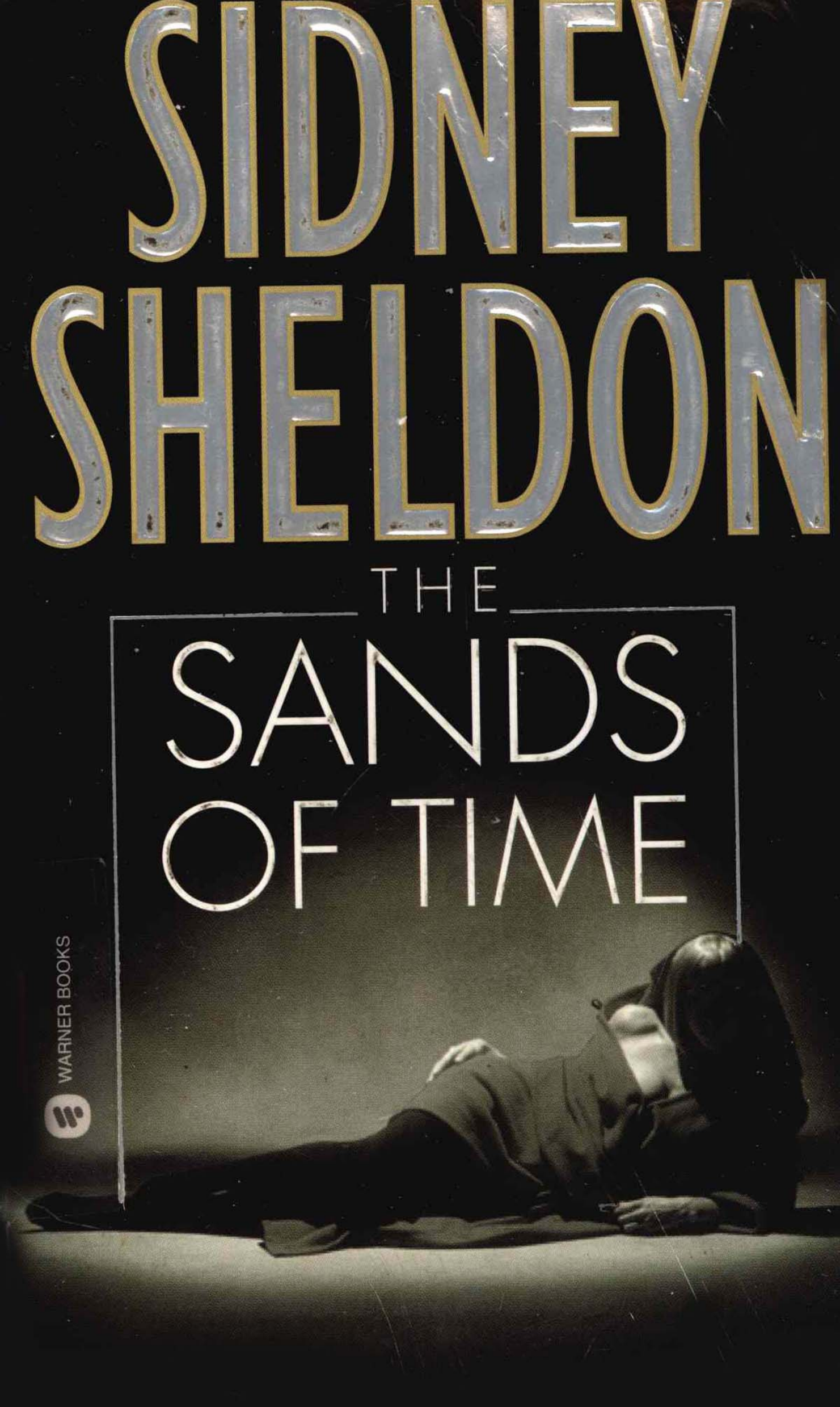
SIDNEY SHELDON

THE SANDS OF TIME



WARNER BOOKS

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WARNER BOOKS EDITION

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WHAT THE CRITICS SAY ABOUT THE NOVELS OF SIDNEY SHELDON

"Clearly the best first mystery novel of the year."

—***New York Times*** **on**
The Naked Face

"Powerful!"

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"The best single book on the entertainment business I have ever read.

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more...

"Arresting, exotic, confident, knowledgeable, mysterious, romantic, and embracing all else, it is saturated with promise. Robustly told and pleasurably consumed."

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"Sheldon is a master storyteller."

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Master of the Game

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"A master storyteller at the top of his game."
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"Woven together with such gusto that Mr. Sheldon propels his saga to a satisfying climax."
—***New York Times Book Review*** on
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"Vintage Sheldon...the kind of book that keeps readers turning pages."
—***People*** on ***Memories of Midnight***

The Incomparable Sidney Sheldon

Best known today for his exciting blockbuster novels, Sidney Sheldon is the author of *The Sky is Falling*, *Tell Me Your Dreams*, *The Best Laid Plans*, *Morning, Noon & Night*, *Nothing Lasts Forever*, *The Stars Shine Down*, *The Doomsday Conspiracy*, *Memories of Midnight*, *The Sands of Time*, *Windmills of the Gods*, *If Tomorrow Comes*, *Master of the Game*, *Rage of Angels*, *Bloodline*, *A Stranger in the Mirror*, and *The Other Side of Midnight*. Almost all have been number-one international bestsellers. His first book, *The Naked Face*, was acclaimed by the *New York Times* as "the best first mystery of the year" and received an Edgar Award. Most of his novels have become major feature films or TV miniseries, and there are more than 300 million copies of his books in print throughout the world.

Before he became a novelist, Sidney Sheldon had already won a Tony Award for Broadway's *Redhead* and an Academy Award for *The Bachelor and the Bobby Soxer*. He has written the screenplays for twenty-three motion pictures, including *Easter Parade* (with Judy Garland) and *Annie Get Your Gun*. In addition, he penned six other Broadway hits and created three long-running television series, including *Hart to Hart* and *I Dream of Jeannie*, which he also produced. A writer who has delighted millions with his award-winning plays, movies, novels, and television shows, Sidney Sheldon reigns as one of the most popular storytellers of all time.

To learn more about this book and author, visit www.sidneysheldon.com, and sign up for the Sidney Sheldon eNewsletter at www.twbookmark.com.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This is a work of fiction. And yet . . .

The romantic land of flamenco and Don Quixote and exotic-looking señoritas with tortoiseshell combs in their hair is also the land of Torquemada, the Spanish Inquisition, and one of the bloodiest civil wars in history. More than half a million people lost their lives in the battles for power between the Republicans and the rebel Nationalists in Spain. In 1936, between February and June, 269 political murders were committed, and the Nationalists executed Republicans at the rate of a thousand a month, with no mourning permitted. One hundred sixty churches were burned to the ground, and nuns were removed forcibly from convents, "as though," wrote Duc de Saint-Simon of an earlier conflict between the Spanish government and the Church, "they were whores in a bawdy house."

Newspaper offices were sacked and strikes and riots were endemic throughout the land. The Civil War ended in a victory for the Nationalists under Franco, and following his death, Spain became a monarchy.

The Civil War, which lasted from 1936 to 1939, may be officially over, but the two Spains that fought it have never been reconciled. Today another war continues to rage in Spain, the guerrilla war fought by the Basques to regain the autonomy they had won under the Republic and lost under the Franco regime. The war is being fought with bombs, bank robberies to finance the bombs, assassinations, and riots.

When a member of ETA, a Basque guerrilla underground group, died in a Madrid hospital after being tortured by the police, the nationwide riots that followed led to the resignation of the director general of Spain's police force, five security chiefs, and two hundred senior police officers.

In 1986, in Barcelona, the Basques publicly burned the Spanish flag, and in Pamplona thousands fled in fear, when Basque Nationalists clashed with police in a series of mutinies that eventually spread across Spain and threatened the stability of the government. The paramilitary police retaliated by going on a rampage, firing at random at homes and shops of the Basques. The terrorism that goes on is more violent than ever.

This is a work of fiction. And yet . . .

CHAPTER
One

Pamplona, Spain ***1976***

If the plan goes wrong, we will all die. He went over it again in his mind for the last time, probing, testing, searching for flaws. He could find none. The plan was daring, and it called for careful, split-second timing. If it worked, it would be a spectacular feat, worthy of the great El Cid. If it failed . . .

Well, the time for worrying is past, Jaime Miró thought philosophically. *It's time for action.*

Jaime Miró was a legend, a hero to the Basque people and anathema to the Spanish government. He was six feet tall, with a strong, intelligent face, a muscular body, and brooding dark eyes. Witnesses tended to describe him as taller than he was, darker than he was, fiercer than he was. He was a complex man, a realist who understood the enormous odds against him, a romantic ready to die for what he believed in.

Pamplona was a town gone mad. It was the final morning of the running of the bulls, the Fiesta de San Fermín, the annual celebration held from July 7 to July 14. Thirty thousand visitors had swarmed into the city from all over the world. Some had come merely to watch the dangerous bull-running spectacle, others to prove their manhood by taking part in it, running in front of the charging beasts. All the hotel rooms had long since been reserved, and university students from Navarre had bedded down in doorways, bank lobbies, automobiles, the public square, and even the streets and sidewalks of the town.

The tourists packed the cafés and hotels, watching the noisy, colorful parades of papier-mâché *gigantes*, and listening to the music of the marching bands. Members of the parade wore violet cloaks, with hoods of either green, garnet, or gold. Flowing through the streets, the processions looked like rivers of rainbows. Exploding firecrackers running along the poles and wires of the tramways added to the noise and general confusion.

The crowd had come to attend the evening bullfights, but the most spectacular event was the *encierro*—the early-morning running of the bulls that would fight later in the day.

The previous night, at ten minutes before midnight in the darkened streets of the lower part of town, the bulls had been driven from the *corrales de gas*, the reception pens, to run across the river over a bridge to the corral at the bottom of Calle Santo Domingo, where they were kept for the night. On this morning they would be turned loose to run along the narrow Calle Santo Domingo, penned in the street by wooden barricades at each corner. When they reached the end of the street they would run into the corrals

at the Plaza de Hemingway, where they would be held until the afternoon bullfight.

From midnight until six A.M., the visitors stayed awake, drinking and singing and making love, too excited to sleep. Those who would be participating in the running of the bulls wore the red scarves of San Fermín around their throats.

At a quarter to six in the morning, bands started to circulate through the streets, playing the stirring music of Navarre. At seven o'clock sharp, a rocket flew into the air to signal that the gates of the corral had been opened. The crowd was filled with feverish anticipation. Moments later a second rocket went up to warn the town that the bulls were running.

What followed was an unforgettable spectacle. First came the sound. It started as a faint, distant ripple on the wind, almost imperceptible, and then it grew louder and louder until it became an explosion of pounding hooves, and suddenly bursting into view appeared six oxen and six enormous bulls. Each weighing fifteen hundred pounds, they charged down the Calle Santo Domingo like deadly express trains. Inside the wooden barricades that had been placed at each intersecting street corner were hundreds of eager, nervous young men who intended to prove their bravery by facing the maddened animals.

The bulls raced down from the far end of the street, past the Calle Estrafeta and the Calle de Javier, past *farmacias* and clothing stores and fruit markets, toward the Plaza de Hemingway, and there were cries of "*Olé*" from the frenzied crowd. As the animals charged nearer, there was a mad scramble to escape the sharp horns and lethal hooves. The sudden reality of approaching death made

some of the participants run for the safety of doorways and fire escapes. These men were taunted by shouts of "¡*Cobardon*!"—coward. The few who stumbled and fell in the path of the bulls were quickly hauled to safety.

A small boy and his grandfather were standing behind the barricades, both breathless with the excitement of the spectacle taking place only a few feet from them.

"Look at them!" the old man exclaimed. "¡*Magnífico*!"

The little boy shuddered. "*Tengo miedo, Abuelo*. I'm afraid."

The old man put his arm around the boy. "*Sí*, Manolo. It is frightening. But wonderful, too. I once ran with the bulls. There's nothing like it. You test yourself against death, and it makes you feel like a man."

As a rule, it took two minutes for the animals to gallop the nine hundred yards along the Calle Santo Domingo to the arena, and the moment the bulls were safely in the corral, a third rocket was sent into the air. On this day, the third rocket did not go off, for an incident occurred that had never before happened in Pamplona's four-hundred-year history of the running of the bulls.

As the animals raced down the narrow street, half a dozen men dressed in the colorful costumes of the *feria* shifted the wooden barricades, and the bulls found themselves forced off the restricted street and turned loose into the heart of the city. What had a moment before been a happy celebration instantly turned into a nightmare. The frenzied beasts charged into the stunned onlookers. The young boy and his grandfather were among the first to die, knocked down and trampled by the charging bulls. Vicious horns sliced into a baby carriage, killing an infant and sending its mother down to the ground to be crushed. Death

was in the air everywhere. The animals crashed into helpless bystanders, knocking down women and children, plunging their long, deadly horns into pedestrians, food stands, statues, sweeping aside everything unlucky enough to be in their path. People screamed in terror, desperately fighting to get out of the way of the lethal behemoths.

A bright red truck suddenly appeared in the path of the bulls, and they turned and charged toward it, down the Calle de Estrella, the street that led to the *cárcel*—Pamplona's prison.

The *cárcel* is a forbidding-looking two-story stone building with heavily barred windows. There are turrets at each of its four corners, and the red-and-yellow Spanish flag flies over its door. A stone gate leads to a small courtyard. The second floor of the building consists of a row of cells that holds prisoners condemned to die.

Inside the prison, a heavyset guard in the uniform of the Policía Armada was leading a priest garbed in plain black robes along the second-floor corridor. The policeman carried a submachine gun.

Noting the questioning look in the priest's eye at the sight of the weapon, the guard said, "One can't be too careful here, Father. We have the scum of the earth on this floor."

The guard directed the priest to walk through a metal detector very much like those used at airports.

"I'm sorry, Father, but the rules—"

"Of course, my son."

As the priest passed through the security portal, a shrieking siren cut through the corridor. The guard instinctively tightened his grip on his weapon.

The priest turned and smiled back at the guard.

"My mistake," he said as he removed a heavy metal cross that hung from his neck on a silver chain and handed it to the guard. This time as he passed through, the machine was silent. The guard handed the cross back to the priest and the two continued their journey deeper into the bowels of the prison.

The stench in the corridor near the cells was overpowering.

The guard was in a philosophical mood. "You know, you're wasting your time here, Father. These animals have no souls to save."

"Still, we must try, my son."

The guard shook his head. "I tell you, the gates of hell are waiting to welcome both of them."

The priest looked at the guard in surprise. "Both of them? I was told there were three who needed confession."

The guard shrugged. "We saved you some time. Zamora died in the infirmary this morning. Heart attack."

The men had reached the two farthest cells.

"Here we are, Father."

The guard unlocked a door and stepped cautiously back as the priest entered the cell. The guard then locked the door and stood in the corridor, alert for any sign of trouble.

The priest went to the figure lying on the dirty prison cot. "Your name, my son?"

"Ricardo Mellado."

The priest stared down at him. It was difficult to tell what the man looked like. His face was swollen and raw. His eyes were almost shut. Through thick lips the prisoner said, "I'm glad you were able to come, Father."

The priest replied, "Your salvation is the Church's duty, my son."

"They are going to hang me this morning?"

The priest patted his shoulder gently. "You have been sentenced to die by the garrote."

Ricardo Mellado stared up at him. "No!"

"I'm sorry. The orders were given by the prime minister himself."

The priest then placed his hand on the prisoner's head and intoned: "*Dime tus pecados . . .*"

Ricardo Mellado said, "I have sinned greatly in thought, word, and deed, and I repent all my sins with all my heart."

"*Ruego a nuestro Padre celestial por la salvación de tu alma. En el nombre del Padre, del Hijo y del Espíritu Santo . . .*"

The guard listening outside the cell thought to himself: *What a stupid waste of time. God will spit in that one's eye.*

The priest was finished. "*Adios*, my son. May God receive your soul in peace."

The priest moved over to the cell door and the guard unlocked it, then stepped back, keeping his gun aimed at the prisoner. When the door was locked again, the guard moved to the adjoining cell and opened the door.

"He's all yours, Father."

The priest stepped into the second cell. The man inside had also been badly beaten. The priest looked at him a long moment. "What is your name, my son?"

"Felix Carpio." He was a husky, bearded man with a fresh, livid scar on his cheek that the beard failed to conceal. "I'm not afraid to die, Father."

"That is well, my son. In the end none of us is spared."

As the priest listened to Carpio's confession, waves of distant sound, at first muffled, then growing louder, began

to reverberate through the building. It was the thunder of pounding hooves and the screams of the running mob. The guard listened, startled. The sounds were rapidly moving closer.

"You'd better hurry, Father. Something peculiar is happening outside."

"I'm finished."

The guard quickly unlocked the cell door. The priest stepped out into the corridor and the guard locked the door behind him. There was the sound of a loud crash from the front of the prison. The guard turned to peer out the narrow, barred window.

"What the hell was that noise?"

The priest said, "It sounds as though someone wishes an audience with us. May I borrow that?"

"Borrow what?"

"Your weapon, *por favor*."

As the priest spoke, he stepped close to the guard. He silently removed the top of the large cross that hung around his neck, revealing a long, wicked-looking stiletto. In one lightning move he plunged the knife into the guard's chest.

"You see, my son," he said as he pulled the submachine gun from the dying guard's hands, "God and I decided that you no longer have need of this weapon. *In Nomine Pater*," Jaime Miró said, piously crossing himself.

The guard slumped to the cement floor. Jaime Miró took the keys from the body and swiftly opened the two cell doors. The sounds from the street were getting louder.

"Let's move," Jaime commanded.

Ricardo Mellado picked up the machine gun. "You make a damned good priest. You almost convinced me." He tried to smile with his swollen mouth.