

**The Case of the Death Dealer
An Alexander Steele Investigation**

By Lawrence Johnson Sr.

Parts:

One, Two and Three

* * * * *

PUBLISHED BY:

Lawrence Johnson Sr.

The Case of the Death Dealer
An Alexander Steele Investigation

Copyright © 2010 Lawrence Johnson Sr.

Pusherman

The cool evening breeze didn't seem to faze the crowd of music lovers as they tapped their feet and bobbed their heads to the Latin rhythms of music legend Carlos Santana. The open air venue on the west side in Philly's Fairmount Park was the perfect night out for Alexander Steele and his longtime girlfriend Shakia.

Shakia ignored the occasional pungent scent of marijuana wafting past her nose, feeling the chill in the air as she tugged on her powder blue shawl and snuggled up closer to Steele. An interior designer by trade Shakia, dressed in royal blue pants and a white top she could have easily been mistaken for a model. When the concert came to a close Steele, the six foot browned skin ex-detective looked around as he stroked the corners of his mustache wondering if getting front row seats was worth the hassle of dealing with the crowds after the show.

As the two made their way through the crowd to the parking lot Shakia gently held on to his arm while the couple discussed the concert. Steele made a habit of parking close to the brightly lit parking lot lights in case an old enemy or two should be lurking about. It didn't take long for him to notice the small white piece of paper tucked under the driver's windshield of his midnight blue Jag.

He unfolded the paper and read the note.

Steele meet me on the corner of 57th and Master at 11:00 tonight. It's a matter of life or death, signed Trench.

Shakia folded her arms and looked toward the stars in the night sky, it was clear that Steele's usually calm girlfriend was upset by the note. "Oh hell no, what does that low life bastard want now?" Shakia was known for her kindness, she shared a mutual respect with just about everyone she knew but when it came to Trench respect went out the window and Shakia never held back. "He's bad news baby. Everything he touches turns to ..."

Steele placed his index over her lips. When she noticed that more than a few people in the parking lot were watching she dropped her arms to her side and let out a sigh. Early on in their relationship she learned that Steele was a confident man who always made his own decisions. Not only did she respect him for that she admired his confidence.

Steele read the letter again aloud, “A matter of life and death,” he said.

Shakia pranced around in a small circle, you could hear her heels clicking against the parking lot’s asphalt, “Life or death alright,” she muttered, “yeah probably his.”

Steele checked his watch, 10:45. ‘How did he know I was here?’ he wondered. He explained to his Shakia that lives may be at stake; he didn’t want that to be on his conscience.

It was exactly 11:00 p.m. when Steele rounded the corner and parked his car in front of the corner lot on Master Street. A few seconds later a black Escalade pulled up behind him.

Steele patted Shakia on the hand, “I won’t be long baby.”

Shakia watched silently as he got out of the car. She always joked with her girlfriends about his looks. She would say, he’s like Denzel and Billy Dee combined, but she was always quick to add Billy Dee when he was in his prime.

Steele stood face to face with the man he had grown up with and had learned to despise. The stocky built man wore a dark blue jogging suite, his hair was cut close. His mustache seemed to grow wider when he smiled at Steele.

When Trench reached out to shake hands the small diamond studded earring in his left ear glistened through the darkness. “Alexander Steele in the flesh, man I wasn’t sure if you were gonna show.”

Steele pretended not to see Trench’s outstretched hand, “Okay Trench, what’s up? Why am I here?”

Trench stretched out his arms and looked around. “I got people around here, people

who look out for me. I got wind of something the other day. There's a shit storm headed this way." Trench looked around again. "You sure you want to do this out here. I mean you got a reputation to protect and all, I didn't think you wanted to be seen with me that's why I left you the note."

The men sat inside the Escalade to continue their conversation while Trench explained. "There's a guy, a big time drug dealer named Fat Daddy. Him and some chemist got into a thing in Florida about six months ago about manufacturing a large quantity of pills, probably Ecstasy. Anyway it ended badly and Fat Daddy had his sister offed," he motioned as if he were using a knife to cut his throat. Trench nodded, "That's right; they found her floating in one of the back bays in Miami. According to what I've been told this chemist swore that he would get revenge for his sister's murder. Well it took a while but he is about to get even. He's created this odorless, poison to spray on Fat Daddy's next coke cocaine shipment. If it's true, and if it works, folks from Philly to Maryland are gonna start dropping dead within 48 hours after using the drug. Not only will it put the fat man out of business. The friends and family of those dead junkies will hunt him down and kill him like a rabid dog."

Steele reached for the door handle, "You don't need me, you need to go to the cops with this."

Trench grabbed Steele by the arm but when Steele gave him a nasty look Trench quickly let go. "Come on Steele, just here me out. I can't go to the cops. They'll ask me where I got my info from and besides you know how I feel about cops."

Steele took his hand off of the handle and eased back into the seat. "Okay, where did you get this hot news flash from?"

Trench gripped the steering wheel with both hands and stared out of the window

before answering. “I got it from my cousin. Remember I told you I got out of the drug business, well, somebody once said that ‘Nature abhors a vacuum.’ My cousin stepped into that vacuum; if I go to the cops they will bring him in, that’s why I need you. What’s your fee?”

Steele looked out of the window then back at Trench, “Man you know that I am retired.”

Trench threw his hands in the air. “Okay, fine, who cares if a couple of hundred junkies die?”

Steele got out of the car and slammed the door. “Oh don’t give me that crap. For years you ruined thousands of people’s lives selling them drugs and all of a sudden you decided to grow a conscience?”

Trench got out of the car and walked around to the sidewalk to face Steele. “I’m doing it for my cousin, he’s blood. If all of those people die Fat Daddy will be dead, out of business and when the heat dies down John will take over his turf giving him control of half of the city. I want him out of the drug business not further in.”

Steele held up his hand, “Wait, do you mean Little John? Little John is your cousin?”

Trench nodded and waived his hand, “Yeah but don’t call him that. He’s got a big rep now and a bad temper to go with it and besides he ain’t so little anymore.”

Trench walked around to the back of his SUV, when he opened it Steele saw that it was loaded with all kinds of knock offs. LeBron James, Nikes, Aviator sunglasses, Prada, Sean John clothes, even a couple of pairs of Manolo Blahnik shoes. Trench fished through the sea of merchandise before pulling out a yellow folder.

“Here,” he handed it to Steele. “I printed this out from the internet.”

Steele held it to the light and thumbed through the dozen or so pages of stories about missing drug addicts whose deaths were of an undetermined nature.

Trench pointed to one of the papers, “You see that? From the Bronx in New York to North Philly it’s always the same, unknown causes. It’s odorless, colorless, and tasteless. He’s been experimenting on those dudes and now he’s ready.” Trench held up both hands as if he were surrendering, “I tell you what, why don’t you sleep on it and give me an answer in the morning?” He reached inside the SUV and picked up two pairs of the sunglasses, “Here, for you and your lady, no charge.” Steele reluctantly accepted the glasses and agreed to give Trench an answer tomorrow.

After dropping Shakia off Steele went home and tried to get some sleep but his conscience wouldn’t cooperate. His thoughts drifted back to grade school and how the kids used to joke about how God forgot to give Trench a heart. How do you do business with a guy who robbed a nun at age fourteen?

Two hours later Steele found himself driving through the roughest neighborhood in the city. No one in their right mind would come down here alone in the daytime and most cops wouldn’t risk traveling through this part of town late at night but some how on this dark and quiet night Alexander Steele seemed to be drawn to it. There was movement in shadows of the blocks and blocks of abandon buildings where it was commonplace to see hundreds of crack vials strewn about the sidewalk. The movement came from the remnants of lives that once had promising futures until somehow it all went wrong, somehow dreams were shattered and goals were forgotten. This was a microcosm of the millions who chose unwisely at life’s fork in the road. These were the forgotten whose primary concern was not what to wear to work tomorrow morning but how to survive another day.

Up until now Steele had never given it much thought. Every now and then a homeless

drug addict would be bold or desperate enough to step out of the shadows and approach his car asking for money. At that moment the cold stark reality had set in, Steele thought to himself that could have been me, or one of my friends. Deep down inside he knew that he could not just sit idly by and let them all perish.

The Inner Sanctum Crew

Alexander Steele arrived at his upscale night club bright and early the next morning. When Club Inner Sanctum opened two years ago Steele enlisted Shakia to help him design the club's interior. As a professional decorator Shakia combined eclectic elements with Steele's taste and melded it with elegant nightspots of the fifties and sixties. The club's décor was made up of various shades of dark reds, blues, medium grays, and a touch of polished steel that gave the club style and originality. He was very proud of what he had accomplished. Steele had created an environment where people of all races, backgrounds, and social status could hang out and be themselves.

His friend and club manager who lives above Club Inner Sanctum always had a pot of fresh brewed coffee waiting for Steele every morning. "Morning Sugar Bear, did you have any problems here last night?"

Sugar Bear was a large dark complected heavyset man with a friendly smile. He shook his head as he polished one of the glasses behind the bar, "No boss, it was business as usual. How was the concert? Looks like you got home pretty late."

Steele nodded his head, it was good. If there were anyone who hated Trench more than Steele's girlfriend it was his three best friends Sugar Bear, Stan, and Roger aka the Philosopher. Steele motioned for his friend to meet him in the back. The last booth on the left in the rear of the club is where Steele spent most of his time. During the day he conducts business but during club hours it was all about socializing with friends and

customers. Sugar Bear and Steele took their coffee to the booth.

The club manager listened intently to Steele's story about last night's encounter with Trench. He politely waited until the story was over before rearing back and proclaiming, "Well I guess there's going to be a lotta of dead junkies cause I know you aren't going to help that dude again. He's been bad news since we were kids and he's never gonna change."

Sugar Bear's response was expected, they all knew that Trench was rotten to the core but this wasn't about him.

Steele sipped the steaming hot coffee and looked at Sugar Bear. "I'm taking the case."

Sugar Bear's eyes widened, "You what! You do know who we are talking about don't you? Besides aren't you retired?"

Steele was unfazed by his friend's emotional outburst. He sat back in the booth and corrected "Sugar Bear; you called them dead junkies, wrong, they are people. Oh Trench will be the one who pays me alright but I ain't doing it for him. He's a lying bastard but there is one thing that he said that was true. I can't stand by and let all of those people die."

Later that morning Steele drove down to North Philly to an area known by the locals as the Badlands to meet Trench in his office hidden behind a restaurant aptly named the Greasy Spoon. It was a bright sunny day outside but it was clear from the grime on the front window that the sun's attempt to brighten the inside was a lost cause.

From the moment Steele walked in the door it was evident that whoever was responsible for cleaning the place had taken the last five years off. The dingy red and white sign in the corner read special, 2 eggs, hash browns, and coffee \$1.50. Knowing that it

was a front for Trench's illegal activities in the back Steele shook his head as he entered.

He murmured, "They should change the sign to leave your taste buds at the door."

The half dozen zombie-like patrons didn't bother to look up when he walked in. The decor was early seventies with duck taped stools but the balding; cigarette smoking man in front of the grill was defiantly a product of the fifties.

Never taking the cigarette from his mouth the sweaty cook turned around holding a spatula in one hand and plate of eggs and hash browns in the other. "What can I get you young blood?"

Steele chuckled as he thought, 'Coffee, hash browns and eggs \$1.50. Cigarette ashes? No charge. Does that come with a side of Pepto Bismol? This place would be a health inspector's dream if one was ever bold enough to come through those doors.'

Steele took notice of the bulge near the cook's waistline under his dirty apron. 'That ain't no fanny pack, he thought, this guy was definitely packing heat.' The cook was doing double duty as Trench's first line of defense; too bad he didn't do windows.'

Steele glanced at the plate of food and waived him off, "No thanks." He pointed to the dark brown door all the way in the back. The man set the plate on the counter in front of the customer, hanging directly over head was a swirly strip of fly paper that had done its job all too well.

"You Steele?" he asked.

When Steele nodded the cook reached under the counter and buzzed him in. Steele passed by an assortment of boxes containing counterfeit merchandise from Trench's suppliers. They lined the walls of his office in the back of the rundown greasy spoon diner. He counted three body guards plus the hired help.

Trench had changed into a blue jeans and a short sleeved olive green shirt, he motioned for one of the men to clear a box of Gucci handbags from the chair so that his guest could sit down. Trench sat behind a large oak desk filled with papers and lit up a cigarette. “Thanks for coming Steele. I know that it was hard...”

Steele waived him off. “Let’s cut the bull crap. I don’t like you and if the truth be told you never really liked me either so there’s no point in us acting like we are best buddies okay? I want one hundred grand, half up front and the rest later so get rid of your boys here and tell me who this crazy ass doctor is.”

Once Trench’s men left the room he told Steele about Doctor D. and how the once respected doctor picked up the gambling habit that forced him into making the illegal drug Ecstasy to support that habit. “One day he got carless and screwed up the mix, a couple of college students got sick at a frat party and one of them went into convolutions and died. That’s how he got the name Dr. Death or Dr. D for short.”

Steele nodded, “So when is Fat Daddy’s next shipment due?”

Trench took another drag from his cigarette and blew the smoke high in the air as he shook his head, “I don’t know. I don’t even know where he keeps it stashed but Dr. D knows. Fat Daddy distributes his drugs out of 7 or 8 hoagie shops around town but his one legitimate business is his Steakhouse on Germantown Avenue.”

Steele was a bit miffed; “You mean you want me to stop this Dr. D from poisoning Fat Daddy’s drug shipment but you don’t know when it’s coming or where it’s going?” Steele leaned back in his chair; “Well let’s see should I use my crystal ball or should I break out my Ouija board? How do you know any of this is true?”

Trench waived the cigarette around as he got up from the chair and walked around to

the front of the desk. “When I got out of the business my crew disbanded. One of my guys ended up working for the good doctor. He called me because he has people in Philly that will most definitely die if this tainted stuff hits the streets.” Trench noticed that a copy of the wall street journal was sitting on his desk in plain view. Alex Steele didn’t think much about it until Trench tried to cover it with a magazine. He handed Steele a piece of paper. “Call this guy,” he instructed. “His name is Panama; he drives a cab at 30th Street Station. A while back Panama did time with Fat Daddy and the Dr. that’s where the two meet.” Trench chuckled, “Strange, ain’t it? Prison is supposed to rehabilitate your ass instead it just makes you a better criminal.” He opened the safe and handed Steele the \$50,000 then reached inside the top drawer and gave Steele a picture of Dr. D. “That’s the best I can do man.”

Twenty minutes later Steele was back on Broad Street headed to his club. He saw no point in telling Trench what they both already knew. There was a strong possibility that the poisonous drugs could already be on the street. There was no time to waste. As he reached for his cell phone Steele caught a glimpse of a blue Chrysler in his rear view mirror. It was the same car that was parked up the street from the toxic restaurant. He was being tailed and he had a pretty good idea of who it was.

Steele pulled into a side street and confronted the two men. “Can I help you gentlemen?”

Both guys were muscular with dark tight fitting shirts; they were taller and heavier than Steele. Judging from the size and thickness of their necks they could have been the poster boys for steroid use. The middle aged men looked like bouncers you would find in side a sleazy strip joint.

The bigger of the two stroked his coarse black beard, “What business do you have with Trench?” he said in a husky voice.

Steele laughed in his face. “You must work for Little John.”

The second man stepped forward and waived his finger at Steele. “Man, you don’t want to say that to his face. The last guy who did needed \$8,000 worth of dental work.”

Steele chuckled, “Okay, fine, I get it. Tell Johnny that Trench is a client of mine and if he wants to know what’s going on he needs to talk to his cousin.”

As Steele turned to walk away the man with the beard grabbed him on his shoulder. Steele whirled around and stuck his gun in the man’s gut. The man froze instantly once he felt the tip of the cold steel barrel plunging into his abs.

Steele was no longer smiling, he stared directly into the thugs eyes and said “Look; I don’t have time for this, talk to Trench.” Then he aimed his weapon in the mans face for a few seconds just to make sure they both got the point before backing away and getting into his car to drive off.

It was just before the evening rush hour when Steele caught up with Panama, outside the train station on the outskirts of center city. Dressed in light pants and a light palm tree shirt Panama was a small olive completed man with a mustache and goatee.

“Alexander Steele,” he tipped his straw hat and shook Steele’s hand. “Trench told me that you would be calling. As the cabbies around him picked up passengers exiting from 30th Street Panama told Steele about how he met the Fat Man and Dr. Death in prison. “We were all cellmates,” he recalled. Panama looked to the ground; “I knew that one day there would be bad blood between them, I could feel it, even back then. There were four of us, there was a guy named Eddie in our cell. He became Fat Daddy’s right hand man. Did Trench tell you that Eddie has gone missing?”

Steele shook his head, “No, when did this happen?” he asked.

Panama thought for a while and said “About two weeks ago. Yeah, I remember because it was the day after my wife’s birthday.”

The cabbie looked at Steele and pointed to his head, “You see Dr. D is muy loco; he was crazy even then. If you ask me I think that he used too much of his own product, if you get my drift. Even in jail he still couldn’t get that dam monkey off his back. The Fat Man’s got issues too, he likes to gamble, a real high roller, he’s also superstitious and that makes him very paranoid my friend. He’s into astrology and all that supernatural shit. Every month he goes to the Borgata down the shore. It’s a real shame; do you know he went to Morehouse College?” Panama motioned as if he was washing his hands. “I don’t run with that crowd no more. I got a wife and kid to support.”

Panama’s information was useful, the two talked until he had a fare. Hey Steele, gracias, the man smiled at the two crisp twenty dollar bills Steele had given him and waived to Steele as he was leaving.

Steele now had something to work with but there was the nagging thought that all of his efforts would be for naught if the doctor had already put his deadly plan into motion. Back at Club Inner Sanctum the evening crowd had already begun to trickle in. Members of the club ran the gambit from politicians to construction workers, pro athlete’s lawyers and others made up the cast of regulars. Steele has always exuded a quiet confidence, a coolness that everyone notices whenever he walks into a room. As he greeted the costumers at the bar with hugs and handshakes he noticed a few of his friends waiting for him.

Its common knowledge that no one sits at Steele’s back booth unless they are invited however that rule doesn’t apply to his two oldest friends Stan and Roger who was know around Philly as the Philosopher. With an IQ of 165 and a knack for writing inspirational

quotes Roger's personality was more like a prankster than an intellectual. Dressed in his usual attire of blue jeans and grey tee shirt he waived to Steele just in case he hadn't spotted them. His somber looking buddies had been concerned about him since earlier in the day when they received his call.

Glass Houses

After the usual greetings Stan the tallest of the three men decided to get right to it. "So Steele, I see you're back in the game, huh?"

Steele nodded, "Not by choice brother."

The usual jovial Philosopher nodded at Stan, adjusted his glasses and gave Steele a serious look. "Well you know how it is, you called and here we are. I know you couldn't say much on the phone so what's the deal and how can we help?"

Steele ordered drinks for his friends and a Pepsi for himself. He explained the entire situation to the guys and waited for their response. While the Philosopher sipped his grey goose Steele slid the picture of Doctor D across the table.

When the Philosopher saw the photo he nearly spilled his drink. "Hey, I know that guy; we went to Morehouse together in Atlanta."

Steele smiled, "I figured you would, that's why I asked you to come. Dig up anything you can on him, no matter how small."

The Philosopher shook his head, "That was ages ago and we really didn't hang that much. Back then he was a pill freak, I see he's graduated from more than just college."

Stan briefly looked at the picture then tossed it on to the table as he spoke. "Yeah, he graduated alright, from popping pills to mass murder, what's the world coming to? Steele,

you want me to check this dude out?”

“Not him,” said Steele, “I want you to work your computer magic on the king pin Fat Daddy.” Steele gave Stan a small piece of paper with Fat Daddy’s real name on it.

Stan nodded, “I’m on it, by this time tomorrow I’ll be able to tell you what kind of toothpaste this guy uses.”

As Stan and Steele discussed his plan the Philosopher took out his pen and pulled out a small pad then began writing. He had heard about Sugar Bear’s lack of sympathy concerning the looming mass murder of hundreds. On his way out of the door he handed Sugar Bear the paper and simply walked out. It read, ‘Glass Houses - Life is like a finger print, each one is unique. Until you can duplicate my life’s experiences, until you have felt my joy and pain, my victories, and failures you are not qualified to judge me, my decisions, or my lifestyle.’

Sugar Bear thought for a moment smiled then tucked the paper inside his shirt pocket. At the back of the club Stan noticed that something was not quite right with his friend. “Hey man, I know you’re supposed to be retired and all but it’s time to embrace who you really are.” Stan stood with outstretched arms as he looked around the club, “This is Alexander Steele’s playground he proclaimed, it’s a beautiful place,” he sat down across from his friend and continued, “but it’s not who your really are.” Stan opened his hand and put it on his chest, “Deep down inside you are a private detective, a damn good one, that’s what you were born to do.”

Stan spotted a familiar face near the front of the club and waived him over. Kenny was a tall dark haired man with a deep dark tan wearing an expensive beige suit. He made his way over with his beautiful girlfriend in tow.

Stan made the introductions; afterwards Kenny said “It’s a real pleasure to meet you

Mr. Steele.”

After a bit of small talk the happy couple went over to the dance floor. Stan immediately turned to Steele and asked, “What do you think of Kenny?”

Steele was dumfounded by the question, “What do I think?” he repeated. “He’s not my type,” joked Steele. “Okay, I get it, you want me to read this guy. I see a happy couple out having a good time.”

“No,” Stan shook his head, “that’s what everyone else sees but what can you tell me about Kenny?”

Steele decided to humor his friend. “Okay, fine, let’s start with the easy part, judging from the white ring around his tanned finger it’s obvious that he has recently taken off his wedding ring and the fact that he has a deep tan and his girlfriend doesn’t probably means that he probably took the wife on vacation instead of the hot girlfriend.”

Stan was not easily impressed, “How do you know he didn’t get the tan from working outside in the sun? Maybe in construction?”

Steele burst out into laughter, “With those soft hands” he replied, “He’s more likely to be holding a doctor’s scalpel all day than a jack hammer and you don’t buy suits like that on a construction worker’s salary. That’s a custom made suit, it didn’t come off the rack.”

Stan had little choice than to concede that Steele’s observations were right. “So is that it Steele? Is that all you got?”

Steele laughed again, “Man, what do you expect? I only talked to the guy for five minutes. Okay, he’s not originally from Philly, if you listen closely you could hear a slight Boston accent, he’s left handed and Jewish, how’s that?”

Stan slapped his hand on the table in amazement, “Damn, how do you do it?”

Steele leaned forward, “He threads his belt from right to left, and he has a little Star of David on the chain around his neck.”

The detective/club owner was feeling antsy, it was like he knew something was about to happen but he could not put his finger on it. It was the calm before the storm. He left the club early and drove past Fat Daddy’s Steakhouse. The bright red and white sign above the restaurant was impressive. Next to the letters that read Fat Daddy’s Steak house was a picture of a large juicy prime rib steak. Steele was about to turn his car off when he noticed a dark green pickup truck without a license plate pull up in front of the restaurant. One of the two men that got out of the truck looked at a red sedan parked on the same side of the street as Steele.

The men dressed in dark clothes lowered the back of the pick up and struggled to drag something large and heavy on to the sidewalk directly at the entrance of the Steak house. Three middle aged women who had just left the restaurant screamed in horror once they realized that the object was a dead man’s corpse.

The men in the truck did not appear to be fazed by the screams; one of the men watched patiently as his partner poured a bucket of dark green slimy seaweed over the dead man’s body then walked over and tossed a note that read ‘I’m coming for you!’

The screams from the women brought curious customers running out of the restaurant to see what the commotion was about. Seconds after the truck sped. The sound of its squealing tires was drowned out by a tremendous boom coming from inside the restaurant.

The scene erupted into total chaos; windows were shattered by the force of the explosion while those closest to the blast were thrown to the ground. Others were screaming

and yelling as they scrambled to drag their friends and loved ones out of harms way while the flames flickered inside of what was Fat Daddy's Steakhouse.

In all of the confusion Steele noticed that the red sedan was speeding off. Realizing that there was nothing that he could do to save those who died in the blast he decided to pursue the man in the red Dodge Charger.

The sounds of the fire alarms combined with the wail sirens and squealing tires got Steele's adrenaline going. He knew that the driver must have set off the blast by remote control. Steele chased the car down back streets through red lights across parking lots and gas stations but the driver knew how to handle a car. The chase came to an end when the driver turned the corner into a small street and rammed into a car that was parked in the middle of the street. The driver was killed instantly.

Steele sat on a nearby step waiting for the police, he thought to himself, 'The doctor is making his move; it won't be long before the other shoe drops and many more people die.'

The next morning started out the same as most others, thousands of unhappy people trudging off to spend eight hours or more in a place that felt more like punishment than a job. Steele sat in his car and checked out the dozen or so people standing at the bus stop. He was there to stake out Fat Daddy's hoagie shop across the street.

Dressed in black Dockers and a loose fitting blue shirt Steele wanted to be comfortable for the long day ahead. He needed to know for sure if Dr. D. had already made his move. If he had all hell would break out across the city and since his hoagie shop was drug central it would be ground zero.

As he watched and waited he thought about Stan's clever little stunt last night. The little exhibition that he goaded him into was just what Steele needed to crystallize the

reasons why he would need to step out of the comfort of his cushy club to do what few other men in this city could. Steele had solved tough cases all over the world, it was a dangerous job, a job where he faced death more times than he cared to remember, a job that got him shot not once but twice, but Stan was right, he was good at it.

By noon the temperature had climbed to an uncomfortable, muggy eighty nine degrees and there was still nothing out of the ordinary going on across the street. Stan's call was a welcome distraction from the mundane comings and goings of the few customers that wandered in and out of the hoagie shop. Most of the customers were apparently absent minded and paranoid since very few came out with any food but always looked around before entering and leaving the store.

Stan and Steele talked for a while then agreed to meet at seven that evening. Any private detective would tell you that without a doubt spending long hours on a stakeout was the most boring part of the job. At six thirty he decided to call it a day. Steele loved the energy that came from the busy neighborhood street in the summertime. The radio was set to WDAS and the AC was on full blast but on the outside it was hot and sticky.

Steele turned down the radio and lowered the window a bit so that he could enjoy the wafting aroma's coming from the neighborhood barbeque grills and listen to the children's laughter as they played in the fire hydrants. As he made his way uptown he could hear music blaring from the teenager's radio as they hung out on the front steps while the old heads up the street shot craps probably with crooked dice.

Showtime in the inner city came to an abrupt halt when Steele noticed that he was being followed for the second time in two days. Knowing the car behind him would follow he drove until he reached a gas station in a fairly isolated area. Steele no longer needed to wonder if the poisoned drugs were in play, if they had been there would be no need to have

him followed. Pretending not to notice the car Steele who always dressed in light button down shirt that make it easy to conceal his weapon casually walked into the gas station and pre paid for his gas, he also brought a plastic red cigarette lighter.

When he returned to his car he was not surprised to see a muscular man with a full black beard sitting comfortably on the hood of his jaguar while another played with a large sharp ice pick.

Trying to avoid another confrontation Steele tried to reason with the men, “Look I told your other friends to talk to Trench.”

The man with the white tee shirt had two tattoos a bulldog on his arm and a broken diagonal link chain on the side of his neck. The tattooed man laughed and said, “Why would we wanna do that? Fat Daddy wants to know why you’re watching his place.”

Realizing his mistake Steele quickly shifted to his second plan, attack. When he took off his gas cap and began pumping gas into his car the bearded thug on the hood looked confused but Steele’s lack of fear angered the tattooed man with the ice pick. As the young Asian gas station owner watched from inside to see what would happen next in an act of frustration the thug in the white T shirt plunged the ice pick into Steele’s front tire.

The hissing sound distracted his partner just long enough for Steele pull the hose out of the car and douse him with gasoline. Steele had taken him by surprise; he knew that he needed to act fast. Steele was at the top of his game, he quickly snatch the gasoline soaked man off of the hood and twisted his arm behind his back. The sharp searing pains forced the bearded thug up on his toes winching and screaming in agony.

The man with the ice pick was very angry; he snarled as he ran toward Steele yelling obscenities. Suddenly, as if some invisible force was holding him back the ice pick wheedling

thug stopped dead in his tracks. Steele was holding the cigarette lighter close to the gasoline soaked thug's shirt. The strong odor of gas filled the air. He moved it side to side taunting the guy with the weapon. In an instant the tables had turned and Steele was in control.

“One more step,” he yelled, “take one more step and I’ll light your boy up like a roman candle on the forth of July! Now lose the dam ice pick asshole!”

Come back next Thursday for the conclusion titled: **The Death Dealer 7/29**

www.AlexanderSteele.com