in line, both for the manager's kidnapping to be solved and to be able to withdraw their money. When they saw that the kidnapper's threat had worked and Ron was leaving with all their money, the herd effect, combined with their fury at not receiving their money, unleashed a shockwave. The crowd surged through the peephole, easily subduing the security guards before they could react, and entered Morrigan's towards the packages in front of Max and Ron.

The Morrigan's Massacre

Holy shit. We're screwed! thought Max, watching the crowd rush towards them. Josh panicked and pulled out a revolver, standing in front of the bags full of money and pointing it at the crowd. The idiot had his finger on the trigger and his hand was shaking worse than a green stick, which was the perfect recipe for tragedy.

'Stop right there, that's my money. Get back!' he shouted, his gun shaking in his hands. But the crowd didn't give a damn and kept moving towards the bags.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

BANG! BANG!

Five fucking BANGS, but those weren't broken glass or shots fired into the air. In his fear and seeking to protect that damn money, Josh fired three times into the crowd; two straight shots, despite his shaking. One of the shots hit a man, while the other two wounded others. Max had to look again to believe it.

One of the bullets went straight past and almost hit him; Max needed all his reflexes as a policeman to avoid being hit and ended

up falling to the ground. When he got up, he looked ahead and saw the baby crying, lying in a pool of blood coming from the bullet wound to his mother's head. The bullet hadn't hit the child, but the mother's fall had made the child cry, without any awareness that he was in the pool of blood gushing from his dead mother. Enraged, Max ran up to Josh and wrestled with him, trying to get his gun away. People were divided between the panic of fleeing the confusion and avoiding further gunfire, while some idiots were still trying to loot the bags, left out during the fight between Max and Josh.

'Let me go, you idiot! I want my money!' said the criminal, struggling to push Max away from the gun.

'You'll be in a fucking cage after what you've done!' retorted Max, grabbing Josh and managing to throw his gun away. They continued to grapple with each other and, in a combined move, threw each other onto the bank counter. Max hit his head. His mind turned foggy, and he saw only a dark figure and a distinctive glow before blacking out.

Shopping Time

'Where am I?' Max asked, bewildered.

'In hospital, sir. You were hit by a car while trying to cross the road in a hurry, and we almost didn't manage to save you. But you're recovering now.'

Max panicked and tried to remove the bandages and the IV needle, and the nurse looked at him in panic, trying to hold his hands. After all, he wouldn't have enough Drex to cover that bill and he still had to find Dale and demand that he unlock the rest of his money.

His movement, however, was stopped by the nurse, who tried to prevent Max from removing the IV. She kept her hands tight to prevent the patient from getting loose.

‘Let me go! I need to get out of here!’ shouted Max, struggling to get free from the nurse.

‘Sir, calm down.’

‘I DON’T HAVE THE MONEY TO PAY FOR THIS HOSPITAL!
THE DAMN BANK HAS BLOCKED MY ENTIRE ACCOUNT!’

‘Don’t worry, sir. A young man has already paid for everything, and the funds have cleared. You were just sleeping and you can go home now.’

That last sentence left Max paralyzed in a state of utter confusion. Not having to pay a hospital bill is one of the rarest situations there is. He relaxed and looked around the room.

The nurse took this as a good sign and eased the pressure she was applying to hold Max down on the bed, then helped him up and gave him room to get dressed.

On the chair, Max found a newspaper dated five days ago, with a headline in big letters:

MORRIGAN’S MASSACRE SPARKS TERROR!
FIVE DEAD, INCLUDING TWO TRAMPLED.
BANK VAULT RANSACKED.

‘How long have I been out?’ Max asked the nurse.

‘Five days, sir. Good, because it’s chaos out there. What happened at Morrigan’s has sparked riots throughout the city.’

‘And the criminal in the bank? What happened to him?’

‘He was sent here with you, officer. He was discharged and then went to prison. A man called Kevin left this for him.’ The nurse handed Max a gun in a plastic bag: ‘evidence’.

Max resigned himself, thanked the nurse for her care, grabbed his coat, and left the hospital. His head still ached, but it was time to stock up and make sure his little treasure was safe.

SOURCE

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