

Prologue

The scariest place in the world is also the quietest.

At least that's what Lieutenant Jeon Byung-Soon thought. He had been wandering through the slowly lightening dawn for about twenty minutes, the rest of his small platoon following behind. Every few feet, one of his men would pull at the wire fencing and another would prod the barbed wire above with the tip of his M4 assault rifle.

Beyond the fence was the most beautiful scenery the twenty-one-year-old Lieutenant had witnessed. He stopped and watched as a slow, creamy white fog drifted across the lowlands, filtering the sun's emerging morning light as it traced across tall grass and low shrubbery, its lazy entrails whispering around small trees and other outcroppings. Few if any humans had walked this land for over sixty years, leaving it to nature, which included rare and endangered tigers, amur leopards and Asiatic black bears. Lieutenant Jeon liked to stare out into the wilderness at times like this, just as night became day. He would let his eyes rest, eventually letting them defocus. It was a trick his father had taught him as a small child chasing crickets in the back yard of his home. Soon his eyes rested, focusing on nothing in particular but rather taking in the entire panoramic view as a whole. It was then that he could discern small movements in his peripheral vision, like a rare red-crowned crane stepping tentatively between the grasses, or a goat grazing lazily on the edge of a hill. And, of course, any stray humans attempting to cross the deserted landscape, seeking refuge on his side of reality.

A Seoul native, Lieutenant Jeon was patrol leader for a Republic of Korea platoon delegated with ensuring the Demilitarized Zone was secure and without breaches. Twice a day, Lieutenant Jeon and his camouflaged group of South Korean soldiers would trek alongside the eight-foot high fencing that marked the edge of the DMZ on the South Korean side. Two and a half miles distant

was similar fencing creating the official edge of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, better known as North Korea. Running the width in the center of the DMZ was the Military Demarcation Line (MDL), which was the actual political border running along the thirty-eighth parallel. According to the armistice established in 1953, troops from both sides were to retreat twenty-two hundred yards from the front line, thus creating this no-man's land in between.

There were a couple of villages within the border of the DMZ but not many people lived in either and those who did kept to the village proper for fear of being mistaken for the enemy by either side. Panmunjom, near the western coast, was home to the Joint Security Area (JSA) and was really the only place where humans actually congregated; mostly soldiers from both sides who spent hours staring at one another across a five-inch-wide concrete slab, which represented the border. Of late, there had been an abundance of tourists, which to Lieutenant Jeon's dismay, seemed to lessen the importance of what was actually happening here. Over a million soldiers were posted on either side, making the DMZ one of the world's most heavily fortified frontiers. All it would take is for one brazen tourist to skip over the concrete slab and it wouldn't be absurd to have that become the catalyst for starting World War III.

All Lieutenant Jeon wanted was to finish out the week and take leave to see his girlfriend less than 65 miles away in the South Korean capital and get away from the maddening solitude. He was an avid soccer player and the cacophony of shouting voices, thudding feet, and spirited after-game celebrations were like a magnet for his senses which had been numbed by the constant silence.

"Sir, we are ready to move on, Sir," Sergeant Park said, his Korean clipped and insistent.

Lieutenant Jeon's mind quickly returned to the task at hand.

He brought his eyes back into focus, grasped his rifle tighter and, pointing the muzzle toward the ground, nodded his head for his men to move out.

Twenty minutes later, the terrain became steeper and Jeon knew they were approaching the last of three observation towers on their route.

“Sergeant, take Corporal Sung and go ahead to the tower,” Jeon said, nodding toward the turn in the trail that he knew would lead them up the twenty steps built into the hill, ending at the tower that marked the turning point in their patrol. The Sergeant nodded and, together with the Corporal, disappeared around the corner.

Moments later, Lieutenant Jeon and the remainder of the platoon rounded the corner and saw the tower just ahead. Situated on a rise at the edge of a sloping cliff, it overlooked a lush green valley, dotted with small ponds and mini-lakes. They purposefully climbed the steps and were almost at the observation level when Sergeant Park gestured at him animatedly, his arms swinging quickly, his eyes questioning.

“Lieutenant, Bob is not there,” he said, his arms gesturing across the valley.

“What do you mean Sergeant?” Jeon said.

“I mean Bob has not emerged from the tower since we arrived Sir,” Park replied. “And I see no others from the platoon in the immediate vicinity either.”

“Let me see,” Jeon said, impatiently jumping up the final steps and grabbing the younger man’s binoculars.

He focused the lenses and gazed at the tower located approximately 1800 yards away, a little lower down the valley aside a clearing. He waited. And waited.

“You see, Sir?” Park said, his voice shrill.

“Perhaps he is taking a leak Sergeant,” Jeon said, smiling. The platoon saw the same North Korean soldier every day, his binoculars raised in a similar fashion, aimed directly at them. Since they didn’t know his name, they called him Bob.

“The others are not there either, Sir,” Park continued.

Jeon surveyed the opposing tower, moving his focus up and down the tower's steps, then side to side, taking in the landscape to each side of the tower. There was no movement whatsoever. He thought for a moment.

"Sergeant Park, take three men and follow the trail to the rise," Jeon pointed in the direction of a hill that was the highest in the vicinity. The patrol didn't normally go that far as that part of the trail was designated to another patrol, but it was the highest peak for several miles. "Take your binoculars and see if you can locate the platoon."

Park nodded and turned, then quickly turned back, remembering to salute. Then motioning three others, he bounded down the steps and raced along the fence toward the hill.

Lieutenant Jeon continued to scan the lush area surrounding the tower, resting on the small pond to its left, and the clearing where the North Korean troops usually sat smoking cigarettes and cleaning their rifles. Bob was usually the only one at the tower and he never left unless relieved. It had been his habit for the months of observation Jeon and his platoon had been witness to. Jeon didn't really think Bob had disappeared behind a tree to take a leak; he had never done that before. If a North Korean soldier abandoned his post during a patrol, Jeon knew the others in his platoon would report his actions and the man would be immediately disciplined.

So where the hell was he?

"Sir!" Park jumped up the steps to the tower, his breathing fast and heavy. "I scoured the entire area, Sir. There is no sign of any platoon. Not only that but we didn't see smoke from the Dyang frontier either."

Jeon stared at him. The Dyang frontier was a nickname the troops had given to a camp post just beyond the fencing on the Northern side. It was known to be a place where several platoons met daily and, over raging barrel fires, smoked, talked and generally wasted time before heading

back to or from their barren barracks deeper in territory. There was always a fire going, day and night, and as a result there was always a trail of smoke in the sky directly above its location.

“You are sure Sergeant Park?” the Lieutenant asked, knowing full well the Sergeant would not be mistaken.

“Yes Sir!” he confirmed. The other men were all looking at one another, blank expressions on their faces. Obviously they had no idea what to make of the mystery.

Neither did Lieutenant Jeon. In his two years patrolling the DMZ, this had never occurred before. He pulled at his lapel, searching for the communications switch that would connect him to his commanding officer in Panmunjeom.

Before he spoke into his tiny microphone, he stared one last time out into the wilderness, the green grasses glistening as the fog dissipated and the dawning sunlight filled in shadows throughout the lonesome scene. Silence pervaded, with only a light wind causing the low tree limbs to bristle.

Where the hell were all the Koreans?

Chapter One

The quiet was absolute. Outside the circle of light caused by the three-foot flames of the campfire, there was nothing but darkness. The high-canopied trees acted like insulation against the outside world and all they could see and hear were the orange and yellow flames and the crackling of the dried pine logs.

"If I threw a grenade in the middle of the fire, what would you do... dive for cover, or jump on top of the grenade?"

Frank Daro and Arthur Hart had been camping with their kids in upstate New York for nearly ten years. Pretty soon, the kids would be teens and have no desire to camp with them anymore. Then they'd need a fresh excuse to do what they were doing now: sitting around a roaring fire drinking beer, smoking expensive Cuban cigars, and discussing idiotic scenarios.

"I'm serious," Frank continued. "Would you jump on the fire, killing yourself but saving the kids, or would you save yourself and yell for the kids to do the same?"

"I'd kill you," Hart said.

"But I have the grenade."

"No, you just threw it in the fire."

Frank laughed. "You saying you wouldn't act on instinct? You've thought it through, right, I mean, something like this?"

"Frank, I've been your friend for what, a decade?" Hart said. He took a long swig of semi-cold beer and stared into the flames. "Of course I've thought about situations like that."

Frank's smile faded. "Ah, come on. Nothing's ever happened."

Hart's twelve-year-old son, Jamie, came out of the tent and ambled over to the fire. He grabbed a long stick he had previously carved into a point, slumped into one of the cheap beach chairs we'd lugged around for years and looked around for the marshmallows.

Frank tossed him one from the bag in his lap. It flew across the fire and landed in Jamie's lap.

Hart glanced at Frank. He grinned.

"You moron," Hart said.

Jamie snickered and stuck the marshmallow on the end of his stick.

An hour later, the three kids were in the tents playing a game of Pictionary, an old standby that always occupied them well once they realized there was no TV, no computer, no video games, and definitely no smartphones. Both fathers agreed there would be no electronic gadgets after 11pm. If they had their way, they wouldn't bring them at all. But then, neither Frank or Hart could live more than an hour without their Androids, and hypocrites they weren't.

Frank could keep a fire going for hours, not huge but steady; the kind of fire you could roast weenies and marshmallows on, and then when it got a bit chilly, could be turned into a raging inferno with the twist of a stick. That was Frank's job, keeping the flame going while they finished off the twelve-pack.

Hart's job was setting up camp, unpacking groceries, cooking, washing up, and putting kids to bed. For almost a decade nothing much had changed and--despite Hart's ex-wife insisting that it was a ridiculous relationship (there was irony in that somewhere) --neither Frank nor he felt it should. Recently, the kids had taken over some of the chores but then he felt useless and usually told them to go take a hike...literally. Frank would just laugh and pass him another beer.

They weren't really drunk all the time; that wouldn't be good parenting. But from Friday night to Sunday night they were never completely sober. A dull, summertime haze is what they called it. The kids didn't mind, or at least wouldn't mention it until they were in their thirties and in therapy. And they hadn't started drinking themselves yet so they weren't feeling appropriately guilty, again, according to Hart's ex. He figured within a decade, they'd be bringing a twenty-four pack to accommodate the whole crew.

"You talk to General Wade lately?" Frank asked.

"Not since your last get together," Hart answered.

"He wants to hold a gathering," Frank said. "I suggested your place."

"Of course you did," Hart said.

"You'll find this one particularly interesting," Frank continued. "And personally gratifying."

Hart tried to make out Frank's eyes across the fire but the flames were too intense. His face was a mask of smoke and flickering light.

"Don't bullshit me," Hart said. "You're spying on someone, and just need a place to do it."

"You're spoiling the surprise," Frank muttered.

Hart groaned. After a few moments of silence he said, "I'll set it up with Al. He'll know what to do."

"Yeah, Al's good.

They were silent for a while, both thinking about kids, parenting, and gatherings organized by high-ranking military acquaintances.

"Hey Frank?" Hart said. The other man looked up at him finally. He noticed Frank's eyes were a little glazed. "When they come for you, you'll let me know, right?"

Frank guffawed. Hart knew he hadn't taken him seriously.

"Oh, and by-the-way," he continued. "If anyone ever does throw a grenade into our campsite, I'll expect *you* to dive on it."

Chapter Two

The restaurant was called *The Artichoke Hart*, not because the specialty is artichokes but because of his name.

Since Art Hart was difficult to trill off the tongue he had grown up with monikers including *part fart* and, of course, *Art the Fart*. But sometime in his early teens a school friend had discovered

the prickly fruit--her parents ran a grocery store--and he became *Artichoke*. Since he couldn't find anything disparaging other than the vegetable being mysterious and a little hard to swallow--which he thought was kinda cool anyway--it stuck.

Some twenty years later, his name was now associated, in subdued neon, with a barely viable, upscale casual dining establishment that arguably offered some of the best jazz in the Baltimore, Maryland area. He felt time had rounded him, physically and mentally, but knew he'd become even more prickly. Staying in shape was getting harder as he aged but he still exercised most days and kept his mass under two hundred pounds. He grinned recalling that some patrons told him he looked like Chef Gordon Ramsey without the hair. But since running a restaurant was not something he had ever aspired to do for a living, he was forced to hire Al Rocca.

Al was a former colleague of Frank's, but unlike the roguish, tough-guy persona Frank exemplified, Al was short, round and cuddly, in a brown bear kind of way. He would make some career-obsessed woman a tremendous wife someday, Hart thought. He was also the best chef Hart had ever met, despite having absolutely zero formal training. He was organized as hell too, which was good, because although Hart dabbled in cooking, he couldn't balance books if his life depended on it. Lately, that had become evident every two weeks when he sat down in his office and emptied his bank account via payroll checks and supplier invoice payments.

Things weren't all bad though. There was always the assurance that should someone have too much to drink, Al can easily double as the bouncer. Because Al used to be employed by the CIA.

"Frank called Friday," Al said, without looking at Hart as he strode into the restaurant early Monday morning. "Wants to do another one of his gatherings."

"He only told me yesterday," Hart said. "At the campfire."

Al smiled. He was wrapping cutlery in cloth napkins at the bar. He still didn't look up.

"He wishes to spare no expense," Al said.

“That's because the taxpayers will be footing the bill,” Hart said, joining him at a barstool opposite. Hart knew Frank had already discussed his speakeasy with Al before laying it on him at the campsite. Telling him was a courtesy since Al did all the organizing and prepping. And besides, Frank knew Hart needed the income so why would he say no?

He grabbed a few recently washed cloth napkins and began folding them into triangles. “He’s also expecting special guests, no doubt.”

“No doubt,” Al said. He finally looked up. “He wants us to record it.”

“Of course he does.”

“He didn’t tell you anything?” Al asked.

“You know we never talk shop on campouts,” Hart answered. Actually, Frank and Hart rarely talk shop at all. The less Hart knew about his best friend’s life as Deputy Director of the CIA, the better.

“I’ve got a menu figured,” Al said. “You want to have a look?”

Hart cocked his head sideways and smiled.

“Okay, just checking,” he said, pulling away from the bar, leaving Hart to finish wrapping the cutlery. A moment later, he called from the kitchen.

“If you see Lazare, hold me back.”

“Only if it gets me out of dishes detail,” Hart yelled back. Al didn’t answer but Hart heard pots clanking loudly as they were being racked. Daniel Richard Lazare was the current CIA Director - Frank’s boss. According to Al, Lazare stood for everything he eventually had come to hate about the Company.

Al Rocca looked like an Italian bricklayer, complete with the receding hairline and bulky forearms. He would be the owner of the *Hart* if he had the money and jokes that he would have called it *The Rock*, but since his ex got most of his money, it hadn't been an option. Hart had

already solved his alimony problem by giving his ex the matrimonial home--Hart lived in a tiny apartment above the restaurant and strongly felt the kids shouldn't have to move--so most of his savings had gone into the first and last month's rent and a lot of leasehold improvements for the restaurant.

Al liked to cook...a lot. And he had read a couple of books on running a restaurant which made him more informed than Hart, so Hart made him Manager. He paid him enough to be a partner, though they'd never considered formalizing the arrangement. Al wasn't worried. Neither was Hart. They probably should be, Hart thought, since they never seemed to make a profit at the end of the month. But Al created some amazing dishes and Hart hired some awesome bands. It was fun and the customers loved it. So far, their heads were above water. They were dog paddling but had yet to drown.

During the week Al and the staff handled supper easily most of the time which is why Hart played sommelier at his favorite spot at the bar whiling away the weekday evenings watching videos of new bands he was considering booking for the weekends. Occasionally, he'd get up and make the rounds, conversing genially at patron's tables. On Monday evenings, once a month, the doors closed at 3pm and he cooked for the staff and their spouses. It was costly, stressful for him, and they lost the evening dinner income, but it was his way of saying thanks for their running a four-star restaurant with very little help from the owner.

Prior to the *Artichoke Hart*, Al and Hart both had challenging careers and after a while they had both lost their jovial attitudes, their zest for life... and their wives. The *Hart* was therapy for both of them.

Ten years after leaving their paying jobs and starting the restaurant, they'd got their lives back. Except for the jobs...oh, and the wives. In Al's case, he was still trying. In Hart's, he felt like she

had never really left. Spending time with his two children meant he had to stay in touch with her. He couldn't wait till they turned sixteen.

A moment later, Al came out to the bar again. "So who's the party for?" he asked.

"I'm sure General Wade has a new pet project," Hart said.

"Oh? Anything earth shattering?"

"He's Military Intelligence's liaison to the CIA," Hart said flatly. "Everything he does is earth shattering."

"So we can anticipate some of the postulators?" Al said

"If I know Frank, he's going to take advantage of the occasion and do a little schmoozing."

"I'd better get out the boxed wine, eh?"

Hart laughed. Frank arranged for important intelligence community functions to be held at the *Artichoke Hart* as often as he could, and he always wanted the booze to flow. Once any official festivities were done with and the reporters had left, everyone took advantage of the rare chance for field agents, analysts, politicians and influential business magnates to mingle. They drank, smoked cigars, and talked about things they really shouldn't be talking about in public.

Occasionally Frank would invite people he was investigating or researching.

Thus the reason he often had them record the events.

"I'll help at the bar on this one," Hart said. Al's eyes narrowed. Hart grinned. "Don't worry, the tapes will be running, as they say. But you know what else they say: people tell bartenders things they wouldn't tell their therapists. Listening to drunken spooks is a great way to find out what's going on in the world."

Al returned to the kitchen.

Chapter Three

Although the *Artichoke Hart* prided itself on being upscale casual, this was Baltimore, not DC; people tended to be a touch more relaxed. At Company events, however, everyone was in their finery, and, depending upon their age, typically emulated Don Johnson's *Sonny Crocket* or his more recent television persona, *Hap Briggs*.

“Nice turnout,” Hart said to Frank. He was dressed in a dark blue Armani pin stripe that Hart hadn’t seen him in since the last event.

“Hmmm”. They didn’t make eye contact. Frank was distracted, or focused, depending upon your understanding of Frank’s moods.

“Wine okay?”

He leered at Hart. “Just make sure there’s one of the good bottles under the counter where I can reach it.”

Hart smiled.

“Frank, I need you to introduce me to someone.” Director Lazare had snuck up behind them, grasped Frank’s elbow, and nudged him toward the center of the room where several strangers were gathered, talking animatedly. Lazare looked like an accountant, with receding hair, a paunch, and short, thick legs. He'd never been in the field and had ridden desk jobs in the quagmire of Washington legaldom before being appointed as top spook. He gave Hart a curt nod while leading Frank away. Lazare and Hart had a terse relationship, mostly because he didn’t like that the *Hart* wasn’t a CIA-owned facility.

Al came through the kitchen doors carrying fresh appetizers. When he saw Lazare standing with Frank and Hart, he quickly turned about and returned to the haven of the kitchen. The appetizers went back too.

Hart smiled again. Frank's events were so much fun.

Lazare had led Frank into the center of one gathering and was introducing him to the very attractive Latina woman General Wade had introduced during his initial informal speech at the beginning of the gathering. Hart guessed her to be in her late twenties. About five feet, seven inches, she had classic long black hair, a noticeably narrow waist and long legs, hidden well at the moment in a very stylish business pantsuit but accented stylishly with four-inch black heels. Her hair was tied back in a ponytail and for a moment Hart thought of other exotic young women he'd met over the years. If he hadn't heard General Wade call her one of America's brilliant young IT experts, he would have thought she was some Senator's aide.

Frank glanced at Hart who motioned with his head toward the table in the far corner, near the glass block wall that allowed a great deal of light into the room from DeQuincy Street. There were hidden microphones set in the centerpieces at every table but Hart could only engage one at a time. The recorders and ten monitors were in my office in the basement.

Frank could review the whole event from several angles afterwards, or he could sneak down to the office part way through and listen in on conversations he thought were important enough for eavesdropping.

Frank had paid for the entire system, including a security set-up that rivaled most banks. Bands often left their equipment overnight, so Hart liked the fact that the restaurant couldn't easily be broken into, though knowing Frank, the *Hart* could likely take a nuclear hit and come out of it intact.

"Who's the hottie?" Al said, returning with the appetizers and placing them on the table beside Hart.

"Lena Lopez Castillo," he said. "Wade says she's some kind of IT genius."

Al's one eyebrow rose questioningly. "In that outfit, she could be a Columbian drug runner and Wade would still be working the crowd with her.

"Wade can't be swayed by a good-looking woman," Hart said.

"Sure," said Al. "That's why his wife of thirty years left him and he has thousand-dollar call girls coming to his penthouse every weekend.

Hart laughed. According to the General, Ms. Lopez Castillo is about to unleash the next big thing," he said.

Al's head tilted sideways as he looked at Hart, then over at Ms. Lopez Castillo, then back to Hart.

"I'm not even going there," he said.

Hart laughed again. Al could be the life of the party. Too bad he couldn't be let loose on the crowd.

"So why do Latinas always have two or three last names, anyway?" he asked.

"Maybe she kept her ex-husband's name and added it to hers," Hart offered.

"She's divorced?" Al said, his eyes roaming her body up and down.

"Doesn't look old enough to have passed puberty to me," Hart said.

"Geez, you're getting old. Or blind," Al said.

"I think she's with the greaseball," Hart said, nodding his head toward the skinny man standing just behind Ms. Lopez Castillo. He looked to be a similar age as her but with his shiny greased hair pulled back in a ponytail he looked a little like Leonardo DiCaprio in that Four Musketeers remake. The ponytail looked odd when he and Ms. Lopez Castillo were close together, making him seem a little effeminate somehow since they both adorned ponies and both wore pants. Hart did register, however, how easy it was to tell the male from the female, thanks to the young Ms. Lopez Castillo's curves.

"Jay Losano," Hart said. "Her security chief and partner."

"Mafia?" Al asked.

"He grew up in Vegas, has Italian ancestors, and likes poker," Hart said. "Of course he's mafia."

"Seems he's got Lazare eating out of his armpits," Al said. "Wonder if the old codger knows he's gay."

"Who's gay?"

"Your mafia dude," Al said. "Look at the way he stands."

Hart looked over and thought perhaps Losano's way of leaning on one foot, arm on opposite hip, and chin raised did look a little less than manly but even DiCaprio had questionable posing moments.

"What an idiot," Al said, shaking his head as he sidled back to the kitchen to retrieve more food. Hart wasn't sure if he meant Losano, Lazare, or both.

Hart watched Losano scribble something on the back of a calling card and hand it to Frank. He held the pen with the two middle fingers of his right hand and handed the card over with a little flip of his wrist. Hart still wasn't sure. He courted the prerequisite permanent five o'clock shadow, and he dressed very well, tailor made right down to the tapered white gino shirt with subdued frilly designs embossed on the chest. Okay, on second thought, maybe he was gay.

Frank looked down at the card, grinned, and lifted his gaze up to Hart. He gestured toward the kitchen door. Hart nodded and headed for the stairs that lead to his downstairs office.

Chapter Four

The basement ran the full length of the restaurant and boasted nine-foot ceilings. Most of it was wide open and empty with floor to ceiling mirrors on one wall and an array of hand-held weights and other mandatory gym equipment along the opposite wall. Positioned around the open space were floor model punching bags, three treadmills, and in the center of the room a makeshift, floor level sparring ring with roped sides and matted flooring.

When Frank offered to put in his elite security and monitoring system, he had thrown the training dojang in as a bonus. Hart knew why he'd done that and he didn't object; it saved him buying a membership at one of the mediocre local martial arts clubs. On a fairly regular basis, field agents who weren't really comfortable in the glass-walled corporate environment at Langley would come out and spend a day at the *Hart*. They'd work out, have lunch, chat a bit with Al and Hart, then head back to the compound later in the afternoon. Hart sent the lunch bills to Frank and he promptly had them paid. Hart didn't charge for the gym time; after all, Frank had paid for it.

At the far end of the basement, Frank's construction crew had built a twenty-by-twenty-foot office complete with two-way mirror and built in wall-to-wall desk. They had incorporated shelves to house monitors and recording devices in such a way that only the front facades of each unit popped through faux walls into the office interior, just above the desk. It made for a clean, very modern, very Matrix-ish security room.

Hart loved it.

On a busy Saturday night, he could sit down here and aim cameras at any table to see which menu items were being enjoyed, which were being nibbled at, and, occasionally, eavesdrop on interesting conversations.

None of the staff had any idea they were able to do that since Al kept the office locked at all times.

The stories Hart could tell about politicians and their plans for dealing with competitors, peers, and sexy staffers. They all came to Baltimore thinking they were escaping prying eyes in Washington, only to end up in one of the CIA's best equipped offsite meeting places.

Monitors and cameras allowed him to see the dining room from three different angles: the kitchen, the main entrance, the small corner stage, and the outside parking lot. The remote microphones allowed Hart to listen in on any table conversation, chit-chat at the reception desk, and, of course, the band on stage...in full surround.

Hart slipped into the leather chair which faced the main computer screens allowing him to control where the camera/microphone combos focused. Eight smaller screens above the two main ones showed other scenes available elsewhere in the restaurant. He could alternate from one to another with the flip of a switch.

It wasn't too difficult to find Frank as he was the only one staring at the center of a table. Hart pressed the X key on the keyboard that was connected to a small laser light in the centerpiece of the table. It flashed on and off quickly.

Frank nodded. He then placed the card Losano had given to him flat on the table top. He stepped back slightly and gestured with his head again.

Hart zoomed in on the card. The autofocus lagged slightly but when it caught up he was able to read the handwritten words: *We do not wish to be recorded.*

Hart leaned back in his chair. Lucky guess. There's no way Losano or the girl could know there were recording devices in the restaurant. He likely assumed there would be cameras somewhere with so many high-up Company people in attendance. Hart smiled. He couldn't possibly know how sophisticated the system really was.