

**A Jack Sloan Novel**

**THE  
PLACEBO  
EFFECT**



**LARRY SEELEY**

# **The Placebo Effect**

**A Jack Sloan Novel**

By  
**Larry Seeley**



**Strategic Book Publishing & Rights Co.**

Copyright 2014

All rights reserved – Larry Seeley

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, or by any information storage retrieval system, without the permission, in writing, from the publisher.

Strategic Book Publishing and Rights Co.  
12620 FM 1960, Suite A4-507  
Houston, TX 77065  
[www.sbpra.com](http://www.sbpra.com)

ISBN: 978-1-63135-749-7

**Read the other Novels in the Jack Sloan Border  
Wars Trilogy  
by Larry Seeley:  
*Gypsies, Tramps, and Thieves,*  
*17 Degrees North &  
The Bridge of the Americas***

**What the critics say about *Gypsies, Tramps, and Thieves*:**

***The SantaFean*:** Larry Seeley, a budding novelist stuck out in the middle of nowhere in a tiny New Mexico canyon, has one vivid imagination. I ordered a copy of "Gypsies, Tramps and Thieves" because I liked the sound of the title. Little did I realize that I would be spending my entire Friday night and Saturday afternoon stuck in a chair while biting my nails and waiting for the last shoe to drop. "When are we going to have another Jack Sloan novel? I want it NOW!"

***Glenda Bixler, Reviewers Roundup*:** Would you like to meet a really cool dude?...Jack Sloan [in]...*Gypsies, Tramps and Thieves*... readers..this book is fun to read, exciting, romantic in a way-cool, different way! It is unique with a style of writing that is thoroughly enjoyable--sorta laid-back, yet get up and MOVE!...a *must-read*. Larry Seeley is a new author, but I'm already anxiously awaiting the sequel. You'll be sorry if you miss this one! I loved it!

***Stephen Tremp*:**...I highly recommend *Gypsies, Tramps, and Thieves*. It's not...for your kids. But if you enjoy a great story of murder, revenge, and redemption with terrific character development, you'll love this book

***Susi Perry*:** "*Gypsies, Tramps and Thieves*" by Larry Seeley is a great read...very entertaining...looking forward to the sequel. **Action builds until you can't put it down!**

***Betty Gelean, Reviewer for Nighthead, Vancouver, BC*:**...action...identities/characters, plotting, good guys and bad guys, each trying to out-think the other. I rarely set it [the book] down.

***Redda Booky for the San Luis Obispo Book Review*:** I loved this book. Great adventure, mystery and setting. The characters come alive. The story is intricately woven and held my interest from the first sentence to the last. If this is a debut novel, I can't even imagine what the next will be like. I urge my readers to get this book and read it. You won't be sorry. Larry Seeley is the next James Lee Burke.

**Brandon Christiansen:** ... story line...is excellent. It keeps you guessing...It is so great, it could be a movie. I can't wait for the second book to come out!

**E. Scanlon:** Gypsies, Tramps and Thieves by Larry Seeley; He is one of those rare writers of an intriguing story that gets you involved and makes you want to travel the road of Jack Sloan. I found it hard to put it down once I started, can't wait for the next in the series.

**Steve Godofsky:**...It's not often I feel a book is a real page-turner for me but Gypsy's, Tramps, and Thieves got me. 340 pages went down in 2 reading sessions...and left me wishing there was more. And I hope from Mr. Seeley, there is!

**Niecy Strong:**...intriguing, captivating and totally engrossing. As I read the book, I find myself thinking what a great movie it would make. The characters are well-developed, the descriptions of the scenery are descriptive but not laborious and lengthy. Jack Sloan is smart, heroic, vulnerable and decisive. I want more Jack Sloan.

**Dirty Frank, Manassas Review:**...an instant con-classic. I want to be Jack Sloan. From beginning to end the cast of seedy characters keeps your guts tied in knots and wanting more. Fast paced and well written, this is a story that you don't want to end. Jack Sloan needs to make another appearance... and soon.

**Raine, New Zealand Book Reviews:**...a thrilling novel...talk about sitting on the edge of your seat...romance, drugs, alcohol, violence and murder. All the elements are there for a great thriller, including a showdown at the end. Can't tell you any more without ruining the twists and turns but if you enjoy a good thriller, read this book. Congratulations Larry Seeley.

**Sara Howard, author of Apollo Engineer on the Saturn V:** A story set in the southwest. This involves Indian Casinos and some really bad guys. Everybody shoots or kills everybody else. Every character is a thief, murderer or a bad guy. The women are truly tramps. If you like foul language, sexual scenes and murder on a grand scale, this book is for you.

**Marty Shaw for Reader Views:**...a wild ride...providing an intensity that makes the book a definite page-turner. ...compelling and realistic characters, combined with a tightly woven plot, had me reading as fast as I could...fans of action, mystery, and suspense will not regret reading "Gypsies, Tramps, and Thieves," and just might see me standing in line with them when the sequel, "17 Degrees North," comes out.

## **And what do critics say about 17 Degrees North?**

**Stephen Tremp:**I love the Jack Sloan character, who I liken to Jack Reacher from the Lee Child series...steel in his back and velvet in his heart...not a book to buy for your kids. But if you like gritty straight up action, relentless killers, and well developed characters, then 17 Degrees and Gypsies, Tramps, and Thieves are books I highly recommend. Download them both and read them in order. Thanks Larry for the second book and I hope there is a third one soon!

**S.P. Washburn, to the Washington Post:**I thoroughly enjoy Larry's books. A great read, from the characters to the landscape, keeps you turning page after page!

**Kay Hoffman, to the Lexington Herald-Reader:** ...a new adventure--even more gripping and more thrilling...the reader is taken on a wild journey between Juarez and Northern New Mexico that is fraught with danger... a book that's a lot of fun to read because Jack and Darlene do things most of us would flee from. Go Jack. I can't wait to read the next book in his trilogy.

**pinky mo, Goodreads, Firstreads,** This book isn't just a page turner - it grabs you by the throat with both hands and hurls you through the pages at over 100 MPH. This is one E-Ticket ride that you won't want to pass up! ...relevant to our times...scary...a classic story of good versus evil... This book is not for the faint of heart...evil people do evil things, and the only way to stop them sometimes is to take them out...my advice to all of you is buy the book, you can't go wrong, it's worth every penny and second you'll spend on it. Happy Reading!

**Linda Hedrik, Peachy's Ya-Ya and Sweet Potato Book Club:** I couldn't put it down...strong women characters, and main character Jack Sloan is tough but with his tender side - just like a real person. The pace is fast and even...from one character to the next seamlessly, each part segueing well. I look forward to more from Mr. Seeley, and more about Jack Sloan. It was a riveting book and I thoroughly enjoyed it.

**Vashti Watston, Guest Reviewer for the Miami Herald:** A great sequel! The characters are colorful and the storyline is exciting. Perfect follow-up to Gypsies, Tramps and Thieves. It's got it all and is a perfect summer read.

**Redda Booky, San Luis Obispo Reader Reviews:** Larry Seeley, in his stunningly crafted second shoot-'em-up, 17 Degrees North, brings Jack Sloan back with a vengeance...Jack's love of justice and loyalty to his wife and friends counterpoint his brushes with no-good, murderous Ponzi schemers, Mexican cartel heavies, and crooked government officials in a tapestry of love, betrayal and murder. I couldn't put this book down. Could not recommend it more highly.

**Glenda A Bixler "Glenda" (Pennsylvania)The Vine Voice:** [Larry] Seeley has his own style of writing that I have come to appreciate...[he] has done it again! A thriller that keeps the suspense high and the action ongoing! Jack is a James Bond type, but more laid-back...Darlene is the perfect cool lady that not only stands behind her man, but gets along side of him when the fighting and shooting starts!...characters are worth getting to know...including the assassin.

## What the critics say about the Bridge of the Americas:

***Dirty Frank, Manassas Review:*** I reviewed Seeley's debut novel, *Gypsies, Tramps, and Thieves*, and loved it. In his latest, *The Bridge of the Americas*, he shows off his writing chops. *Gypsies* is engrossing and exciting; *Bridge* is all that, but it's evident it's not a first book. Literate and appealing, the prose flows like Hemingway from one character and scene to another. Point of view is one hundred percent accurate, and it makes this an easy-to-read pulse pounder. Buy it, you won't regret it.

***Manchester Guardian Reviewer:*** This is an exciting roller coaster of a thriller ride, which gripped me from the first few pages. I couldn't put down. We have an interesting group of characters with a likeable hero in Jack Sloan and baddies that aren't always bad. The characters have depth and the writing is high quality. I particularly liked the scenes with Mattie who has no compunction about one minute having sex with men or women and the next minute killing them. The author introduces several strands to the story and then brings them all together in a thrilling climax. There are a couple of great twists. I didn't realise when I started reading that this is the third book in a trilogy. At no time did I feel I was missing anything by not having read the first two books, which I now plan to read. I strongly recommend this book to all lovers of thrillers.

***Kay Hoffman, to the Lexington Herald-Reader:*** I have read ... Larry Seeley's trilogy and I like... them. His third in the series, *The Bridge to the Americas*, takes us to the Mexican drug cartels, Native Reservations, and casino gambling. These can be rough places, but put a murder in the middle and then bring on Jack Sloan and you've got a great story. Jack hasn't lost his noble side, but he has those dark places too, and Darlene is able and, most of all, willing. We see Mattie again and she hasn't lost her edge. All in all, this is a good read; in fact, I couldn't put it down. Waiting for Seeley's next thriller!!!

***Saniko:*** This gripping crime thriller is told in the first-person of main character, casino businessman and tough guy Jack Sloan, and alternates with third-person accounts from other characters who play key roles in the story. Author Larry Seeley intrigues us with a colorful cast of scheming personalities and weaves their interactions with skill as he drives the major plot and subplots of the novel forward. The dialogue is crisp, the characters are cold and calculating... and the setting...remote and threatening. Short chapters, which often include cliffhanger endings, heighten the suspense and create a mood of apprehension, such that it had me turning the pages far into the night. If you love contemporary crime stories with a "Wild West" influence and a theme that integrates political corruption, drug cartels, and con men (and in this case, "con women"), add this one to your reading list.

***Redda Booky, San Luis Obispo Reader Reviews:*** In his latest chilling caper, Jack Sloan and his steely-knuckled wife, Darlene, reunite with a few old nemeses and some loyal friends in Larry Seeley's third installment of the *Border Wars Trilogy*. While Jack seems to have lost his taste for both the hard life and killing, he can't help but take us along on a riveting ride through danger, intrigue, torture, and murder. I recommend this novel to first-time Sloan readers and long-time devotees. It's a great read that is hard to put down - especially when Mattie is in the picture.

***Megan Schacht:*** Action-packed detective fiction that's charming protagonist will appeal to all readers. You will want to read all three of these novels to share in Jack's misadventures with murderers, sex addicts and con men.

***Vashti Watson, Guest Reviewer for the Miami Herald:*** A terrific third installment to a must-read trilogy! An exciting story starring Jack Sloan and his cohorts that was full of excitement, intrigue, violence and sex...what more could you want in a novel?! The twists and turns are masterful and the storyline couldn't be better. I definitely recommend--I couldn't stop reading.

***Sheherizade2U:*** The Bridge of the Americas: A Jack Sloan Novel, is book three of Larry Seeley's Border Wars Trilogy. A young girl is murdered on a dark highway, the winter of 1995. Fifteen years later, the crime sets in motion a string of events that find Jack Sloan and his wife Darlene caught in the middle between the dangerous world of the drug wars in the Southwestern United States, and illegal activities surrounding the development of a new casino on a tribal land. Jack...is smart, heroic, intuitive, vulnerable and decisive. Seeley knows how to develop his characters in plots that thicken & thicken. This is a fast paced novel with an entertaining cast. The story is intriguing and totally captivating. It is filled with violence, sex and a strong dose of the reality surrounding cartels and the war on drugs with all of its related violence that we hear about daily in the news. Seeley's writing style is unique and thoroughly enjoyable. I wouldn't be surprised if this trilogy is made into a movie. Bridge of the Americas is exciting, fun to read and a definite buy for your holidays!

## **Dedication**

To KT, my partner in crime.

## **Acknowledgments**

Carol Martin, reader and editor, Rich Fahle and his staff for their tireless efforts, Beth Bruno, Editor, and my four children: Larry, Sharon, David, and Max.

## Table of Contents

Prologue
Chapter 1 Delmont and Buddy
Chapter 2 Jack Sloan
Chapter 3 Ricky
Chapter 4 <i>El-Coco</i>
Chapter 5 Delmont and Buddy go to Vegas
Chapter 6 Loretta
Chapter 7 Majyk
Chapter 8 Coco-Man
Chapter 9 Hector I
Chapter 10 Please Fill Out the Job App
Chapter 11 Jack
Chapter 12 Something Don't Smell Right
Chapter 13 Date Night
Chapter 14 Jack and Darlene
Chapter 15 Sandoval
Chapter 16 And, If Elected, I Promise...
Chapter 17 Señor
Chapter 18 Hector II
Chapter 19 True Detective
Chapter 20 Care for a Dip in the Pool?
Chapter 21 A Pain in the Ass
Chapter 22 The Boss
Chapter 23 Born Killer
Chapter 24 Home Invasion
Chapter 25 Darlene
Chapter 26 Second Chance
Chapter 27 Time Slips Away
Chapter 28 Patrick Rigbey
Chapter 29 Kill Shot
Chapter 30 Hector Returns
Chapter 31 The Res
Chapter 32 The Compound
Chapter 33 Purly Gates
Chapter 34 The Assassin
Chapter 35 Purly Scores Big
Chapter 36 Chief Bear
Chapter 37 Hector and Jack
Chapter 38 MIA
Chapter 39 Will Cowdry
Chapter 40 Rescue
Chapter 41 Down the Highway
Chapter 42 South of the Border

Chapter 43 The Pecos River Queen  
Chapter 44 Home  
Chapter 45 Bringing in the Sheaves  
Chapter 46 On the Road Again  
Chapter 47 Flagstaff  
Chapter 48 Coco  
Chapter 49 Felder Blackspot  
Chapter 50 I Seen Fire  
Chapter 51 Back to the Res  
Chapter 52 But I Ain't Seen No Rain  
Chapter 53 Enrique  
Chapter 54 Hector Quintana

## The Placebo Effect.

According to the American Heritage Dictionary: The beneficial effect in a patient following a particular treatment that arises from the patient's expectations concerning the treatment rather than from the treatment itself.

## Prologue

*There was blood on the saddle and blood all around,  
And a great big puddle of blood on the ground.  
A cowboy lay in it all covered with gore,  
And he never will ride any broncos no more\**

*\*Words and music by Everett Cheetham Circa 1934  
Performed by Tex Ritter*

Four men sat around a kitchen table in a small adobe situated in the barrancas about ten miles west of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains and not far from Santa Fe proper. A single hanging light illuminated the room. They spoke in quiet voices, English mixed with Spanish, two with strong Mexican accents. A deck of cards lay in the middle of the table, like they wanted someone to pick them up and shuffle.

The youngest-looking, a man about thirty-five, sprinkled white powder on a small mirror and snorted it through a half-straw he'd taken from his shirt pocket. He proffered the mirror to the others, but each shook his head. The man shrugged and replaced the glass in the same pocket with the straw. He reached for a beer and took a deep swallow. A noise at the back door caused him to turn and stare.

*“¿Qué fue eso?”*

*“El perro, the dog, Hector. He knows how to open the door. Don't be so fucking nervous.”* The home-owner, a heavy man, laughed and punched the younger fellow in the arm.

*“No names. ¿Te acuerdas?”* Hector said.

*“Lo lamento, Señor.”* The big fellow sneered the apology, drawing out the honorific.

A board creaked in the back of the house. The younger man pulled a small handgun from the ankle holster strapped to his right leg and stood.

*“El perro? Bullshit. What in the fuck is going on?”*

He pointed the pistol at the heavy man's face. Hector felt affection for the gun, a Ruger LCP 380 that saved his life on more than one occasion.

*“Easy, Amigo. We're all friends here.”* The big man shifted his eyes.

Another board groaned, and Hector didn't hesitate. He dropped to one knee and pumped a round between the fat dude's eyes. He turned the pistol towards the other two, but they were already out the front door.

The *hombre* with the hole in his forehead flew backwards, almost knocking over the *maton* who now crowded through the rear entrance followed in lock-step by a second. Both held MAC 10's at the ready.

Hector knew the drill. He emptied the remainder of the six-shot clip at the doorway and rolled to his left. He didn't presume the cheap sofa would stop forty-five caliber rounds from the Ingrams, but the opposition wouldn't see him for a few vital seconds. He jammed his spare magazine into the pistol grip and released the slide.

The familiar sound of suppressed automatic weapons fire hissed from the other side of the room. Hector used an infantry crawl to gain a position on the couch's far end, a few feet from the front entrance. No bullets tore the sofa fabric, and the firing stopped. Hector risked a glimpse around the furniture's corner and liked what he saw.

The lead thug lay sprawled across the floor, his smoking weapon pointed to the sky. Behind him, another man crumpled in a near-crouch position. Blood poured from a massive wound in his right shoulder. Hector could see him jerk while his life spurted across the boards. He fired another round into the man's skull to make certain.

*Somebody tipped them. They knew who I was.*

He held the loaded and cocked pistol in his right hand, barrel pointed down and away from his body, his finger outside the trigger guard. *Maybe someone outside.* He moved toward the door where the two men from the card game that never happened exited and tried to remember if he heard a car starting. In his mind he sorted the sequence of events. *No use.* He'd been occupied with the firefight. A fucking semi could have roared away from the house and he wouldn't have heard it.

Hector used his foot to nudge open the door and peek around the corner. *Great.* Their car gone, along with his. He faced a ten mile walk to civilization and the night air's mountain chill filled the valley. He smelled piñon and juniper and a faint whiff of smoke from a distant fireplace. He'd follow that trail and hope they'd let him use their telephone. He'd left his cell phone in the car in case it rang during the meeting, his jacket on the seat, and his keys in the ignition for a fast getaway. He strode past the empty parking spaces and toward the main road.

He hadn't discovered the employer of the men who ran away, or the ones he killed, for that matter. All he knew for sure is that they were in the drug business. Could be South of the border or one of the New Mexico gangs. Either way, they were part and parcel of the same band of thieves.

The beer clawed at his bladder, and he stopped and pissed onto a tall Ponderosa pine at the driveway's end. A noise to his left startled him, and he swung toward it, urine spraying. A jack rabbit bounded away into the night.

He shook off, zipped up, stared at the stars, scratched his head, then turned and retraced his steps to the house. When he opened the door, a blood and death stench permeated the room, and he almost wished he'd stayed outside, but there were things forgotten in his haste.

The fat man lay on his back. It took Hector's full strength to roll him to his side. A wallet bulged from his right rear pocket. Hector used a paper towel from the kitchen counter to remove it and examine the contents.

New Mexico driver's license and not much else. A few hundred dollars that Hector shoved into his pocket. *I'll make it look like a robbery.* He returned to the counter and grabbed a brown paper bag that he'd earlier used to carry the six-pack of beer to the meeting. He dropped the wallet and the fat man's watch into it.

*Fuck. My prints have to be all over the place.* He looked around in disgust, wadded the paper towel, and dropped it on the fat man's stomach. *No point in trying to clean up.* Besides, it would be difficult for local law enforcement to access classified records.

He moved to the two shooters piled in the rear entryway and searched them. No identification, but some money, and both wore watches. He took it all and shoved it into the bag. He stared at their faces without recognition. *They must be hired guns.*

Blood splattered both their jackets, so he squeezed into the entryway and took a coat off a hook. Could have belonged to the oversized home owner since it draped Hector's body like a large blanket. The brown bag fit into the side pocket. This time he exited through the back door, the way the assassins entered. Time to start walking.

He followed the driveway to the road and sniffed the air like a wolf on the track of a spoor. The fireplace smoke came from the east, and he decided to follow the highway in that direction.

He knew the road from his days on the ski slopes in Taos and recalled how it turned into four lanes a short distance down. Maybe he'd get lucky and hitch a ride before he found a phone.

He tilted his head and scanned the heavens. A clear night, and the stars looked like they'd multiplied since the last time he noticed them. He'd spent most of his life in the United States, either in school or training, but he missed his hometown, Puerto Vallarta, and his fisherman father who liked to sit weekends in one of the bars that lined the streets and sip on beer. Maybe more than one. Except for the occasional hurricane, its people led a peaceful life. Hector doubted he would ever enjoy it again.

\*\*\*

Back at the house, Hector's first victim, the fat man, let loose a major sigh. Some might have called it a death rattle, but they would be wrong. The noise came from air rushing into his lungs. His right leg twitched and eyelids vibrated like they wanted to open, but couldn't.

Another man, bigger, but more muscular than porcine, leaned against the back door frame and observed the struggle. He chewed on a toothpick and appeared to arrive at a decision. He pushed into the kitchen and stood over the fat man, unzipped his fly, and urinated in his face.

"Wake up Zippo," he said and laughed.

He knelt beside the now-heaving hulk and stuck his forefinger in the neat hole in the man's head. He pushed, but felt nothing but bone shards. *Zippo is a tough hombre.*

He leveraged his forearm under Zippo's chin, careful to avoid his own piss, and pushed downward while he watched the other's eyes for a sign of recognition. Kicking heels and bloody spume would have to suffice for proof of the other's discomfort, pain, and terror.

*The longest journey begins with a single step.* He rose to his feet and turned toward the front door. *Time to find out where the other one went.*

# Chapter 1

## Delmont and Buddy

*In a little honky-tonky village in Texas  
There's a guy who plays the best piano by far  
When he plays with the bass and guitar  
They holler, "Beat me up Daddy, beat me Daddy, eight to the bar"\**

*\*1940 by Don Raye with credit to Ray Mickinley*

Delmont Davis looked across the bar at his partner, Buddy.

"It's Thursday, Buddy, and I don't mind tellin' you I'm gettin' nervous. We been doin' real fine, but what the fuck's happened to business lately?" Delmont threw his hands in the air and scowled at his partner.

They owned a bar in Albuquerque, and their personal income came from money they skimmed off each day's receipts. When business flourished, they were okay. They paid selective bills, and held the long-term view that they would someday file bankruptcy and leave most creditors with the proverbial empty bag in their hands.

"You didn't give nobody money that don't deserve it, did you?"

"You know I don't touch the money, Delmont."

"You steal money every day. I don't care, but maybe you've been tappin' the till a little hard?"

"No way. There ain't been nothin' to tap lately."

"We got to pay the beer and liquor vendors. We need inventory to operate, we gotta get to Vegas, and we ain't got much dope left."

"Maybe it's the girls. The ones workin' the pole are gettin' old. Customers like fresh meat."

"Who the fuck knows, Buddy. Maybe people don't like the stink in here, or maybe we should quit waterin' the drinks. Whatever it is, I think it's comin' time to tank the joint. It's gonna be a real pain in the ass to pack up and move to a new location, *and* we'll need capital, but we ain't got much choice."

"Where we gonna get the money, Delmont? We ain't won in Vegas for a long time."

In Delmont's opinion, Buddy excelled at the obvious.

"If I didn't know better, I'd swear them poker games at the Nugget are rigged." Delmont shook his head. "Listen, Buddy, winnin' at the game is the least of our worries. The vig on that hundred thousand I got from Sammy the Nail is costin' us two grand a week."

The loan-shark transaction was Delmont's solution to their recent money woes. He knew if you paid the vig, you could leave the principal alone. The mob called it 'working money'. They used the bar to borrow a hundred grand from Sammy the Nail—as in coffin nail because he nursed a chain-smoking habit—and stared at the possibility of missing the vig payment for the first time. They'd blown their last cash on an ounce of coke and a bag of heroin. Speedballs were Delmont and Buddy's drug of choice, although, they would do whatever it took to get their hands on narcotics, up their noses or in their veins.

"If we miss the vig payment, the principal comes due, and there's no chance in hell we can get our hands on that much money." Delmont pushed his hands through his thick, dark, curly

hair and leaned forward in his chair. He'd developed a paunch, and it hung over his cowboy belt. His once handsome face sagged, and deep furrows crisscrossed his forehead. "We ain't got enough cash to buy into the "big" game, so I don't see any way to win enough to help." He let out a sigh.

In Delmont's studied opinion, the no-limit holdum game played by most pros in Vegas offered the best chance to win.

"If we miss the vig payment, we'll have about seven days to come up with the balance. If we don't, we're lookin' at a world of hurt." He enjoyed the terror spread across on Buddy's face.

Delmont liked to use expressions from Vietnam-era films. Sometimes when he hit on a woman, he claimed he suffered from PTSD. The years passed, and it proved less effective in eliciting sympathy. Chicks got older and forgot their brave boys in uniform's sacrifices, plus, the younger ones thought PTSD might be a sexually transmitted disease. Delmont once spent two months in the army, but got busted out with a Section Eight discharge—"unfit for service".

"Whadda you mean?" Buddy sounded nervous, and a sweat droplet rolled off his clean-shaven head and splashed onto the bar. He scowled and wiped his hand across his brow.

"I mean they'll break our legs, and if that don't work, somethin' else. If Sammy figures there's no way he's gettin' his money back, he'll ice us and take the bar."

\*\*\*

Delmont represented the outfit's brains; Buddy, the muscle. Buddy was reputed to have killed two men in bar fights, one with a tire chain, and owned a nasty disposition, but Delmont knew that Sammy the Nail frightened him.

"You got to think, Delmont. You're the smart one. You got the answers. All I got is my farm."

Buddy's father left him a good-sized farm a few miles north of Albuquerque. Delmont made sure the taxes were current. The property carried no mortgage, and, even though it belonged to Buddy, Delmont always looked at it like his personal loan collateral.

"We could go to a bank and get a mortgage on that place," Delmont said. "It's worth at least a million. Trouble is, Buddy, you're a convicted felon, and bankers don't like your kind's smell."

Delmont gave Buddy that look he used when he wanted something.

Buddy pulled a nickel a few years earlier on an assault and rape charge and didn't bother to report to his parole officer after his release. It seemed the State pursued other priorities, and never hassled him despite his living openly in the city. New Mexico might leave him alone, but no bank would loan him money. Delmont told him if they tried to transfer the property to Delmont's name, there would be IRS issues.

Delmont professed to Libertarianism and believed that Libertarians considered the income tax illegal. At least, that's what he said to Buddy when, once again, he didn't bother to file.

"Remember that fucker, Buddy?" Delmont asked him the same question every April 15. "I gave him thirty-five hundred bucks and he showed me how *not* to pay taxes. Best money I ever spent. That year, I became a Libertarian."

"But you never did that stuff he told you. You threw all that crap he sent you into the dumpster."

"That don't mean shit, Buddy. If good old Uncle Sam knows you're Libertarian, they don't bother you."

"The money, Delmont. What about the money?"

"I been thinkin' about how much dough we need. If we miss the vig, we'll owe Sammy a hunnert and four grand. That's principal and two weeks' vig. We need fifty more to buy into the

big game and a yard and a half for the new business, including interim drug purchases. That's three hundred extra-large."

"Godammit. How do you add that shit up in your head?" Buddy stared in apparent awe at Delmont.

"I know you think it's bad luck to borrow money on the farm, but I got a foolproof idea where we can get the dough, but not do it with a bank."

Buddy refused to use the farm to get a loan. He'd told Delmont that he feared financial institutions, convinced he would be overwhelmed by misfortune if he were to lose, or even encumber, his father's property.

Not that Buddy knew what "encumber" meant. In Delmont's opinion, he was fence-post dumb and poorly-educated. He'd told Delmont about running away from school after kindergarten, never to return. Not street-smart, but street-shrewd, he'd taught himself to read and write, and his darting little eyes could size up a dangerous situation in a nanosecond. He'd also developed a rough charm and carried on like others valued his smile at somewhere near a million dollars. Too bad Sammy the Nail didn't share his belief.

"I already told you, Delmont. I ain't gonna sell my farm."

Delmont shrugged and ran a finger along one eyebrow. A nervous habit he'd developed over the years.

"I got to talk to Nicky Jimenez. You know, Sammy's man here. He's a punk. I can play Nicky, but we can't fight the mob," Delmont said.

Delmont gave Nicky the weekly vig payments, due every Saturday after closing. Nicky, in turn, took a small cut and passed it on to Sammy.

"Now think about this, Buddy. We always use Saturday receipts for the vig, to cover payroll on Monday, and to pay the liquor and beer vendors. We'll take in about ten grand, or so."

Buddy nodded, seemingly wary of what might come next.

"If I can convince Nicky to wait for the payment until next week, we could take Saturday night money to Vegas and win enough for payroll, vig, and booze. That'd be a ten grand stake. We wouldn't be able to buy into the big game, but I could win what we need at blackjack. I'll set aside a four grand cushion in the remote chance we lose, and we could pay the vig if necessary. I could even win enough to get us our stake."

"How you gonna' get Nicky to wait? He's a total prick. How 'bout if I kill him?"

"Jesus fucking Christ, Buddy. If you kill Nicky, Sammy'll cut off our nuts, stuff them in *your* mouth, and shoot us both—if we're lucky. All we got to do is get him to wait for a few days."

"That's this week, Delmont. How about next week, and the week after?"

"Since when did you get to be such a planner? You don't even know what you're gonna do tomorrow. Leave the big picture shit to me."

Delmont thought about it. If the big bucks came due, he could never pull off what he planned for Buddy's property fast enough to save their asses, but Ricky could give him the time he needed.

Buy the Kindle version at:-

<http://www.amazon.com/Placebo-Effect-Larry-Seeley-ebook/dp/B00Q0WP LLU/>