

The Last Circle

Danny Casolaro's Investigation into The Octopus and the Promis Software Scandal

Cheri Seymour

Walterville (Oregon): Trineday: 2010, \$24.95 (US)

Robin Ramsay

This is almost 450 pages of text and another 130 pages of evidence and photographs, at the end which I had enjoyed the ride but still had almost no idea of (a) what was and wasn't important here (never mind what was and wasn't true); (b) how close Danny Casolaro had got to any of this; (c) who had killed him. One of the few clear things that emerge is that while trying to wrestle with this enormously complex and elusive material might have depressed someone whose life was in good shape, never mind someone like Casolaro whose life was falling apart, it is nonetheless pretty clear his death was murder and not suicide. And presumably because someone thought he was getting too close to something. But who? And what? remain almost as opaque at the end of the book as at the beginning. I say 'almost' because halfway through the book, into the narrative of spies and the mob and hitmen and the theft of the PROMIS software, international spookery, and military developments in secret on an Indian reservation, comes a murderous, drug-dealing criminal gang composed of ex-policemen and ex-soldiers. Well now....

Way back when this magazine began, in the days when getting access to copies of the *International Herald Tribune* in Britain seemed exciting, there was the vague notion that if we read enough public material we would be able to reconstruct the secret world beneath it. This book shows as well as anything I have read that these notions were simply the views of naive people who had never been near real criminal investigations, nor tried to deal with people from the covert world who were blowing smoke (let alone who might kill you if you found something interesting). The author of this book has been on the case, off and on, for twenty years and is still unable to decide how many of the tales told her by this story's two central figures, Michael Riconosciuto and Robert Booth Nichols are true. The core narratives here are so complex, and the waters so muddied by people lying, as to be almost impenetrable. The author doesn't help by taking the reader down all manner of interesting trails leading

off the main drag – mind control and viruses and remote viewing I remember – with little bearing on the central story (but who was to know where the trail would lead when the excursion began?) So I would say this: anyone looking for a straightforward narrative which begins with a puzzle and ends with a resolution, don't buy this. On the other hand, if you want a fascinating kaleidoscope of crimes and covert operations from the dark side of American life, facilitated by American moral hypocrisy and funded by the largely unregulated development of the military-industrial-intelligence complex, with enough 'stories' to keep a *Sunday Times* 'Insight' team going for decades, this is for you.