

**T**he investment banking firm no longer resembled a triage center. There was no hint of turmoil, and it was almost as if Tim had imagined everything. The trappings appeared as peaceful as the day he first arrived to interview at Atterberry-Stanton. He couldn't believe it was less than two months since his move from New York—not even sixty days. Now, highly trained professionals had restored artificial order. But artificial was the only kind of order left in Tim's world. He understood that these scientific developments had altered human destiny forever.

One day, he suspected, somebody would release a biological killer on large numbers of innocent people, and that would mark the beginning of the end for mankind's naïve peace-of-mind. The gates of hell stood wide open.



The **Deadly**  
a novel  
**Trade**

**KEN MORRIS**

Bestselling author of financial thriller  
*Man in the Middle*



Baltimore, Maryland

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*As always, to my four sons, Colby, Tim, Scott,  
and Brett, and to my wife, Amelia.*



# Part I

a new life





## chapter 1

**H**ARDLY ANYONE—NOT EVEN COPS—DARED VISIT the discarded men and women living beneath this overpass in Southeast San Diego. But this late January day, a one-eyed man in a rotting Celica slowed to ten miles per hour and studied a guy leaning against a rusted chain link fence. Close enough to talk, he pulled over and got out. Before drawing attention to himself, he tugged a jacket-hood over his head, shadowing a heavily pockmarked face.

“Hey, man—” he said, trying to sound pleasant—“you wanna earn a few bucks?”

“Maybe,” the derelict said. “Who’re you?”

“Who am I?” he asked, stifling a laugh. “I’m Santa Claus, come to deliver a present.”

A blue stocking cap, long sleeves, and ghetto grime made it hard to tell if the bum was white or black.

“You got any relatives in this area?” the man asked.

“Unh-uh.” The drifter bowed, gazing at toes poking through shredded shoes.

“That mean no?”

“No.”

“You saying you don’t have anyone close to you here?”

“Nah.”

“Good. You have cancer or any other big disease?”

“No. Shakes sometimes.” Through toothless gums, he spoke with a lisp.

“Ever had a driver’s license?” the man asked, masking his disgust.

“No.”

“Any of these nothings know your real name?” The one-eyed man waved a hand, indicating the other vacant faces.

“Nah. They always try’n’ to steal my stuff.”

“Can you use a fifty?” The man held out a crisp bill.

“Fifty bucks?”

“Yeah.”

“I gotta kill someone?”

“No. See those two guys in the car?”

“Yeah.”

“We’re on our way to a big-deal party.”

“Party? Me?” The shreds of the vagrant’s plaid shirt flapped, exposing skin that confirmed he was a white guy.

“Fifty dollars now—” the man handed the recruit the bill—“fifty more later. You guys are part of the entertainment. I bet a few buddies I could find three guys could drink them under the table. They said ‘no way.’ Can you drink a bunch of a-holes under the table?”

“Fuckin-A. What kinda booze?”

“Everything. Beer. Wine. Whatever. You game?” The procurer smiled like this was an invitation to Mardi Gras.

“All I gotta do is drink?”

“You’re holding the money that says you’ll beat these guys into terminal hangover.”

“Man. I knew this was my lucky day. Gettin’ paid to drink. . .”

The one-eyed man bobbed in the direction of the car. “Now that we’ve got that settled, listen carefully. Your name is Sam. Those other two in the car, their names are also Sam. Everybody you meet tonight is named ‘Sam.’ Got it?”

Sam 3 nodded and broke into an unsteady path towards the car, as if improvising a jagged dance. The man nudged him into the backseat, where Sam 3 squeezed alongside Sams 1 and 2. All

three smelled of month-old body odor and Thunderbird.

The moment he engaged the engine, the man spun the air conditioning vents onto his face. Twenty-two minutes later, having listened to the Sams blather about their collective good luck, he drove around the back of a seemingly deserted, turquoise-tiled building.

Lapping in air, hoping to obliterate the stench, he herded the three men around back. When they reached the entrance, a doctor beckoned all four men inside a darkened hallway.

“You’re certain they meet our requirements?” The doctor had a Dutch accent.

“Positive,” One-Eye answered. “They got no dental records, since they got almost no teeth. No family. And they’re still breathin’.”

“Get them inside.”

“Hey, man,” the last Sam said, “this is a shit place for a party.”

“Don’t worry, my friend,” the man said. “I brought you here to give you food first. You’ll be able to drink more on a full stomach. Smart, uh?”

“I guess. I could use a little wine now—”

“Not yet. Gonna save it for the contest.”

“I can have a drink now and still drink lots later.”

“No. Eat. Then drink.” The man pushed all three recruits towards a far room with a thick door. Once he corralled them, he pulled a hankie from his pocket, wiped his hands, and tossed the cotton rag in the trash.

Sam 3 looked at the doctor’s stethoscope on the way into the room. “Why we got a doctor?” he said. “I hate doctors.”

“He’s here to save the lives of those you destroy in our little drinking game,” the one-eyed man said, wishing this third Sam would just shut up and do his job.

Sam 3 attempted an awkward Muhammad Ali shuffle, shadow-boxing the thin air. “They try and keep up with me,” he said, “they gonna need a doctor, or an undertaker.”

A moment later, inside the sealed room, the Sams gummed sweetened pabulum from plastic bowls. The one-eyed man

watched, grateful to be behind a two-way mirror. From overhead vents in the improvised cafeteria, tainted air filtered down. An hour later, the three homeless men began to pant and feel the first blisters. After that, the other symptoms progressed rapidly. Two hours later, the man heard the doctor mutter, "This is beyond our expectations."

Shortly before 2:00 AM, the one-eyed man re-entered the room, looking like a Halloween elephant in his gray plastic coat, boots, and gas mask. Having been required to videotape the nightmare, and having witnessed his recruits pound the wall and scream as their bodies decayed from within and without, he appreciated the precautions.

He bent over the first man, carefully tying a thick surgical mask around the nose and mouth. He repeated the process with the other two. "Prevent leakage," the doctor had explained to him.

"All that blabbing didn't get you jackshit, did it?" said One-Eye, tying the mask onto Sam 3.

One at a time, he looped a rope under their armpits, dragged the bodies outside, and stuffed each into a sealable bag before tossing them in the back of a pick-up truck.

*Job almost complete*, he realized. A brief drive along a darkened dirt road, the final drop-off, and then home. Ten thousand dollars didn't weigh much, he mused, but it sure felt good.