



Dear Reader,

This month, we embark on a truly ambitious project for our newsletter subscribers, long in development. Its opening is presented below with no additional introduction; further comment, we feel, would only detract from the mystery. At some point over the next few newsletters we will reveal our full intention...but for now, beyond asking for your patience, we require of you

only one thing: enjoy!

With warm regards,

Doug & Linc



AND SO IT BEGINS...

Roger Smithback cast an eye on the battered steamer trunk that had been sitting for years in the back of his closet, and he again felt a rush of pain and sorrow, mingled with self-reproach. Inside were the papers of his late brother, Bill Smithback, who had been murdered in New York City a few years before. These were not Bill's personal papers—his widow Nora had those—but the articles, notes, interviews, research, and other materials Bill had worked on as a reporter for the *Times* and the *Post*, as well as for his three published books. Roger hadn't cracked the trunk since it arrived—he knew it would stir up painful thoughts, and he could hardly bear the idea of sorting through the papers to figure out what to do with them.

But since he was moving into a larger apartment closer to Miami Beach, he realized that he simply had to get this done, and now was the time.

The coats had already been taken off the racks and packed up for the move. Taking a deep breath, he seized the handle of the trunk and dragged it out of the closet into the hallway. He stared at it and fought a brief impulse to shove it back in.

Unlatching the lid, he lifted it up, to see bundles of steno pads, spiral notebooks, and manila accordion folders, all tied up and neatly stacked. A scent of dust and ink arose. He recognized his brother's scribbled handwriting, the generous looping letters, the dramatic flair, that flowed from Bill's extravagant and sometimes outrageous personality. It appeared to be a well-organized archive, and not, thank god, the mass of loose paper he feared.

Shutting the lid, he dragged the trunk down the hall and around the corner into his little office. He took the first bundle and placed it on his worktable, untied it, and started going through it, taking notes by hand on a yellow legal pad. His plan, he decided, would be to quickly inventory the bundles, and then go through them later, page by page.

The papers were organized not chronologically, but by case and story. The oldest ones went back to Bill's early days as a writer and reporter, many featuring the cases of Special Agent Pendergast. One fat bundle dealt with the Museum murders--the first of Pendergast's cases he covered--another with the Surgeon killings, and yet another on the archaeological expedition to Quivira where he first met Nora Kelly. These three cases Bill had written up and published as books. Roger knew there was more to these cases than had gone into the books, as Bill had noted in telling him stories about them with relish. But Roger was surprised there was so much more in the trunk that he knew little about, including many cases involving Pendergast that, as far as Roger could recall, he'd never even heard of. The more he sorted through the bundles, the more he appreciated this was a gold mine of information.

He labeled each bundle with a brief summary of its contents, and then retied it. He had wondered if a university archive might be interested in these papers. His older brother had been a remarkable journalist, if unorthodox and at times obnoxious, and he had broken a number of extraordinary stories. Roger plowed on.

About halfway through the trunk, he came across a manila file that was curiously blank. Inside was a single folder, containing a slender manuscript. He pulled it out and read the title page.

UNTOUCHABLE The Unique and Mysterious Career of Special Agent Aloysius X. L. Pendergast

By William Smithback Jr.

He began to read:

Pendergast moved to holster his gun, a 1911 Colt. It was a beautiful custom firearm made by the famed gunsmith Les Baer, chambered in .45 ACP, with a combination of balance

and heft that was most pleasing to the hand. And it had just saved his life.

This was something to consider.

Putting the weapon away, he climbed up the jungle ravine until he reached the two dead bodies, still steaming in the mists that never fully vanished. The first was of the Giant Rat of Sumatra, its claws and teeth stringy with gore; and the second was the madman who had tamed the creature to do his murderous bidding...

Roger paused for a moment. Giant Rat of Sumatra? He had never heard of a case like that. Then he flipped ahead to the end of the short manuscript.

Chapter 1: Pale Fire

In the annals of the FBI, Aloysius X. L. Pendergast is simultaneously one of the most successful, and notorious, agents in the Bureau's history. Successful because he has never lost a case—or, at least, never lost a case he did not intend to (as shall be seen). Notorious because...well, a few other FBI agents may have put it best when they gave him a nickname—"Three-in-One"—not, of course, used in his presence. As the name would suggest, it alluded to the idea that Pendergast was smoother than the finest machine oil and just as slippery. But more to the point, it reflected his 'arrest-to-kill' ratio: on average for every three perps he exposed, only one survived to face justice.

But to truly understand the career of Aloysius X.L. Pendergast, one must first comprehend his life. And to do that, one has to travel back before his birth, to the long, convoluted, and disturbing history of his family. The Pendergasts were no ordinary line; they were a dynasty spun through with madness, criminality, and murder on the one side, and genius on the other. There were no ordinary Pendergasts, it seems—they were all sui generis, as Pendergast himself once...

And there the unfinished manuscript stopped in mid-sentence. Attached were half a dozen hand-scribbled pages that appeared to be an outline of Pendergast's life: his classified war years; his joining the FBI; and his first cases. Appended to this was a skeletal list labeled "P's Most Sensational Cases," leading up to the very investigation that led to his brother's own murder. And that, of course, is where it abruptly ended.

For a long time, Roger Smithback sat at the worktable, staring at the slender manuscript. Bill had mentioned to him several times before his untimely death that he had been working on a secret project. It was so private, so confidential, that he wouldn't share the details, even with his brother.

There was no doubt in Roger's mind: this was his brother's secret project: a biography of A. X. L. Pendergast, featuring some of the agent's early life and his most obscure and fearsome cases. And in that moment Roger Smithback made a momentous decision. More than a decision: he made a vow....

More to come in the next newsletter.





And, for your enjoyment, a few interesting web links:

[To follow Doug's Instagram account](#)

[To visit the Preston and Child Facebook page](#)

[For the adventurous, a surprise link to an interesting website](#)

Picture credits, from top to bottom:

Doug and Linc in the Mark Twain House

Doug and Linc arguing, by Luchie Child

Chris Royal, Young Diogenes, Diogenes and Constance at the volcano