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THE INFORMANT

Meet the biggest dealer in Miami's biggest industry

by John Rothchild

MIAMI RESIDENTS don't wear many clothes, but they have more to hide, per capita, than inhabitants of any other city in the nation. They plot secret military missions in Cuba and carry out secret commercial missions in Colombia. At dockside bars, exiles from corrupt regimes and other political intriguers mingle with smugglers and other conventional criminals. In New York or Washington, one asks, "What does he do?" In Miami, one asks, "What does he *really* do?"

To describe crime as Miami's problem would be like describing oil as Houston's problem. The Quechua Indians of Peru, who have no word for "problem" in their language, give us a noble example of resignation that might be applied to this rogue city. The police and the courts, however, cannot respond as Quechuas, and they depend on informants to guide them through the murk. A city as full of criminal conspiracies as Miami is an informant's mecca. That is why there are days when the criminal justice system (as it is optimistically called) sometimes seems to be run by Ricardo "the Monkey" Morales.

For fourteen years, this stocky and intimidating Cuban exile has whispered into ears at the FBI, the CIA, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Internal Revenue Service, the Miami and county police, and the state and federal prosecutor's offices. He has informed about terrorism, then about drugs, and now, in his most inspired effort to date, about ter-

rorism *with* drugs. But Morales is not just an observer. In Morales's latest judicial happening, Tick-Talks (so named because it involved a bugged wall clock), Ricardo "the Monkey" Morales has made most of the major decisions for both the defendants and the prosecutors. His role in this legal proceeding is like that of a patient who directs his own gallbladder operation.

THE CUBANS began to flood Miami after Castro's overthrow of Batista in 1959. They were looking over their shoulders, hoping to return and recapture their homeland, but that hasn't happened. Many of their American hosts expected that the Cuban culture would have been diluted in the melting pot by now, but that hasn't happened, either. Miami was once a Southern town, but the city has grown to resemble Santiago or Guayaquil much more than it resembles Birmingham or Mobile. Latin American inhabitants have been partially assimilated, of course, but they have affected Miami much more than Miami them. There are now nearly 200,000 Cubans in the city alone (out of a total population of 350,000), and 600,000 in Dade County as a whole (out of 1.6 million). These figures don't include 125,000 who arrived as recently as the 1980 Mariel boatlift. They have been joined by 16,000 Nicaraguans and a growing number of Salvadorans. In Miami, Spanish is a more useful language

John Rothchild lives and writes in Miami.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

RICARDO "THE MONKEY" MORALES	The Informant
HANK ADORNO	Florida state attorney
SIDNEY ARONOVITZ	Federal district court judge
JOE BALL	FBI agent
ORLANDO BOSCH	Terrorist pediatrician
TAYLOR BRANCH	Journalist; acquaintance of Morales
FIDEL CASTRO	Unpopular in Miami
RINA COHAN	Florida state attorney
THE CONDOM BROTHERS	Friends of Quesada; frequenters of the Mutiny Bar
MR. CZUKAS	U.S. Customs inspector
D. C. DIAZ	Miami police officer
RAUL DIAZ	Sergeant, later lieutenant, of the Dade County Public Safety Department
PHILIP DOHERTY	Miami assistant police chief
JOSÉ "PEPE 70" GONZALES	Associate of Quesada; informant
HILDA INCLAN	Journalist
CARLOS THE JACKAL	European terrorist
JOHN F. KENNEDY	Ordered Bay of Pigs; no follow-through
RAUL MARTINEZ	Miami police sergeant
ROBERTO ORTEGA	Not important
ROLANDO OTERO	Anti-Castro activist
POLLACK, SPAIN & O'DONNELL	A law firm
CARLOS QUESADA	Drug dealer; off-and-on friend of Morales; informant
RUDY "THE RED BEARD" RODRIGUEZ	Convicted drug dealer; informant
JOHN ROTHCHILD	Journalist
ELIDIO RUIZ	Murder suspect; found dead on Morales's doorstep
JERRY SANFORD	Federal prosecutor; later defense attorney
HELGA SILVA	Journalist on <i>Miami Herald</i>
SAM SMARGON	Florida state attorney; later U.S. attorney
FRANKLIN SOSA	Associate of Quesada; informant
FRANCISCO TAMAYO	Associate of Quesada; informant
MONTY TRAINER	Bar owner
FAUSTO VILLAR	Associate of Quesada; informant
RAFAEL VILLAVERDE	Former CIA employee; social worker; indicted for drug dealing
RAUL VILLAVERDE	Rafael's brother; also indicted
ATLEE WAMPLER	U.S. attorney
GEORGE YOSS	Florida state attorney

than English at gas stations, in sidewalk encounters, and even in stores like the Woolworth's in Miami Beach. Many of the exiles float in with only the clothes on their backs, while rich Venezuelans and Colombians fly in above them to buy condominiums and fancy dresses. The economy is thriving.

A Cuban journalist friend of mine says, "Cubans no longer expect to retake their country. Now they want Dade County." Already Miami has a Latin mayor, and for the first time its city council is controlled by Cubans. Now Latinization is moving outward to smaller, contiguous cities such as Miami Beach, and toward the Dade County line. The triumph of the Cubans has created a secondary immigration, that of the Gringos who are leaving this area and heading for Ft. Lauderdale in Broward County, where one can still order a McDonald's hamburger in English.

Most Cuban immigrants have been remarkably industrious and law-abiding. The speed at which they worked up from nothing to control this city and its businesses would have been the envy of the Italians and Irish who came to New York in the last century. Yet an active minority of Cubans has created unique legal problems for Miami—unique not only in quantity but also in quality. The CIA is partly responsible for the peculiarities, because in the 1960s the agency used this city as a base for its war against Castro. Hundreds of young Cubans were trained in this war, not only to use machine guns and plastic explosive but also to outsmart the American institutions that were not apprised of the battle plans. When the CIA pulled out, these Cubans didn't just throw away their detonators and go home, which partially explains why *Miami Herald* reporter Helga Silva has a fourteen-page list of unsolved political murders, and why endless grand juries have been called on to ponder terrorist affairs.

When Florida became the national center for the importing of cocaine and marijuana during the 1970s, Miami was asked to fight another unwinnable war, this time against itself. Law-enforcement agencies now struggle against the city's biggest business. Drug cases account for more than 50 percent of the criminal proceedings in town; U.S. attorney Atlee Wampler has estimated that if his office closed its doors to new cases, it would take all his full-time prosecutors more than nine years just to handle the backlog. A significant part of Miami's population winks at drug smuggling the way terrorism was winked at a decade ago.

Like many of his fellow Cubans, Ricardo Morales supported Castro at first. He was trained as a Castro secret-police agent, and his

last job in Cuba was handling security investigations at Havana airport. He was in his early twenties when he defected in 1960. When he got to Miami, he was recruited by the CIA, which taught him about bombs and about the recoilless rifle, and he took part in various secret missions following the failure of the Bay of Pigs. When the CIA refused to sponsor future raids, Morales left the agency in disgust. That was in 1963. But he returned to take a special assignment in the Congo during 1964 and 1965, partly out of respect for a couple of colorful CIA operatives and partly because he needed the action. When Morales left the Congo, he had acquired a reputation for intensity that exceeds the normal civilized limits. He had the courage to go to the edge of Africa to support his friends, and he had the ballistics training to dispatch them if they became his enemies. Morales has been impressing Miami with high-voltage performances ever since.

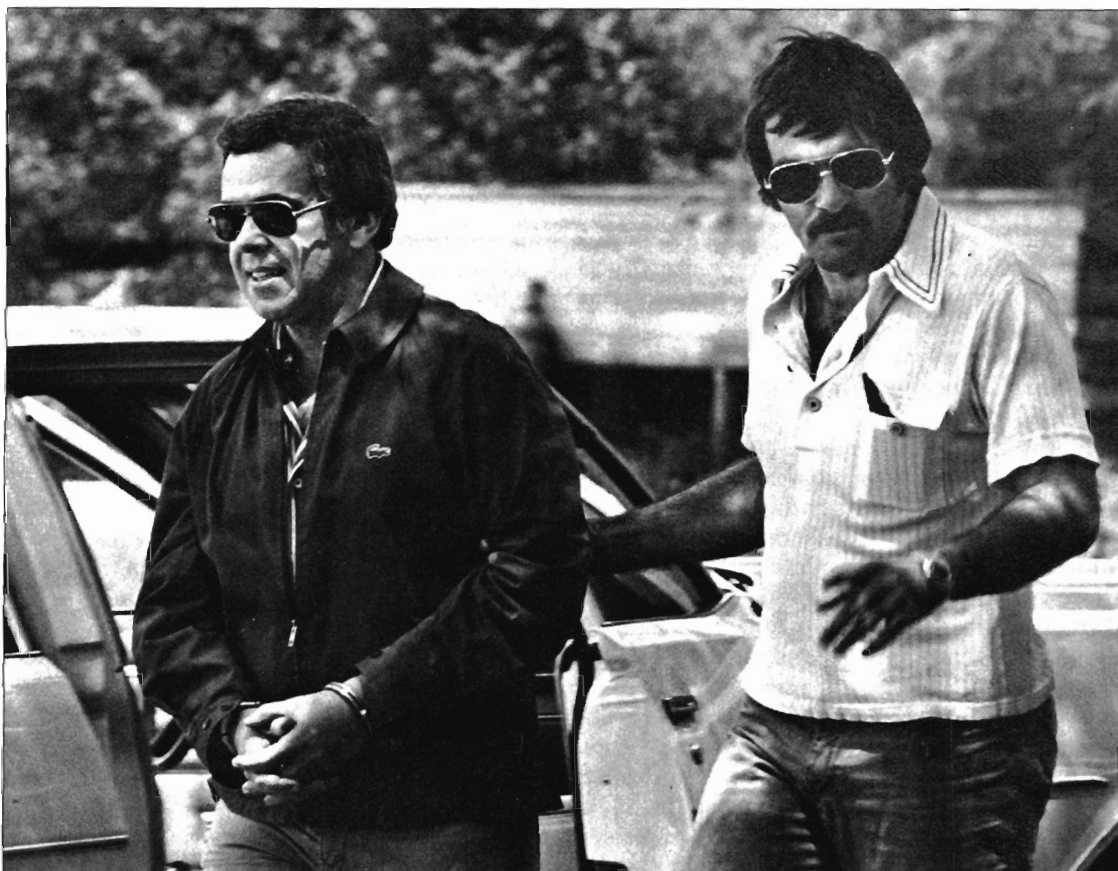
A man I know once made a surprise visit to Morales's apartment. He told Morales's girlfriend, who answered the door, that he wanted to have a friendly chat with Ricardo. He was invited to sit in the living room while Morales finished taking a shower. When Morales entered the room, he marched directly to the visitor's briefcase and opened

it without asking permission. The visitor was too startled to object. Morales dredged up the tape recorder, which was already running. He removed the tape cassette and put it in his shirt pocket; he shook out the batteries and placed them at opposite ends of the mantelpiece, like trophies. Then he returned the neutralized recorder to the briefcase. So far, Morales had not said a word. Then Morales pulled out his revolver and laid it on the coffee table. He had disarmed his visitor, and now he was offering up his own concealed weapon for the visitor's inspection. My friend lacked the wit to empty the gun and place the bullets on the mantelpiece, next to the batteries. Morales got out a couple of glasses from a cabinet and poured some Chivas Regal. His mood had shifted from menacing to jovial. "Now," he said, "we can talk." That's the Morales style.

"The salvation of informants in Miami is that there is usually somebody else to get."

Bombs and babies

ONE DOES NOT grow up hoping to be an informant. Morales got his first opportunity after his arrest in 1968. His fingerprints matched those found on the remains of a bomb that had detonated in the office of a firm that sold medical supplies back to Cuba. The newspaper clipping



The Miami Herald

Ricardo "The Monkey" Morales under arrest

shows a handsome young man with a crew cut, looking more like Ricky Ricardo of "I Love Lucy" than a veteran of the Cuban revolution and the Congo wars. The CIA might have lost interest in blowing up Castro, but its Cuban ex-operatives were still practicing on small stores, police stations, and travel agencies in Miami. Ad hoc military brigades formed, broke up, and reformed, often claiming to be following orders from the Invisible Government.

Morales was an important early arrest in the FBI's pursuit of the elusive groupings. But his fingerprints were barely dry before the charges were dropped and Morales was on the temporary FBI payroll. In the lingo, Morales was "flipped." The FBI wanted to use him to get somebody else. The salvation of informants in Miami is that there is usually somebody else to get.

In this case, the somebody else was Orlando Bosch, the terrorist pediatrician. Yes, an exploding baby doctor. Morales got himself a job making bombs for Bosch. He made phony bombs while reporting details of Bosch's upcoming missions back to the FBI. Bosch couldn't understand why his bombs didn't go off, but he kept trying. He and some associates were arrested in the act of shelling a Cuba-bound Polish freighter in the Miami harbor. Morales's testimony at the trial helped convict Bosch and send him to prison in late 1968.

By 1972 the terrorist pediatrician was walking the streets again, and the scowl on his cadaverous face would not make an infant coo. The local prediction was that Morales would replace ships headed for Cuba as Bosch's favorite target. A bomb did explode under Morales's car in 1974, driving shrapnel an inch into the asphalt of West Flagler Street. "I'm not saying it was Dr. Bosch," Morales said as he surveyed the damage. The Monkey reacted with nonchalance, as if his car had suffered a flat tire.

It was a period of narrow escapes for the Monkey. Only a few months before the bombing incident, Elidio Ruiz had been found dead at Morales's front door. Morales had recently informed on this Ruiz character to Sgt. Raul Diaz over at the county police department. Ruiz and Diaz. I know these names begin to sound alike, but reputations depend on our keeping them clear in our minds. Diaz, now a lieutenant, has been one of Morales's favorite informees. Morales informed Diaz that Ruiz had murdered another man who had informed on Ruiz. Exonerated on a technicality, Ruiz went to visit Morales and fell dead. Morales was then arrested for murder himself. But he

was exonerated when a witness couldn't identify him in the courtroom.

So by 1974, Morales had survived a bombing and an attempted murder, had helped send the bomber to jail, had outlived the man who'd tried to kill him, and had deflected bombing and murder charges against himself. These are impressive results. But it was still early in Morales's career. Morales observers were not yet ready to speculate that he might have bombed his own car to cover up a secret alliance with pediatrician Bosch. The Rolando Otero case was the one that really made the Monkey's reputation in Miami.

Otero was another anti-Castro zealot. In 1975, he and Morales were such good friends that Morales had his own key to Otero's apartment. Meanwhile, more bombs were exploding around the city, including one in the men's room at the state attorney's office, one at the FBI building, and one at Miami police headquarters. Sgt. Raul Diaz and FBI agent Joe Ball, who had approved the original Morales flip in 1968, had several meetings with Morales. Once again, the Monkey came to the aid of law enforcement and declared that Otero was their bomber. This was in December 1975.

Having informed on his friend, Morales went back to Otero with some useful advice: leave the country. Otero took it. Then Morales told the understandably upset police that the leak to Otero had come from FBI agent Ball. Then Morales disappeared. In fact, Ball had to execute an affidavit denying that he helped Otero flee. It was impossible to tell who had done what, and whose side Morales was on. Morales at this time was commuting between Miami and Venezuela, where he was developing some new interests.

Otero went to Venezuela looking for work. He had a friend there who was head of airport security for the secret-police agency, DISIP. The friend's name was Ricardo "the Monkey" Morales. Don't ask me how he got that position. But Otero still trusted him enough to show up in his office, looking for a job. By February 1976, two months after informing on him, Morales had hired him in Venezuela and sent him to Chile on some DISIP mission. In Chile, Otero was arrested and extradited back to America to stand trial on the charges Morales had fingered him for. Twice Morales promised American authorities that he would return to Miami to testify against Otero, and twice he didn't show. After an acquittal on federal charges, Otero was convicted of one of the bombings in Florida state court, without Morales's help.

During this Venezuelan period, Morales exhibited some gray hairs and had raccoon rings

under his eyes. The rumor was that he was under great strain trying to keep his personal affairs in some kind of balance. There was his delicate relationship with Otero, and also his relationship with our old pediatrician friend, Bosch. Bosch was now suspected of blowing up a Cuban airliner in mid-flight, killing all seventy-three people aboard. He also found his way to Venezuela, prompting speculation that he and the Monkey had made up, or perhaps had been collaborating all along. Then Bosch was jailed in Venezuela on a warrant signed by Morales, prompting further speculation that Morales had fooled him again, the way that Lucy fools Charlie Brown every October with the football. Or perhaps the warrant was only a ruse. Who knows?

IFIRST MET Morales during his sojourn in Caracas. In late 1976, two other journalists and I found ourselves on the same plane to Venezuela as Sgt. Raul Diaz, whom you already know, and Florida state attorneys George Yoss and Hank Adorno. We journalists were going to interview Bosch in his Venezuelan prison; the officials were going to talk to Bosch, and also to Morales, in their second futile effort to get his cooperation against Otero. They were hardly off the plane before they were offering Morales an ingratiating tidbit of information. They told him that some officious journalists had come to Caracas and were poking into international terrorism.

One of the other journalists, my friend Taylor Branch, had declared at the start of the trip: "If we have problems in Venezuela, I know a Cuban named Morales who runs security at the airport. He will help us out." We did have problems. A car followed our taxi to the hotel, and from the window of our room there we could see armed men hiding in the bushes outside. Branch and the third journalist, Hilda Inclan, tried several times to call their old friend Morales and ask for his help.

At 5 A.M., a burly little man broke into our hotel room, grabbed our passports off the bureau, and began to holler like a boot-camp sergeant. Branch whined in plaintive disbelief, "Ricardo, is that you?" Branch had told me the stories of Morales turning on Bosch and Otero, but even this wary reporter had never imagined that the Monkey might do it to him. Yet it was obvious that the goons in the bushes belonged to Morales. Morales pushed us out of the hotel room, refusing to acknowledge Branch's overtures of recognition.

We were driven to the airport by armed chauffeurs and held in a private office from sunup until about 8 A.M., when Morales re-

turned to invite us to breakfast. Terrifying at 5, he was all charm at 8. We strolled casually down the crowded airport corridors to the dining room, but when Morales sensed that one of us might bolt for a nearby telephone, he stiffened and scowled, and this was enough to hold us back. At the breakfast table, he relaxed and told jokes and carried on a witty monologue about world affairs. Every time Branch marshaled the courage to ask Morales about our mistreatment, he would either pretend Branch was no longer sitting at the table, or else he would say: "I don't know anything about this Bosch you came to see. Is that his name? Maybe I have read it in the papers." Our involuntary departure from Caracas had a typical Morales result. We felt betrayed, yet we did not completely dislike the abuser. Perhaps he had protected us from darker forces. Like Otero and Bosch and half the Miami legal establishment, we had no idea whose side he was really on.

Narcs and finks

AFTER 1976, the anti-Castro business went into recession. Our hero returned from Venezuela to Miami, but instead of renewing his old connections, he was frequently seen at the Mutiny Bar with a new friend, Carlos Quesada. The Mutiny is to

"It was impossible to tell who had done what, and whose side Morales was on."



The Miami Herald

Orlando Bosch, the rocket-launching pediatrician

the après-deal what Sardi's is to the après-theater, and Quesada was a familiar patron with a big bankroll and lizard-skin shoes. The tables are surrounded by wide-leaved plants and venal waitresses in leotards. There are phone jacks at the tables so people can do business in these junglelike surroundings.

Quesada was an apolitical Cuban with an apolitical arrest record: 1969, violation of narcotics laws, three years probation; 1971, possession of a firearm by a convicted felon, no action by state attorney; 1972, breaking and entering, disposition unknown; 1972, assault with intent to commit murder, victim didn't prosecute; 1974, possession of a firearm by a convicted felon, case dismissed; 1977, breaking and entering, three years probation. The association between Quesada and Morales was considered a step up for Quesada, but a step down for Morales. The gossip around town was that the savvy Cuban who once traded secrets with Israeli and European spies was reduced to gossiping with silk-shirted drug punks. But genius can work with any raw material, and Morales found plenty of raw material at Quesada's \$100,000 stucco house at 1724 S.W. 16th Street. It is the standard one-story Miami residence, surrounded by a wall and decorated with security improvements. When Morales first entered the house in November 1977, police were already hiding outside and taking pictures.

Lt. Raul Diaz calls the visitors to the house on 16th Street "a convention of informants." Diaz should know. Fausto Villar, a familiar presence at Quesada's table, was talking privately to Lieutenant Diaz. Quesada himself was known to drop a hint or two to the police, and so was Francisco Tamayo. Franklin Sosa had cooperated with the DEA. José "Pepe 70" Gonzales was blabbing to another department. Rudy Rodriguez was talking to several departments, according to Lieutenant Diaz.

You might suppose, if you don't live in Miami, that drug smugglers operate in secrecy, and that police agencies operate in ignorance until they learn of the smugglers' activities and arrest them.

Actually, the system of the relations between government and industry in America's drug capital is more complex than that. Each of several local, state, and federal police agencies has its own informants, who inform on other informants, who undoubtedly are informing on them. The informants are also the smugglers. In return for their information, they are sometimes allowed to continue in business. So if you get enough informants in your network, like the diverse collection at Quesada's table, you are protected not by secrecy but by se-

lective prosecution. One can imagine that Ricardo Morales felt right at home in this new environment.

It's hard to fathom how the police decide when to take action and when to just listen. In this case, police say they were getting reports from two informants at Quesada's table—Fausto Villar and Pepe 70 Gonzales. Morales himself had introduced Villar to Sergeant Diaz some years earlier, and Diaz had introduced him to other officers. Now Villar wanted to tell on Quesada, possibly because he resented the feeling that Morales had usurped his position in the drug hierarchy. Pepe 70 was about to be sent to jail for selling a silencer to an undercover police officer. He was willing to tell on Quesada to secure a shorter sentence.

Pepe 70 was something of a sentencing expert. He got ten years for narcotics in Kansas in 1970, and—moving with remarkable speed—another ten years in California in 1971. Nevertheless, he was on the streets of Miami in 1977.

Leaks from Villar and Pepe 70 were the reported basis for a wiretap on Quesada's phone. Quesada changed the number four times between the summer of 1977 and the winter of 1978, which shows that smugglers are not completely indifferent to detection, even though a new number does not stop a wiretap. Quesada also made a half-hearted attempt to disguise his business through conceit, just in case somebody was listening. The most popular conceit was a fishing trip.

Police were not fooled by the following typical conversation between "C" (Quesada) and "W" (an associate).

C: *How are you doing, inspector?*

W: *I went fishing.*

C: *Yeah?*

W: *Yeah, and I arrived last night.*

C: *Ah, it doesn't matter. I went by there but I didn't see you.*

W: *We had an accident yesterday and we had to come back.*

C: *Ave Maria.*

W: *With Julito.*

C: *Yeah?*

W: *Yeah. Perforated his hand with a kingfish hook.*

C: *Who?*

W: *Julito.*

C: *There, at the kingfish store?*

W: *No, there fishing. Out there for kingfish.*

C: *Aha.*

W: *(Garbled)*

C: *Aha.*

W: *He perforated his hand with a big kingfish hook.*

C: *Ave Maria.*

IN THE SPRING of 1977, the police spent hundreds of hours recording and deciphering these Ave Marias and references to kingfish hooks. Morales tells us now that he completed a marijuana transaction out of the Quesada house in November 1977, and then didn't return to the house until late March 1978. The timing is very fortunate, because by March the police had already stacked up the tapes and gone out to arrest Quesada and Rudy Rodriguez and seven other people, seizing \$913,000 and fifty-six pounds of cocaine in the process. Assistant police chief Philip Doherty said it was "like winning the Super Bowl." But Morales wasn't even on the field. He and his friend Franklin Sosa both stayed away during the critical phase of evidence-gathering and were not implicated. How did Morales know when to stay away? Good question.

And why did Morales go back to Quesada's tainted house after the bust? That one's easy to answer. This is the drug business. The best time to deal, in fact, is after the organization has been busted. The post-bust deal has a great chance of succeeding, because police have already completed their investigation. Besides that, money is needed to pay the lawyers, and perhaps to bail out some partners. As Morales later recollected to the police, he, Sosa, and Quesada (out on bail) were at Quesada's house, "and out of the blue sky, Franklin Sosa got up some sort of a connection with this guy Roberto who claimed he was going to give us 20,000 pounds." The Quesada group had momentarily tired of cocaine, since they had just lost fifty-six pounds of it to police, so this 20,000 pounds refers to marijuana. Sosa used the Quesada phone, which he knew had been recently tapped, to make his arrangements.

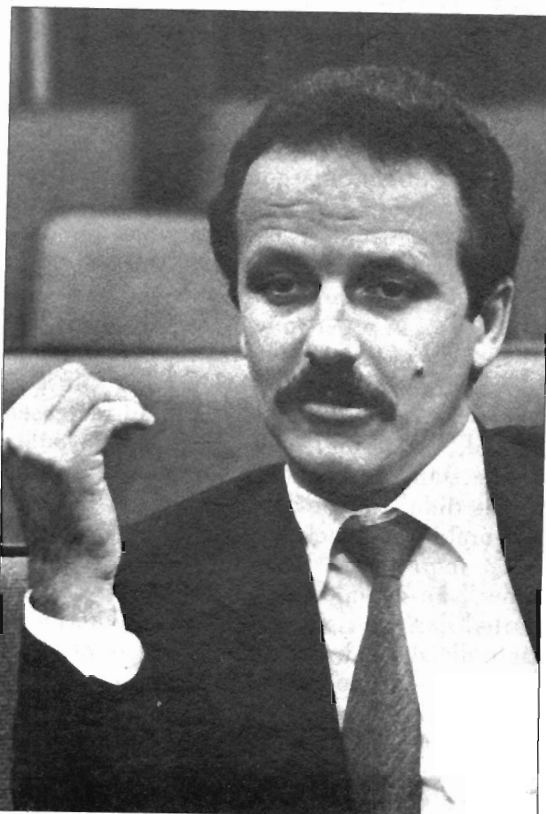
But police had not yet turned off the tape recorders, and they picked up the Sosa conversation as an epilogue to their surveillance. Officers were sent to the place where the bales of marijuana were to be loaded, and who did they find in the procession's lead car but Ricardo Morales. Sgt. Raul Diaz was dispatched to the scene and began intense discussions with the veteran informer. Meanwhile, the Monkey's car and person were searched. This turned up an illegally concealed weapon—as common as Kleenex in many Miami glove compartments. More interesting was a membership card from DISIP, the Venezuelan secret police. Most interesting of all was a list of confidential radio frequencies from the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Coast Guard, the FBI, the Secret Service, the Florida Highway Patrol, and the Miami and Miami Shores police departments. Was Morales allied with all of them?

How did he get the list? "It baffles me," a DEA spokesman told the *Miami Herald*.

There was a difference of opinion among the various state and U.S. attorneys as to the Monkey's reliability. Sam Smargon, the prosecutor assigned to the case, argued that this ethereal defendant might vanish if allowed out of jail. "I wanted a high bond on this man because of his international contacts," Smargon says. At least one of Smargon's superiors, however, was called by the defense to vouch for the Monkey, even though Morales had not shown up at the Otero trial despite two promises to do so. There were still prosecutors willing to trust Morales. Smargon didn't and neither did the judge, who set bond at \$350,000. Later, Smargon also contracted Morales fever.

Word got out that Morales, from his jail cell, had figured out that Pepe 70 and Fausto Villar were the informants responsible for the Quesada wiretap. It may have been spontaneous deduction on his part, but he certainly had enough possible sources. In any event, Morales's perception was disturbing to both Villar and Pepe 70. In the words of Sergeant Diaz, they were "scared shitless." Villar was loose in Miami and Pepe 70 was stuck in an Indiana prison for the silencer. Both suddenly forgot that they had ever talked to police about Quesada, Quesada's house, illegal drugs, or Ricardo Morales. Actually, Villar did remem-

"Each of several police agencies has its own informants, who inform on other informants, who are informing on them."



Carlos Quesada in court

The Miami Herald

ber that Morales was a "valiant man," and said so to the *Miami Herald*.

THE FEE for defending a major drug case can be substantial. In Miami (as elsewhere), the prosecutor's office tends to be underpaid basic training for the other side. Morales was represented by Pollack, Spain & O'Donnell, a firm with some canny ex-prosecutors who had left the world of seeking convictions for the more lucrative one of seeking acquittals. (Even the defense world is not all sunshine. Pollack sits all day in crepuscular darkness with a shotgun propped behind his desk.) Morales's lawyers argued that if the informants had never discussed Quesada with police—as they now claimed—then police had no business using them as the basis for the wiretaps, and the wiretaps should be thrown out of court.

There were two police agencies involved in the Quesada bust, and they squabbled over some of the procedure, and the state attorney's office did not necessarily make the best moves, and the result was that the judge ruled for Morales: the wiretaps were stricken. The new stories told by the frightened Villar and Pepe 70 were given more judicial credence than their old ones, which were supported by tape recordings, sworn affidavits, and the word of at least five police officers.

The principal defendant was acquitted without ever taking the stand. Morales had spent a hundred days or so in jail awaiting the trial, but now (July 1978) he was free, and the two informants had been mortally terrified, and the police were humiliated, and the vanquished prosecutor, Sam Smargon, had suffered a coronary. Smargon says the heart attack was incidental to his judicial defeat, but he does remember that he felt great pressure. Perhaps he could have charged Morales with the concealed gun, in order to win at least something. By the end of the trial, it was too late for that, and besides, Smargon was getting Morales fever. "My respect for the man had increased tenfold," Smargon recalls. "He could have taken the stand and said any number of things, but he didn't. The man doesn't lie."

Morales went back to Quesada's house to develop more drug deals. "I was broke, you know," he confided in a later affidavit. "We started dealing right away." Rehabilitation is the judicial ideal, but the only apparent effect of Morales's encounter with the courts was to remind him of the advantages of cocaine. "Never in my life am I going to touch grass again," Morales declared. "It was getting on my nerves to see a house loaded with bales."

Things were looking up at the Quesada residence. Morales's legal moves had had a devastating side effect on the prosecutions of Quesada, Rodriguez, and the other defendants. Their cases were transferred from state court to a federal court. Prosecutors hoped that a fresh judge might accept the wiretap evidence. But a federal magistrate also rejected the wiretaps, and the prosecutors had no phone conversations to connect Quesada and friends to those fifty-six pounds of cocaine. U.S. attorney Jerry Sanford appealed the magistrate's ruling in a final and desperate effort to rescue the prosecution.

Jerry Sanford has entered this saga before. He was the prosecutor who lost the first Otero case after Morales failed to appear, and now he stood to lose the Quesada case because of Morales's machinations, and yet his friendship with Morales had strengthened. Sanford was a frequent visitor during Morales's time in jail, and his goal was to make Ricardo's stay more pleasant. "I would say, 'Ricardo, do you need anything?' or, 'Ricardo, do you want anything?' and he would always answer no," Sanford told me. After Morales was released, "We would bullshit about the KGB and the CIA, about who did this and who did that." Sanford insists, "I believe Ricardo Morales is one of the few people who never tried to use me."

One of Morales's abiding talents is to arrange things so that nobody ever feels completely defeated on his account. Perhaps he worried that prosecutors would blame him for the rejection of the wiretaps. Now he would give the prosecution a way out. "I remember we were walking down the hall," Sanford says. "It was just before a hearing on the wiretap appeal. Ricardo came up to me and said, 'What would you do if Quesada flipped?' I couldn't believe it." Morales was offering a spectacular cooperator, the second most important defendant in the case, behind Rudy Rodriguez.

Quesada was understandably eager to accept government immunity for all his crimes. He would have to testify against the other defendants, but he and Rodriguez had been feuding, anyway, and his Datsun 280 Z had been strafed with machine-gun bullets. Many believed that this attack came from Quesada's co-defendant, though others speculated that the machine-gun tattoo, which Quesada escaped from intact, may even have been arranged by Morales to give the flip some dramatic impetus. The government was eager to accept Quesada's cooperation, so the deal was approved in less than twenty-four hours. "Like a bolt out of the blue," said judge Sidney Aronovitz.

The wiretaps were finally admitted as evi-

dence, with Quesada to verify their authenticity, and all the other defendants were convicted. Rodriguez got fifteen years. He and the other convicts weren't happy, but everybody else seemed delighted with Morales's choreography. The prosecutors had won a major case. They talked as if Rodriguez was the hardened criminal they wanted to put away, while Quesada was just fluff that could blow back onto the streets for all they cared. The police were vindicated. The defense attorneys got a fat fee. Rudy Rodriguez got back \$450,000, half the money seized in the case. The IRS got the other half. Morales agreed to help the U.S. attorney's office by appearing in front of a couple of grand juries pondering other unsolved crimes.

Quesada was free but had a tax problem, having testified under immunity that he had made \$3 million in the drug business. Morales recommended a good lawyer to him. Guess who? Why, Jerry Sanford, who had gone into private practice following the Quesada conviction. Quesada also had a security problem, with Rodriguez threatening revenge, but the police department assigned him a bodyguard. Morales must have been gratified, with the agency that arrested Quesada now protecting him, and his former prosecutor now defending him, and nobody asking why a lesser de-

fendant hadn't been flipped instead of Quesada, and the troublesome Rodriguez legally detained so that Morales and Quesada could get back to business. It was the fall of 1978.

Operation Tick-Talks

IN DECEMBER 1980, an important law-enforcement conference was held in a police car in the parking lot of Monty Trainer's dockside bar, and then moved to the parking lot at Zayre's, and formally reconvened at a room in the Holiday Inn on LeJeune Road. Crime watcher Ricardo Morales was telling two policemen, D. C. Diaz and Raul Martinez (neither to be confused with Raul Diaz), and later the assistant state attorney, Rina Cohan, that drugs were bought and sold out of Carlos Quesada's house at 1724 S.W. 16th Street. Can you imagine? Police should do something about Quesada, Morales said. He and his partners were flirting with heroin, which tested Morales's moral patience. "Heroin . . . goes against, you know, my own belief and religion, and, you know, I . . . flatly refuse to go along in this new kind of business."

Morales was ready to give a fifty-page deposition. But first he reminded prosecutor Cohan that "I was found not guilty by the jury,

"One of Morales's abiding talents is to arrange things so that nobody ever feels completely defeated on his account."



Ruth Cook

The house at 1724 S. W. 16th St., Miami, Florida.

John Rothchild
THE
INFORMANT

which you should be aware of," for earlier suspicious acts. All Morales wanted now was immunity for subsequent suspicious acts. In return, he would incriminate Quesada and many others. The same kind of immunity that Quesada got for incriminating Rudy Rodriguez back in 1979. Sgt. Raul Martinez helped Morales in his negotiations:

Sgt. Martinez: *He will not be prosecuted for anything he did with...any of his co-conspirators?*

Ms. Cohan: *Correct. Includes Quesada...*

Morales: *Includes the whole organization. The whole family?*

Ms. Cohan: *That's correct.*

Morales: *I won't be prosecuted?*

Ms. Cohan: *No.*

Sgt. Martinez: *If all of a sudden you say in 1980 you murdered Juan Pepe...*

Ms. Cohan: *That's another story entirely.*

Sgt. Martinez: *That's what she is saying.*

Morales: *I didn't.*

Sgt. Martinez: *So you have to restrict yourself to the conspiracy.*

Morales: *To my activities, right? To my activities in the drug business, you know, for the past three years, right?*

Morales's revelations were not shocking. D. C. Diaz was the man assigned to be Quesada's bodyguard after Morales arranged Quesada's flip. To stay close enough to Quesada to shield him, you had to drink with him, and D. C. Diaz had done that, both at Quesada's house and at the Mutiny Bar. In fact, on different nights during the summer of 1980, you could have found either D. C. Diaz, or Raul Diaz, or ex-prosecutor Jerry Sanford, or a customs agent named Czukas sitting at the same table with Carlos Quesada and his new associates.

Chief among these associates was Rafael Villaverde, ex-CIA, a Bay of Pigs alumnus who was ransomed by President Kennedy for medicine and truck parts, a man who moved up from picking tomatoes to operating a \$2 million antipoverty agency for the Latin elderly. Villaverde, weighing more than 200 pounds, knows the mayor, knows the police, knows everybody he ought to know in Miami. Villaverde's welfare agency has been called a front for terrorists, but Villaverde once said that if bombers and assassins did congregate among his elderly, it was only to apply for benefits in anticipation of their retirement.

Other frequenters of Quesada's table at the Mutiny were Villaverde's brother, Raul, and the two Condom brothers, who share an unfortunate name, a conviction for cocaine smuggling, and membership in the paramilitary 2506 Brigade, a venerable anti-Castro group. Morales was often at the Mutiny, too. He had

introduced Quesada to Sanford, and Quesada in turn introduced D. C. Diaz to the Condom brothers, who were brought into the group by the Villaverdes, who were themselves introduced to Quesada by Morales. For the Monkey, the Mutiny gatherings in that summer of 1980 were "This Is Your Life."

Everybody knew what everybody else was up to. Policeman D. C. Diaz told me, "Quesada knew where we were coming from. And he would give us information about drugs, usually things we already knew; or else he would tell stories on his competition. We would visit his house, and if there was something going on that he didn't want us to see, he would come outside and talk. He even tried to bribe us with Rolex watches." For more than a year, police had viewed Quesada and partners with suspicion and at close range, and yet nothing had broken. Perhaps they were waiting for Morales to make a move.

But tensions surfaced occasionally. Jerry Sanford recalls one night at the Mutiny when "Morales kept saying that so-and-so killed the Chilean ambassador in Washington, and Villaverde kept saying he knew it was somebody else, and Morales started throwing pats of butter at Villaverde. Every time he made a point, he hurled a pat. Villaverde tried to ignore this, and so did Quesada. They just sat there and pretended it wasn't happening."

By later October, relations had broken down—not between the suspects and the police, but among the suspects. *The Godfather* was on television again ("when *The Godfather* comes on... the drug people, they get steamed up somehow, and some people have gotten killed because of that," Morales opines), and Morales didn't get an invitation to customs agent Czukas's birthday party, which upset him. In fact, Morales recalls, it was a lousy month. He claims to have spent several hours one evening fending off various hit men. He says he escaped by brandishing a dummy hand grenade. "I pulled the handle and said 'trick or treat'... so that was my Halloween."

SO BY the first week in December, Morales was sitting in the parking lot with the police, restructuring his alliances once again. One theory is that he had been kicked out of the Quesada organization and was retaliating. Jerry Sanford's theory is that the Condom brothers had proposed a legitimate stock deal to Quesada and that Morales mistakenly assumed that "stocks" meant heroin, since none of his friends read the *Wall Street Journal*. The Villaverde brothers, now indicted, said Morales first introduced them to

Quesada and then created this drug investigation, in retaliation for something the Villaverdes did back in 1976. They thought they had a contract with the CIA to assassinate a European terrorist named Carlos the Jackal. When they discovered (such is life in the underworld) that the target was a Libyan dissident and the client was Colonel Qaddhafi, they patriotically backed out. Morales was also somehow involved, Villaverde has contended.

Once again, the law enforcement people went along with Morales. "We don't have the money to buy information, and so we have to work on favors," says Lt. Raul Diaz. "There are certain things you can do for some people and then they owe you a favor. That is the system. Sometimes, it breeds what looks like corruption." The state gave Morales his immunity and then used his testimony for wiretap applications, first on a suspected lesser distributor named Roberto Ortega and then on Quesada's phone and behind the wall clock in Quesada's living room. This was Operation Tick-Talks. Police listened to hundreds of hours of conversation through the spring of 1981, but then the clock fell off the wall and the bug was discovered, so they had to move in to arrest an assortment of schoolteachers, airline pilots, and accountants, plus the Villaverde brothers and the Condoms and Quesada, making forty-eight people in all. They have been charged with conspiracy to distribute cocaine, although no drugs were seized.

Much ingenuity went into the Tick-Talks surveillance. Police detained the caretaker of the Quesada house on a minor traffic charge so that they could make a copy of the house key in his pocket, which gave them entry so they could install the wall bug. The way they came back to change the setting for daylight saving time was very clever. But letting Ricardo Morales chart the course of a criminal prosecution is bound to create a few complications.

For example, Sam Smargon, the state attorney who tried to keep Morales from getting bail when he was caught with the marijuana, and then lost the marijuana case, has moved over to the U.S. attorney's office, which Jerry Sanford vacated to go into private practice. Just before the recent flip, Morales requested that Smargon put him in the federal witness protection program. This program is for people who are helping the Feds, and Tick-Talks is a state matter. Morales had agreed to testify in a federal tax case against a reputed drug smuggler. But that case came and went without Morales testifying. It seems more likely that Morales entered the federal witness protection program because he wanted to, for

reasons having nothing to do with the tax case. Morales has been out of the federal program since July, but is continuing a witness protection program of his own by remaining out of sight of the U.S. marshals. Nobody will tell me where he is to this day.

Jerry Sanford, who was stood up by Morales in the Otero case and then flipped Quesada and later became Quesada's attorney, both on Morales's suggestion, signed on to defend Quesada against charges originated by Morales in Operation Tick-Talks. Sanford also sent Morales's request for federal protection to his friend Sam Smargon. Recently, Sanford simplified his life by stepping aside as Quesada's attorney. The last time I saw Sanford, he looked both relieved and tired.

The government couldn't get Morales to cooperate in the Otero case, and then lost the marijuana case against him because the wiretaps were thrown out and the informants were unreliable, and now it is going to try forty-eight new defendants in the belief that Morales will cooperate and the wiretaps will hold up. It has remarkable faith, and no physical evidence. Drugs were not confiscated in Tick-Talks, and the recorded dialogues between the suspected conspirators are much more befuddling than the old fish-hook exchanges on the previous go-round. The literal translations make it sound like the Villaverdes and Quesada were either milking cows, planting rose bushes, or collecting bazookas. Could they possibly not have known that they were being taped, given all the lively barter of information in this town and the fact that Morales himself had disappeared?

IT IS NOW fall in Miami, and the heat has left the pavement. The only major character in any of the Morales episodes currently in prison is Orlando Bosch. He is still being held in Venezuela, even though he was acquitted there. Venezuela has a different system of justice. Rolando Otero is out on bond, and so is Carlos Quesada, and so are the Villaverdes. Rudy Rodriguez, the man they wanted to convict so badly that they flipped Morales and Quesada, spent about a year in jail awaiting his appeal because he couldn't make the bond of \$1 million. Recently, however, the government changed its mind and agreed to let him use some property he owned as collateral for his bond, so Rodriguez is free again. Naturally, there is a rumor around Miami about why the government let him out: Rodriguez has been flipped, and now he's an informant, too. The rumor doesn't say who is left to inform on. □

"There are certain things you can do for some people and then they owe you a favor. That is the system. Sometimes, it breeds what looks like corruption."