

### DEADLY DE MAYO

By Scott Richards



Hussong's Cantina was a swaying sea of the vertically unconscious. A writhing, drunken mass of the insane, their eyeballs floating in tequila. It was true Margarita madness. After all, this was the birthplace of the notorious concoction back in 1941. The history and the sheer volume consumed there made one feel it was your duty to hammer the agaves till the coyotes howled. Just a simple visit usually turned into a mind-expanding experience ending all too quickly in an unscheduled nap.

The curious mixture of lime juice, Cointreau and cooked hearts of the Maguey produce an almost mystical euphoria when administered in the proper dosage and duration. Most everyone there knew the routine, order a tray of twenty and relax.

Whiling away afternoons in the grip of the salt rimmed devils, life was always sunny and every one was your friend. The word "enough" lost translation once inside this historic archive of legendary excess. Real time stopped; only the moment existed, suspended in the inebriated now.

This was the scene mid-afternoon, moments before the unexpected and deadly occurred. The bar mob inside, swelled out to meet the burgeoning crowd outside and the chaos, began to unfold. Like warring tribes, the already drunk and the want to bees un-explainably clashing, causing the panic stricken Cantina to call in the troops.

They arrived in the form of several police cars filled to the brim with Cinco de Mayo weary officers. With a new and different enemy to face, the mob temporarily joined forces to repel all borders. The weapons of choice were a hundred, or so, beer bottles rained down like an avalanche on the police cars. A great cheer went up from the crowd for their juvenile display. But the childish howls were cut short when the doors flew open and the police emptied their guns into the crowd.

The barrage of 45s and .38 specials rang out like thunder, the air thick with smoke and whizzing lead. My mind was still trying to conceive the why when I heard a thud next to me like a metal pipe whacking a side of beef. At first the guy just looked at me, eyes wide open, searching my face for answers I didn't have. He stared, unblinking; momentarily suspended upright in the solidly packed throng. There was a blossoming patch of red radiating out from a dark hole in his chest, his mouth worked wordlessly as he slipped beneath the sea of panic.

Everything went blank as I struggled to cope with the cataclysmic insanity happening so quickly all around me. Time stood still and I froze with it, suspended in a slow motion world of disbelief and deadly silence. Then like a spark, time quickened, the reality around me accelerated like an old movie reel catching up, the cries of the crowd overwhelming loud upon their return. The trays of Ritas and their effects were quickly vanishing with the pistol smoke.

By now, the shots, still echoing, had sunk into even the most alcohol-soaked brains of the mob. After a very sobering moment, there was a frenzy of erratic scrambling and pushing attempting the impossible of getting out of their own way. Like lightening-spooked cattle, the crowd ran in panicked circles unable to manage a clear escape. Those still caught inside, boiled out of the bar like bees, their eyes wide with terror, stumbling over the unlucky.

As fast as it all happened, it was over. All that remained of that day in May was the smell of gunfire, broken glass and the low sobbing of the unfortunate as the waning smoke revealed the absurdity of those who had come to celebrate a foreign battle they didn't even understand.

