

With Budgets Tight, Condos Dump Lawyers for Death Squads

by Con Chapman

BOSTON. It's the second Tuesday of October, the date scheduled for the monthly meeting of the 375 Marlborough Street Condominium Association, which governs a 15-unit brownstone on one of the most prestigious streets in town.



Marlborough Street, Boston

Sally Tyng, condo association president, offers this reporter a cup of mulled apple cider and a congo bar, joking that her position—"the highest elective office I've ever held"—doesn't excuse her from taking a turn making snacks for meetings.

Congo bars—yum!

This month's session is important because the association is facing a major expenditure—repairs to the roof needed to fix leaks caused by ice dams last winter—and yet attendance is less than 100%. "We've got a couple of scofflaws," she says, referring to unit

owners such as Tyler Watkins III, an aspiring writer who purchased his ground-floor unit with a gift from his parents, but who is chronically late with his monthly condo fees due to the irregular nature of his freelance income.



“We could set a leg trap for Tyler, but one of the cats might step in it.”

Ordinarily, the matter would be referred to the condo's outside counsel, The Law Offices of Alan Lipshutz, P.C., but the firm has just notified the association that the hourly rate of Chloe Schultz, the associate who handles their collection matters, will increase to \$300 an hour in January. “I’m sorry,” says Mort Zucker, a crusty, retired CPA who functions as the association's treasurer. “There's no woman in Boston worth that kind of money with her clothes on.”



Low-priced alternative

So Zucker has brought a competing offer to the table; a three-member team from the Caravan of Death, a Chilean Army death squad that dates back to the early 1970s, has offered to put Watkins under round-the-clock surveillance for \$250 a day, with a bonus of 10% of any overdue condo fees collected.



"The only weapon I'm carrying is my iPod."

"Personally, I think it's a no-brainer," Zucker begins as he hands out photos of the squad's victims over the past four decades, "but we do things by consensus here, so I invited the guys in to make a little presentation."

Unused to public speaking due to their clandestine mode of operations, the group's anonymous leader greets the assembled members through his black mask. "We can't understand you," says Peggy McClaren, a Social Security actuary who lives with her two cats in a basement unit.

"I apologize, *senorita*," the man says, removing his mask to reveal a face that is both sinister and placid at the same time. "Honorable condominium association members," he begins. "I apologize for not having a PowerPoint slide show for you tonight, but me and my *muchachos*—we travel light." He allows himself a little smile, and a few members respond with laughs.



"Come with me—you have illegally parked in Unit 2A's space."

"You people," he continues, "you are good, hard-working people." McClaren nods, as does Zucker, while Tyng maintains a non-committal expression, since her objectivity will be on the line when the matter comes to a vote.

“Why should you, who pay your dues on time, month after month—why should you suffer because some trust-fund beneficiary of America’s ruling class would rather spend his disposable income on Eurotrash women he meets in Back Bay bars?”

The group's sympathies begin to sway, but debate on extraordinary expenditures is typically open and robust. “What if he doesn't pay?” asks Nadia Weston-Weiss, a mutual fund accountant.

“We have ways of making him pay, *senorita*,” the leader says.

“Are they loud?” McClaren chimes in from the sofa. “Because the one thing I hate is noise.”

The leader barks a command in guttural Spanish at one of his two colleagues, who steps forward to show the white-haired McClaren a semi-automatic rifle with a silencer. “It is quiet,” the gunman says in a voice that is barely a whisper. “As quiet as the grave.”

Zucker, with some of his favorite file cabinets.

“You have to agree the price is right,” Zucker interjects, hoping to steer the conversation away from the more colorful aspects of the potential vendor's menu of services.

“We are ready to serve you,” the leader says by way of peroration. “We are prepared to die,” he adds, bowing low before putting his black mask back on.

“Thank you very much for your informative presentation. Would you like a congo bar to eat while we deliberate?” Tyng says pleasantly.

“*Si, senorita*, this would be fine,” the leader says as he takes one of the snack squares and pushes it somewhat awkwardly through the mouth slit of his black mask.

The three men step outside and take seats on the third floor landing, where a tasteful padded bench is located next to the elevator.

Once the door is closed, the floor is opened up for discussion. “I don't know,” Weston-Weiss says, brushing her hair back off her hyphen. “There's something about them that seems a bit—unusual.”

“Sure it's unusual,” Zucker says. “But the ‘usual’ is going to court. Death squads specialize in *extra*-judicial remedies.”

McClaren, who functions as the group's informal parliamentarian, consults the condo by-laws. “Since it's not a capital expenditure, it only needs a majority vote, not two-thirds.”

“Will someone make a motion?” Tyng adds, hoping to move the meeting along with several items remaining on the agenda, including a snow plowing contract.

“I move that we hire the Caravan of Death on a trial basis and if they get good results with Watkins, we put them on retainer,” Zucker says.

“Second?” Tyng asks the group.

“Second,” McClaren says.

“All in favor?” Tyng asks.

A chorus of ayes is heard, and the vote is unanimous. Zucker turns to Weston-Weiss, whom he was afraid would vote against the novel proposal, and thanks her for coming around.

“I appreciate your support, Nadia.”

“No problem,” she says. “They are very frightening-looking men, but then I remembered what the lawyers look like.”

