The Apothecary | Third Draft 3/19/12

Written by Erik Radvon | Prepared for Red Stylo Media

The setting is fictional Mantua County. Southwestern US / Four Corners scenery – desert, scrub plants, cacti, mountains, etc.

Page 1

Five panels.

Panels 1 and 5 are horizontal panels stretching across the top and bottom thirds of the page. Between them, panels 2, 3, and 4 form a row of three evenly sized panels.

Panel 1

Establishing shot. We see a small rundown shack in the middle of the barren desert, a two-lane blacktop road in the distance. We can make out a dirt path leading from the paved road out to the shack. We want to feel the vastness of the desert.

CAPTION: MANTUA COUNTY, USA

Panel 2

An OLD MAN is shown on the left portion of the panel, sitting in the wooden rocking chair and gazing off the porch of the shack. We see a vehicle in the distance merging off the paved road onto a dirt path.

OLD MAN(CAPTION): I LEFT THE CITY AND CAME UP TO THIS PLACE TWENTY YEARS AGO.

Panel 3

Close up of a black luxury model SUV, rumbling down the dirt path, clouds of dust left in its wake.

OLD MAN(CAPTION): **MANTUA'S** STILL THE SAME AS WHEN I GOT HERE. GOOD PLACE FOR SOMEBODY SEEKING A QUIET LIFE. GOOD PLACE FOR SOMEBODY LOOKING TO **DISAPPEAR**.

Page 1 (cont'd)

Panel 4

We're looking straight at the Old Man as he leans forward in his rocking chair to see who is coming out to his desolate house. We see the SUV tearing down the dirt path reflected in his watery, sad eyes. His face is weathered, wrinkled, and peppered with crow's feet and age spots.

OLD MAN(CAPTION): GOOD PLACE FOR SOMEBODY LIKE ME.

Panel 5

We see the large SUV coming to a rest just a few feet away from the Old Man's shack. Clouds of dust circle up from the large vehicle. The Old Man is looking out from his porch at the unexpected visitors, not so much frightened as he is bemused and curious.

Leave a box at the bottom of this page for the title and credits:

"The Apothecary" Story: Erik Radvon Art: TBD Editorial credits

Seven panels – two on the top of the page, three in a row across the middle, and two on the bottom.

Panel 1

Close and low on the parked SUV. An ornate cowboy boot – the fancy kind worn by criminals and Tejano musicians, not cowboys –is thrust out, its wearer stepping out of the vehicle.

OLD MAN(CAPTION): TWENTY YEARS IN MANTUA. **EXILE**, I GUESS YOU COULD CALL IT. TRUTH BE TOLD, I NEVER MUCH MISSED THE CITY. THE DESERT IS QUIET, PEACEFUL. SO IS POVERTY.

OLD MAN(CAPTION): IT'S REMARKABLE HOW FAST YOU GET USED TO IT...

Panel 2

We look head-on at ROMEO, wearer of the ornate boots, standing in front of the parked SUV. Romeo wears a slick suit and sunglasses. A silver necklace with a crescent moon pendant hangs around his neck. Two companion stand on either side of the SUV – thugs also dressed in nice suits but with looks that convey they are armed and dangerous.

ROMEO: YO, OLD MAN!

OLD MAN(CAPTION): ... THE PEACE, THE QUIET.

Panel 3

The Old Man is on the left, leaning off his porch. Romeo is on the right, standing in front of his SUV, hands on his waist, looking boisterous, no-nonsense.

OLD MAN: WHO'S ASKING SO LOUDLY?

ROMEO: NAME'S **ROMEO**. I'M UP FROM VERONA AND NEED AN **APOTHECARY**. 'ROUND THESE PARTS, I HEAR THAT'S YOU.

Panel 4

Romeo is now on the Old Man's porch. The Old Man leans on a cane. The two shake hands.

OLD MAN(CAPTION): APOTHECARY. CITY WORD. FOLK IN MANTUA NEVER CALLED ME THAT. WHAT COULD THIS **BRAZEN YOUTH** WANT?

OLD MAN: I SUPPOSE IT IS, ALTHOUGH I DON'T DO MUCH BUSINESS THESE DAYS.

Page 2 (cont'd)

Panel 5

Romeo pulls a handful of gold coins from inside his suit jacket.

ROMEO: WELL, I'VE GOT **FORTY DUCATS** WORTH OF **BUSINESS** FOR YOU RIGHT HERE. I NEED **POISON**, STRONG AND FAST. THAT SOMETHING YOU CAN **DELIVER**?

OLD MAN(CAPTION): FORTY...WHAT A SUM!

Panel 6

Focus in on Romeo as he has the bulk of the dialogue in this panel. He is forceful, making his case, but not quite foaming at the mouth with anger.

OLD MAN: SUPPOSING I COULD PRODUCE SUCH A **MORTAL DRUG**, YOUNG FELLA, SELLING IT HERE IN MANTUA IS AGAINST THE **LAW**!

ROMEO: THE LAW?! PFFT! NO OFFENSE OLD MAN, BUT YOU'RE LIVING BARE AND WRETCHED OUT HERE. FROM WHERE I STAND, LOOKS LIKE THIS WORLD AIN'T YOUR FRIEND AND NEITHER IS ITS LAW. HELL, NOBODY'S GONNA BE SHOWING UP HERE WITH FORTY DUCATS ANYTIME SOON, I CAN TELL YOU THAT MUCH. SO WHAT DO YOU SAY?

Panel 7

We show the Old Man contemplating, worried lines on his face.

OLD MAN: MY **CONSCIENCE** SAYS NO...BUT MY **POVERY** -- CLEAR EVEN TO YOU, STRANGER FROM VERONA -- TELLS ME MY ANSWER MUST BE **YES**!

ROMEO: I PAY YOUR **POVERY**, OLD MAN, NOT YOUR **DAMN CONSCIENCE**.

Nine panel grid.

Panel 1

The Old Man and Romeo shaking hands in agreement, shown in silhouette against the blazing Western sun setting in the distance.

OLD MAN(CAPTION): MY POVERY SAID **YES**, AS IT ALWAYS HAD. WHENEVER I HAD A CHANCE TO MAKE MONEY FROM MY CRAFT, I TOOK IT. GUESS THAT'S WHAT ALWAYS GOT ME IN TROUBLE.

Panel 2

Old Man looking off the porch as the black SUV rolls down the dirt path in the distance, heading back to the road from whence it came. Sun is setting on the horizon, casting long shadows.

OLD MAN(CAPTION): I TOLD MY UNEXPECTED VISITOR TO COME BACK IN A FEW HOURS AND I'D HAVE WHAT HE NEEDED.

Panel 3

Shot of gold coins in the Old Man's hands.

OLD MAN(CAPTION): TWENTY UP FRONT, TWENTY UPON DELIVERY. BEEN YEARS SINCE I'D SEEN MONEY LIKE THAT. ENOUGH TO PAY MY POVERTY **AND** MY CONSCIENCE.

Panel 4

We see the Old Man's laboratory inside his beat-up shack. There is a seemingly ancient thick oak workbench/table. Arcane books clutter on its surface, surrounded by beakers of liquids and strange fluids, jars of roots and herbs and animal-derived ingredients are also there. User you imagination – make it part scientific workstation, part art studio, part witchcraft-y altar. Try to feature a tortoise skull or empty shell on a shelf somewhere in the background. A shoulder bag and walking stick are slung onto a vacant chair.

OLD MAN(CAPTION): I STILL KEPT MY **LAB** IN ORDER, STILL KEPT THE **FORMULAS** ON HAND. GUESS I ALWAYS KNEW I'D HAVE ONE LAST **SERIOUS JOB** TO DO.

Page 3 (cont'd)

Panel 5

It is night now. A full moon shines overhead, lighting the landscape at nearly daytime levels of brightness. Overhead, slightly aerial shot of the Old Man in the desert behind his house. He wears the bag from the previous panel across his shoulder, like a rustic messenger bag, and has his weight leaning on the walking stick. He looks small in the desert expanse.

Panel 6

The Old Man is digging in the ground around the base of a cactus or a Joshua tree. Moon overhead.

OLD MAN(CAPTION): I STILL HAD MY **NOSE**. COULD STILL FORAGE OUT THE BEST **INGREDIENTS**.

Panel 7

The Old Man yanks a gnarly looking root out from the ground. Again, the moon is prominent overhead and casts a weird brightness on the landscape.

OLD MAN(CAPTION): THE BOY ASKED FOR A CONCOCTION BOTH STRONG AND FAST. CALLS FOR MY **SPECIAL BLEND**, THE ONE THAT MADE ME KNOWN BACK IN THE CITY. THE ONE THAT MADE ME **INFAMOUS**.

Panel 8

Far shot, showing the Old Man small in the desert scenery, slowly hiking back to his shack.

OLD MAN(CAPTION): I GOT MY REPUTATION BY USING NATURAL INGREDIENTS, MY BELIEF BEING ARTIFICIAL CHEMICALS PRODUCE ARTIFICIAL RESULTS. FOR ME, INGEDIENTS ALWAYS HAD TO BE **NATURAL**.

Panel 9

Back at the front step of the shack. The Old Man holds the root up to his nose and is inhaling deeply, his eyes closed as he analyzes the odor, takes the essence in through his nostrils. He's like a chef in love with his produce.

OLD MAN(CAPTION): IN THE END, NO MATTER WHAT YOU'RE MAKING, IT'S ALL ABOUT THE QUALITY OF THE **INGREDIENTS.**

Nine panel grid.

Panel 1

Birdseye view of the Old Man in his laboratory. He is sitting at the large oak table, mortar and pestle and books and ingredients cast all about around him. He wears a pair of crooked bifocals and stares down at the root as he works to slice it with a metal scalpel. He wears latex gloves on his hands. The root is in a metal pan, like a proper scientific specimen.

OLD MAN(CAPTION): WE FORGET THAT WE'RE OF THIS EARTH.

Panel 2

The Old Man holds a thin piece of the root with a pair of tweezers over a beaker. We're close in on the lip of the beaker with the tweezers-held root in the foreground and the Old Man in the background, watching with careful eyes.

OLD MAN(CAPTION): WE FORGET THE TIES WE HAVE WITH THE NATURAL ORDER OF THINGS.

Panel 3

The Old Man monitors the beaker as it fizzes and foams, strange fumes coming off the mixture he is brewing. He wears a bandana around his face.

OLD MAN(CAPTION): WE FORGET THAT WE WERE ONCE WANDERING IN THE NIGHT. HUNTING, EATING, SURVIVING -- JUST LIKE ALL THE OTHER **ANIMALS**.

Panel 4

We see the Old Man decanting the contents of the beaker into an antique-looking glass vial held upright in a wire stand. A smaller vial is next to the larger vial and also held aloft in the wire stand, however we only see liquid being poured into the larger vial. A few cork stoppers are visible in the background, resting on the table amidst the clutter of the Old Man's poison making efforts. The main focus of the panel is the liquid pouring out from the beaker into the large glass vial.

OLD MAN(CAPTION): WE FORGET HOW FRAGILE WE ARE, HOW FRAGILE ALL OF THIS IS.

Page 4 (cont'd)

Panel 5

The Old Man holds the antique glass vial filled with his finished product and topped with a cork up into a shaft of moonlight entering his little shack. He has a smile on his face, the kind a father might have when looking at a newborn child.

OLD MAN(CAPTION): MOSTLY, WE FORGET THAT WE'RE ONLY A SMALL PART OF IT ALL. NOT ABOVE IT, NOT IMMUNE TO IT, JUST **PART OF IT**. FRAGILE THINGS IN A FRAGILE WORLD.

Panel 6

We see the Old Man placing the filled vial back into the wire rack. Show the smaller vial sitting there, still empty, as a bit of foreshadowing.

OLD MAN(CAPTION): MY PEERS, WITH THEIR WHITE COATS AND DEGREES, NEVER UNDERSTOOD THAT. THEIR ARROGANT MINDS PLACED THEM ABOVE THE WORLD. ME, I NEVER FORGOT WHERE WE CAME FROM. THAT'S WHY MY PRODUCTS WORKED SO WELL.

Panel 7

A portrait photograph shown in a silver picture frame, perhaps with a portion of the frame looking like a crescent moon. The photo is kind of ragged and ripped. We see the outline of a woman in the picture frame, but not a lot of details, just a vague figure. We also see the vial cooling off in the wire rack and the Old Man taking off his latex gloves and tossing them into a little trash can.

OLD MAN(CAPTION): WHAT I DONE, I NEVER SAW IT AS **CRIMINAL**. I HELPED PEOPLE, IS ALL. HELPED THEM MEET THEIR MAKER ON **THEIR OWN TERMS**, WITHOUT PAIN, WITHOUT MISERY. **NATURAL**.

Panel 8

We look past the silver picture frame and see the Old Man grabbing an envelope from a pile of papers.

OLD MAN(CAPTION): THE AUTHORITIES DIDN'T SEE IT THAT WAY. THE BIG SHOTS HAD THEIR CHEMICALS AND PILLS TO SELL, COULDN'T HAVE ME RUNNING AROUND CUTTING INTO BUSINESS. THEY CALLED ME A **MURDERER** AND A **DEVIANT**, A **MAD SCIENTIST EVEN!**

Page 4 (cont'd)

Panel 9

Close in on the silver picture frame now, showing the detail of the photograph it holds. It is a tattered photo of a beautiful young woman with a beaming smile.

OLD MAN(CAPTION): IF ONLY IT HAD EVER BEEN THAT EXCITING. IF ONLY THEY KNEW WHAT I HAD **SACRIFICED**...

Five panels. Three even panels across the top half of the page followed by two larger panels taking up the lower half.

We're flashing back now, showing the Old Man's heyday in the alluded to "City." The period doesn't have to be super specific or pronounced, just aim for a slightly nostalgic early twentieth century vibe. The Old Man is, obviously, not old here. Show him as a thin, well dressed guy, clean and neat. He still sports a beard, but it is not grey, and he wears a suit with a bow tie.

Panel 1

The young version of the Old Man is standing in front of a gleaming new storefront. A "grand opening" banner hangs across the front of the building, and a sign above the store entrance that reads "Apothecary" is partially visible.

OLD MAN(CAPTION): ...IF ONLY THEY KNEW WHAT I'D BEEN FORCED TO **LEAVE BEHIND**.

PHOTOGRAPHER(OFF PANEL): OK, JUST A LITTLE TO THE LEFT NOW...

OLD MAN: HOLD UP, LEMME GET THE GIRLS IN HERE WITH ME. GIRLS!

Panel 2

We see the same angle as panel 1 but the camera has moved back, revealing the PHOTOGRAPHER on the right. He wears a hat with a card in it reading "PRESS" and is adjusting some lights. We also see a woman entering the panel from the left, dark haired and beautiful – the woman in the photo previously shown. She has a small girl of 3-4 years old in tow with her.

OLD MAN: THAT'S RIGHT, C'MON IN HERE. WE'RE ALL GOING TO BE IN THE **PAPER!**

WOMAN: OH, MY HAIR IS MESS!

OLD MAN: NONSENSE, YOU LOOK BEAUTIFUL AS ALWAYS.

LITTLE GIRL: YES, YOU LOOK BEAUTIFUL, MOMMY.

WOMAN: OH, BLESS YOUR HEART, MY DEAR!

Page 5 (cont'd)

Panel 3

The family is gathered together in front of the storefront with the grand opening banner, the photographer is leaned in with his eye on the camera's viewfinder, sizing up the shot.

PHOTOGRAPHER: ALL RIGHT, SQUEEZE IN TOGETHER NOW...

OLD MAN: OK GIRLS, BEST SMILES NOW!

PHOTOGRAPHER: HOLD IT JUST LIKE THAT...SAY CHEESE!

Panel 4

We're tight on the young Old Man, Woman, and Little Girl, embracing each other and wearing beaming smiles. The photographer's flashbulbs light their faces.

ALL: CHEESE!

SFX: FLASH!

Panel 5

The Old Man is shaking hands with the photographer, the woman and child behind him.

PHOTOGRAPHER: YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THE FEATURE IN TOMORROW'S EDITION. CONGRATULATIONS AGAIN ON THE NEW SHOP.

OLD MAN: WE LIKE TO THINK OF THEM AS CLINICS.

PHOTOGRAPHER: AH, THAT'S RIGHT. "ALL NATURAL CLINICS FOR ALL NATURAL PEOPLE", RIGHT? CONGRATULATIONS ON THAT THEN, AND ON YOUR **LOVELY FAMILY**.

OLD MAN: THANK YOU KINDLY, SIR.

LITTLE GIRL: LOVELY FAMILY! LOVELY FAMILY!

The page is divided into four evenly sized panels.

Panel 1

We're cutting from the warmth and busyness of the previous scene to an opposite one -- He is surrounded by an air of loneliness and loss. The moon is full and prominent. We see the photo taken years ago now in its silver frame, resting on the Old Man's lap. He is seated on his porch in the desert night, puffing away on a corncob pipe. We show the woman and we now also catch a glimpse of the young girl hiding behind the woman's dress. The Old Man isn't visible in the photo, his portion ripped off or otherwise deteriorated over the years.

OLD MAN(CAPTION): A LOVELY FAMILY. THAT PHASE OF MY LIFE ENDED A LONG TIME AGO.

Panel 2

The Old Man is shown looking pointedly at the moon. Show some activity in the sky, a small shooting star perhaps. You can be a little esoteric with the art here.

OLD MAN(CAPTION): LIFE IS INCONSISTANT, JUST LIKE THAT ORB ABOVE. SOME TIMES ARE FULL OF LIGHT, OTHERS ARE BLACK.

Panel 3

We show the Old Man in younger days, sitting by the bedside of his dying wife. She is connected to IVs and other tubes. Old flowers and "Get Well Soon!" cards adorn the room. The younger version of the Old Man grips her hand tightly, tears streaming down his face, as his other hand administers a needle full of his life-ending concoction.

OLD MAN(CAPTION): SHE GOT SICK, HER LIGHT WAS FADING. WHEN THE BLACK DAYS CAME, I DID THE ONLY THING I KNEW HOW TO...I HELPED HER MEET THE END **NATURLLY**, IN PEACE. THE MEDIA HAD A FIELD DAY, AS DID THE COPS AND THE FAT CATS I HAD CROSSED. THEY'D BEEN WAITING FOR THEIR CHANCE, AND IN MY WEAKEST MOMENT, THEY GOT IT.

Page 6 (cont'd)

Panel 4

A profile of the Old Man's face, the moon and stars reflected in his watery eyes. Tobacco smoke circles around him.

OLD MAN(CAPTION): THERE WAS NO PEACE FOR ME, OR FOR OUR **DAUGHTER**. WITHOUT HER MOTHER, SHE WAS LOST. SO WAS I, UNFIT TO BE A FATHER. THE CIRCUS DIDN'T EVEN ALLOW US TIME TO GREIVE. SHE WENT WITH HER GRANDPARENTS...

Five panels. Panels 1 and 2 are horizontal panels that stretch across the whole page. Panels 3 and 4 are even sized rectangles along the bottom third of the page, while panel 5 is a round panel that breaks out and bleeds to the edge of the page.

Panel 1

Medium/Wide shot. Romeo stands in front of his SUV as the Old Man hobbles off his porch to meet him.

OLD MAN(CAPTION): ...AND I FLED TO MANTUA.

ROMEO: EVENING. WE ALL SET?

OLD MAN: EVENING TO YOU, YOUNG SIR. ALL SET INDEED.

Panel 2

Close in on the Old Man's weathered hands as he gingerly hands over the ornate dram of poison. Romeo's hand is outstretched to receive it. We only see their hands and a bit of their arms, not their faces.

OLD MAN(OFF PANEL): IT'S AS PURE AS YOU CAN FIND. DON'T KNOW WHO OR WHAT IT'S FOR, AND AT MY AGE, CAN'T SAY THAT I MUCH CARE. REST ASSURED – PUT IT IN SOME **LIQUID** AND IT'LL GET THE JOB DONE WITHOUT PAIN OR DELAY. IT'S ALL **NATURAL**.

Panel 3

We back off from the previous panel's close-up, showing the Old Man and Romeo standing in front of the cottage. The Old Man is counting his final payment of 20 ducats. Romeo holds the dram of poison up, examining it in the moonlight. The gold and the vial shine equally bright.

ROMEO(OFF PANEL RIGHT): TRADING **ONE POISON** FOR **ANOTHER**. YOU ASK ME, MINE'S THE MORE LETHAL.

Panel 4

OLD MAN: WISE WORDS FROM A SOUL SO YOUNG. I THANK YE KINDLY. THIS'LL SETTLE **LONG OUTSTANDING** DEBTS.

ROMEO: YOUR WARES AS WELL, APOTHECARY...

Page 7 (cont'd)

Panel 5

We see JULIET, waif-thin and ill looking, yet still hauntingly beautiful, sitting in the back of the SUV. She is wheelchair bound, and admires the desert scenery outside the car window with detached wonder.

ROMEO(CAPTION):...MORE THAN YOU CAN KNOW.

Seven panels. Three smallish panels across the top, three longer panels in the middle, and a large single panel across the bottom third of the page.

Panel 1

The SUV is seen leaving, far in the distance. The Old Man is walking off the porch, stuffing the money into an envelope.

OLD MAN(CAPTION): FORTY. WHAT A SUM.

Panel 2

The Old Man has the envelope raised to his mouth, licking the strip of glue to seal it.

OLD MAN(CAPTION): MANY MOONS HAVE PASSED SINCE I DONE WHAT I DONE. I'M SURE MY DEEDS AIN'T BEEN **FORGOTTEN**, CAN'T BE **FORGIVEN**.

Panel 3

The Old Man places the letter in his rusty mailbox and flips the red flag up for the mailman.

OLD MAN(CAPTION): I CAN ONLY HOPE THIS **HELPS** HER. HOPE IT HELPS HER TO KNOW THAT EVEN THOUGH I LEFT, I NEVER LEFT HER BEHIND IN MY THOUGHTS.

Panel 4

Far shot of the Old Man walking back from the mailbox toward his cottage. The moon is huge and brilliant, dominating the sky.

OLD MAN(CAPTION): THERE IT IS, UNCHANGED. SAME MOON I SAW AS A BOY. SAME MOON THAT HUNG OVERHEAD IN THE CITY, WHEN I WAS SUCCESSFUL. SAME MOON THAT WAS THERE WHEN I GAVE MY WIFE HER LAST SIP AND WATCHED THE LIGHT GO OUT FROM HER EYES. SAME MOON FOLLOWD ME UP HERE TO MANTUA, WATCHED OVER ME FOR ALL THESE TWENTY ODD YEARS.

Page 8 (cont'd)

Panel 5

Old Man back in his chair on the porch. He is leaning back in the chair, one hand going into a pocket and retrieving a smaller dram of poison. It is the same small vial we saw in his laboratory unfilled earlier.

OLD MAN(CAPTION): SAME MOON HERE WITH ME TONIGHT.

Panel 6

Old Man on the porch, head tilted back as he drinks down the small dram of poison in a fast shot, like taking a shot of whiskey. We again see the silver picture frame on his lap.

OLD MAN(CAPTION): INCONSISTENT AS IT MAY BE TO OUR EYES, SHE'S ALWAYS THERE, ALWAYS WITH US. SAME MOON -- WITH ME THEN, WITH ME NOW...

Panel 7

The Old Man is shown lying face down on the porch, arms outstretched as his body enters a death spasm, one hand still clutching the silver picture frame. The silver frame shines in the moonlight, the beautiful woman and reflected stars showing on its surface as the Old Man takes his last breath.

OLD MAN(CAPTION): ...AT THE **END**.

CAPTION BOX:

I do remember an apothecary,--

And hereabouts he dwells,--which late I noted

In tatter'd weeds, with overwhelming brows,

Culling of simples; meagre were his looks,

Sharp misery had worn him to the bones:

Art thou so bare and full of wretchedness,

And fear'st to die? famine is in thy cheeks,

Need and oppression starveth in thine eyes,

Contempt and beggary hangs upon thy back;

The world is not thy friend nor the world's law;

The world affords no law to make thee rich;

Then be not poor, but break it, and take this.

There is thy gold, worse poison to men's souls,

Doing more murders in this loathsome world,

Than these poor compounds that thou mayst not sell.

I sell thee poison; thou hast sold me none.

Romeo and Juliet, Act V Scene I

CAPTION: FIN.

END