

*The God Virus:  
The Sage of Mecca*



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The God Virus:  
The Sage of Mecca

*Complete and unabridged*

American version

Translated from the original French by Samuel Ulnec



**By the same author:**

*The God Virus: The Pontius Pilate Report* Volume 1

*The God Virus: The Pontius Pilate Report* Volume 2

*The God Virus: The Pontius Pilate Report* Volume 3

or the condensed version with all three volumes  
abridged into a single book:

*The God Virus: The Pontius Pilate Report (short  
version)*



# 1

## Final Bouquet

It was the end.

Thomas Anderson looked at his own shadow, the shadow projected onto the glittering surface of the swimming pool. Leaning forward, he could see his face reflected on the gently moving dappled bluish water.

For a moment, he did not recognize himself. He had the sensation he was looking at some other man, with a haggard face, a thousand-yard stare in his blue eyes, a stranger with wrinkled brow and deep shadows under the eyes. The top of his head was balding, and his lackluster graying blond hair contrasted with his long hairy beard. How long had it been since he had last washed or shaved?

That was of no consequence.

He hated the soulless look of that creature who had not been able to save the one person that really mattered to him.

“Tom, why did you abandon her?” seemed to be the reproach staring out of those eyes sunk in a sea of anger.

With a scornful sneer, Tom dropped the bottle of beer he was holding. It fell into the water and spreading concentric rings broke up his reflection.

His whole body shuddered. He looked up and turned towards the sun, seeking some warmth for his icy mask-like face.

In the distance, between the high peaks of the Alps, the sun was slowly declining, and would not be long in disappearing

completely below the reddening horizon, finally yielding its place to nothingness.

It would be the same for Tom.

Of all the endings he might have imagined in the past, the death which was about to carry him off seemed strange, unnatural, even ironic.

He was going to die by his own hand.

He had so often heard bullets whizzing past his ear, whistling like the final rockets in a firework display. Yet he himself was going to make a healthy hole in his own head with a red-hot projectile that would howl his death out of the cold muzzle of a revolver's barrel.

Yet he would feel nothing.

The bullet would be so quick in destroying his brain that it would not be able to register the slightest message, produce the very least electrical pulse, or even less hold a thought, the thought that he was dead.

A click of the fingers, and it would all be over for ever.

Paradoxically, this death that Tom was wishing for, longing for more than anything, he would never be able to note. He would never know that he was well and truly dead.

Only others would know about it.

Tom stirred his tall, muscular form, clad in jeans and a black shirt. Stumbling slightly, he took five steps forward, sat on a teak chair in front of a garden table and fished a cool beer out of an ice bucket.

Leaning back in the chair, he looked at the chalet he had owned for some years now.

Built of solid dark wood, with its peaked roof, the house he had had constructed at the foot of the southern edge of the mountain range was his eyrie, his secret hideaway. He had been able to find refuge there whenever he had had need of getting back to his roots.

On its western side, alongside the garage door where a powerful black four-by-four was parked, an external staircase gave access to a balcony and the main door of the house. The balcony extended along the southern frontage, opening out into a tiled

terrace, always sunny, and ended on the eastern face of the building opposite the swimming pool and tennis court Tom had had installed.

At the foot of the terrace, the ground ran out for another hundred yards, reaching a parapet of old masonry, about a foot and a half high. Beyond that, the mountain sloped gently down to the valley where the closest village lay. Whatever the time of day, the scenery was magnificent, welcoming, calming.

A haven of peace.

But what was the use of a haven of peace, when inside Tom everything was smashed, destroyed and shattered? Camilla was dead, and the loss of her magic meant that everything that had given a sense to his existence no longer had any point.

In the past, if life had had any meaning, he would have turned round and sought it. Nevertheless, his life had never had any real sense, so he had carried on mechanically in a straight line like an ant obeying its instincts and following the basic rules for survival. He had skated over his life from mission to mission, from danger to danger, with fervent religious beliefs as a servant of the Pope, until the final fall when the truth about Christ had torn away his childish visions and flung him down lower than the dirt, like a fallen angel.

Then he had met a real angel on Earth: Camilla. That day in the church at Rennes-le-Château, his life had taken on a new sense, the only sensible meaning: the meaning given by love. Camilla had electrified him, galvanized him and finally set beating his heart inured to everything.

But now Camilla was no more, and the meaning of life had gone with her. Without that meaning, he could no longer plod onward as he had in the past.

Without Camilla, he was nothing, really nothing any more.

Tom gave a long sigh.

He had promised her paradise at his side, but she had ended up in Hell because of him. She had been shut up in a private clinic because she had defended him, the man she loved. But that wretched man had not managed to save her in return.

Was he absolutely responsible for what had happened to Camilla?

Not at all!

Determined to hang on to the worldly powers of the Papacy at any cost, the Vatican had used its hatchet men to put the two lovers out of circulation, so that they could do it no harm.

Tom remembered that when he had taken a notion to publish the secret of Christ in the shape of a novel called *The Pontius Pilate Report* he had had no idea of the extent of the resources the Vatican would bring to bear to destroy the book before it ever appeared.

First, all the publishers had refused to handle his work of fiction, then journalists had happily censured him, docile and obedient to the instructions given them by their bosses, who owned the mass media.

After that, when he decided to arrange for free downloads of his book from the Internet, hackers in the pay of the Pope had systematically destroyed all his on-line files. They had bugged the websites that mentioned them, drowning anywhere that hosted the digital book in a viral flood.

To fight this censorship, Camilla had attempted to publish long extracts in the Catholic magazine she owned. Nevertheless, her father, her Pop the Republican senator, had prevented this, claiming that it would be a scandal, bringing criticism down on the family and harming his chances in the next elections. She had tried to push on with her scheme. Her father's reaction had been to get her shut up in a specialist clinic in a rehabilitation center for drug addicts.

After a couple of weeks without news of Camilla, Tom had set out to find. After a long, hard search he had finally tracked her down, registered under a false name in that loathsome American clinic.

His mistake had been not to get her out by force. He had thought it better to go to a Federal judge. The legal proceedings took several days, and when he finally got a court order to set Camilla free, she had already broken out of confinement by herself.

Unconsciously, Tom clenched his fist on the bottle of beer, at the risk of smashing it into a thousand pieces.

In her escape, doubtless wanting to get away from the United States and her father's henchmen as fast as she could, and not knowing that Tom was on the point saving her from the Hell in which she had been confined, Camilla had gotten on board her sailboat and headed for Europe. Coastguard surveillance cameras had caught her departure, but a cruise ship had found her sailboat empty and drifting in the Atlantic in the middle of a storm.

For the moment, Tom's mind had refused to accept she was dead, clinging to the belief that until her body had not been found there was still room for hope. But cold logic had finally won out: at that season in the year, if you fell into water that cold, just a few minutes in it were enough to see you die from hypothermia.

In the end her body had been fished out of the sea: newspapers had published a string of articles on Camilla's accidental death and her burial. They had highlighted how her father was grief-stricken and had chosen to mourn her among a very small circle of family members.

It was a Sunday of steady rain when Tom attended the funeral.

The shape of things was that he was responsible for her death. He was no better than an assassin, a wretched murder whose wrong decision had killed her. He should have come to her rescue as fast as possible, doing what he was best at, what he had been trained to do in collaboration with Mossad: break in, neutralize and extract, as he had done ten years before to save a Jewish hostage held in enemy territory. Instead, he had dithered; he, the expert on the topic, the specialist who had learned his skills with MI6, had ended up choosing words and negotiation over action.

The bad deed was irretrievably done, and Tom could hope for no more than peace and quiet. He could no longer stand the noise inside his head, his own accursed voice harassing him without cease. He was about to shut it up, and the thought of it calmed him.

Now that he was over forty and his testosterone levels had begun to drop, depression could easily take over. All the same,

Tom was not depressed, just tired of pressing on and having to do it all alone. After all, everything had to end one day, and that day was now here.

Tom smiled sadly.

Long, long ago, when he worked as a negotiator for the Special Forces, he had faced suicides from time to time. He had encountered two types: some had distraught faces, others smiling. A distraught face was understandable. You could easily imagine how the lost individuals had found only suicide as a way of putting an end to their distress. A smiling face, on the other hand, suggested a weighing up of the pros and cons of suicide, finding that solution more advantageous than any other. The result was relief, happiness at taking a one-way ticket to death, thus the smile on the face, the jokes with acquaintances, even a distribution of cigars to friends as if celebrating a happy event, with the one difference that they were honoring the planned death of a friend without knowing it.

That was why they were shocked and uncomprehending after the fatal act occurred, not having seen what was coming from a face twisted into a grin that was really a deadly rictus.

Tom downed his beer in one. Then he threw the glass bottle over his shoulder into the swimming pool. As he was leaning forward to grab another cold beer from the ice bucket, he stopped in his course.

Among the pile of assorted books on the garden table, one caught his eye. His square jaw clenched.

“Damned Koran”, he muttered in his deep voice with a slight Swiss German accent.

He slowly picked up the pocket-sized version of the Moslems’ holy book and mechanically flipped through it.

Tom turned the pages without paying the least attention to the verses that ran past his eyes. Almost in a trance, he remembered finishing the writing of *The Pontius Pilate Report*, then going on to produce a sequel, called *The Sage of Mecca*, half novel, half academic text on the devilish secrets of Mohammed.

Once more, he had sent his book to publishers. Not one had been crazy enough to bring out such a time bomb; no publisher

had dared to print this diatribe against Mohammed, doubtless afraid of seeing real crazies, Allah's madmen, smashing into their premises armed with Kalashnikovs and gunning everyone down. Fear stifled freedom of speech, freedom of thought, and liberty itself, playing the game of self-censorship of any criticism of Islam.

Tom had no fear of that sort. Every time there was a massacre in the name of the Prophet, every time that Islamists slaughtered innocents in the name of God, he wished he could scream out the truth to these fanatics deaf to reality, to their ears under Mohammed's tyrannical yoke.

He wished he could shout out the truth to them so as to save them from themselves through knowledge, freeing them from the chains of ignorance, chains passed down to them by forefathers just as ignorant as they were.

But it would be crying in the desert, a media desert.

Through their silence, their intellectual censorship creating a void, Western media were guilty of propagating the Islamist virus that shackled humankind. Not wanting to "stigmatize" any "good" Moslems, they published no criticisms of Mohammed's religion: none of those who had attempted to show up the real face of Islam had found any sympathetic hearing to give their works some impact.

That had been the case for the novel *The Sage of Mecca*, too.

The Vatican knew that Islam was a sister religion, strongly influenced by the myth of Moses, just like Judaism; it was clear that the three religions of the Book would stand or fall together. It was clear to the Vatican, too, that if it started to criticize the dogmas and absurdities of Islam, its own Church, just as grotesque in itself, would begin to crumble, and end by falling in ruins.

Thus the Pope and his hatchet men kept a close eye on matters, pulling strings so as to depict Mohammed as a wise and tolerant legislator, feeding the run of folk with a ceaseless flow of lies.

It was even easier because non-Moslem writers had long since given up any form of criticism. Constantly renewed, this mental paralysis had taken shape in Europe in the eighteenth

century when Christian authors had highlighted the vices of their own religion. They had pointed their finger at the Inquisition of a previous age and at the corruption of Church institutions. To rouse the West from its spiritual lethargy, they had made use of the comforting myth of the wisdom of the Orient, exaggerating the supposed superiority of foreign, and especially Islamic, cultures. Not having had access to true historical accounts revealing the authentic nature of Islam, these writers had dreamed up a mythical Mohammed, both good and benevolent, even though, wherever his religion had passed through, massacres and forced conversions had marked History. Not for an instant had they imagined that Mohammed might have been wicked: after all, he had taken for his own the doctrine of one true God and had recognized other prophets from the Old Testament, as well as Jesus Christ.

Their vision had been distorted through a mental prism: the tourist syndrome.

Familiarity with their own culture had triggered disdain for it, just like children that think that their friends' houses are prettier than their own, or tourists that believe that the natives of the countries where they travel always do things better than at home. Individuals always have a tendency to avert their gaze from embarrassing aspects of the cultures they admire. For emotional or theoretical reasons, those visiting a foreign country see only what they really want to see. This tourist syndrome tends to make people think badly of their near neighbors, while inversely seeing only good in groups of humans to which they do not belong.

Many Christians suffered from this syndrome relative to Islam. The outcome was a truncated view, a collective heritage of incorrect knowledge of Mohammed's religion and the true face of this man.

Even the 9/11 attacks did not open eyes to the realities of the Moslem world bequeathed by the Prophet.

Blind to the last.

Eyelids had just begun to open, but had very rapidly been shut again, lulled by politicians playing the tune chosen by the band-leader in Rome. The key order was not to link terrorists and Moslems, claiming that those responsible for these atrocities were not Moslems, and that Islam was a religion of peace. To achieve

this it was necessary to invent a whole string of new expressions like “Islamicists”, “radical Islam”, “Moslem fundamentalism” or even “Islamic fascism”. Of course, laws had had to be passed to punish terrorists who were exaggeratedly devoted to the Prophet; but people that were not devoted to him at all also had to suffer sanctions, and have their healthy reticence considered as if it were some sort of mental defect: “Islamophobia”. The docile media had given time only to politicians and pseudo-experts, apologists for Islam, who presented it naively as a great and good religion, because its adepts said “peace be upon you” instead of “good morning”. They obviously had nothing to do with the wicked terrorists. Likewise, the Prophet was depicted as a magnificent man, quite the opposite of the terrorists that claimed to act in his name. But this was all lies: Mohammed himself was an archetypical terrorist, and his bloodthirsty disciples were four-square on the right road when they followed step by step the route drawn up by the founder of Islam to attain his aims.

Thanks to these denials of reality, endlessly repeated and flattering its proud opinion of itself, Islam was able to remain safe inside its fortress of fanaticism, tyranny and intolerance, smothering freedom of thought, controlling every aspect of private life, from food to clothing, from sexual relationships to professional relations, starting at birth and ending only with death. Prisoners of a totalitarian system, millions of Moslem children all round the world day after day carried on learning the Koran in Arabic parrot-fashion, even before they could read or write in their own languages, and certainly without understanding a single word. They swallowed their parents’ faith whole, without the slightest possibility for critical thinking, or attempt to separate true from false. For such children, what their elders said became a lesson that remained etched into their mind for life, so they accepted beliefs exactly as they were handed down to them.

Nonetheless, setting children free from this religious Hell was the best good deed that could be done for them: the first victims of God’s crazies would likely be among these future “good” Moslems. Once they were adults, if any of them discovered the true face of Mohammed beneath the mask of Islamic propaganda, they would not be able to escape from their

religion. Terror would be used to keep them within the sect, as the Prophet had given orders in the Koran for all apostates to be killed, all Moslems renouncing their religion, as soon as this was discovered.

“If they turn back to enmity, then take them and kill them wherever ye find them”, Tom muttered, quoting a verse from the Koran.

He knew the book he had in his hands by heart, just like the children imprisoned in Koranic schools. He had studied it in Arabic, learning every verse and every chapter until he had them at his command. Above all, though, he knew what the vast majority of Moslems were unaware of: he was familiar with where, when and in what historical context each chapter had been produced.

That knowledge was the key to everything. Not only did it permit the veil cast over the creation of the Koran to be lifted, it also stripped the mask off its fantasist creator and allowed an understanding of how the source of all the evils of Islam lay in the words of Mohammed himself.

When Tom had called a big publisher directly so as to have them bring out his novel entitled *The Sage of Mecca* the director had quoted the synopsis and laughed nervously at the idea that an impostor could have been the founder of one of the biggest religions in the world. Sadly, laughter in no way disproved the irrefutable evidence that Tom had put forward in his book. The director had insisted, all the same, claiming it was inconceivable that so many people could have been fooled by a simple lunatic. Mohammed’s sincerity was proved by the success of his religion: proof by numbers. Mohammed surely would not have been able to convince so many folk with a false religion.

Tom had calmly responded that the number of followers of the Church of Scientology was growing year by year. Did that mean that the extent to which that sect’s views were true was also growing yearly? Did it mean that its increasing numbers of believers made it a sincere and legitimate religion, and thus less harmful?

As for Mohammed, at the start he had convinced no more than a few hundred people. Others had just followed the herd, one copying another. Thereafter, Islam had not developed as a thing of

candies and roses, but with blood and tears, through wars and massacres, or through raping women. Forced conversions and killings had been the cutting edge of Islam.

Still to this day, Moslems blindly followed the religion of their forefathers as a virtually innate belief, never questioning any aspect of its founding father.

All these Moslems differed one from another, some good, some bad, some tolerant, others intolerant, some pious, some extremists, some observing the precepts of the Koran to the letter, others breaking free from it. Nevertheless, they all had one unshakeable point in common: absolute veneration for Mohammed, the foundation of Islam.

In theory, it would thus be enough to show the tyrant's hidden face for his myth to vanish into thin air, and with it the madness of the Koranic God Virus. The whole structure of Islam rested on the shoulders of a single man, very much a fallible human and inhumane into the bargain. If he fell, all the rest would fall.

In theory.

In practice, though, truth would not prevent any but future, independent, generations from falling into obscurantism. For the others, being already contaminated, prisoners of traditions, of habits and of hadiths, denial of reality would win out over reason, and Mohammed would remain the quintessential Messenger of God, bringer of a promise of immortality. In the minds of his brain-washed children he would never become seen as the compulsive liar of Arabia that he really was, because of their fear of losing the promised Paradise.

Tom looked at the Koran he held in his hands, musing on the way in which this literary poison had been thought up by the dreamer Mohammed.

Thanks to his job as a caravan leader in Mecca, he had traversed distant lands on camel-back and seen a danger rising over his near horizon: Christianity. His home town drew some of its wealth from trade, it was true, but most came from annual pilgrimages that brought a steady stream of travelers to gather around the three hundred and sixty idols of the Kaaba, the main sanctuary of the city.

Mohammed had grasped that the gradual spread of Christianity would in the end ruin the aberrant cult of idols, and that the pilgrims would sooner or later head for a different Holy City: Jerusalem. In order not to see his home town go downhill, he had the cunning idea of setting Mecca up as the new Jerusalem, no longer with the polytheistic religion of his ancestors, but with a monotheistic, universalist religion, taking up for his purposes the concept of one true God held by Jews and Christians. He could do even better: he could present himself as the last prophet in the Old and New Testaments, just like Abraham, Moses or Jesus, who was reviving the spirit and purity of religion. This would turn away Jews and Christians from their holy places, making them bow before the New Jerusalem in Mecca.

First of all he had to get to know the religions he wanted to divert to his advantage.

He could not read, so could not learn direct from the sources of Judaism and Christianity. Thus, he gathered around him in his wife's house a small circle of scholars, poets and poetesses, collecting the largest possible range of mythologies to which he could gain access. In this way, aided by these clever but shadowy literary figures, Mohammed concocted a recitation, a chaotic mix of traditions, Christian, Gnostic, Talmudic, Mandeian, local, Persian, even Greek and Hindu. This knowledge, though, was vague and approximate, based on inexact and chronologically erroneous sources, which Mohammed spiced up with curses, maledictions, a bit about the end of the World, a bit about Paradise and a lot about Hell, while striving to keep the customs of pagan Arabs: polygamy, slavery, easy divorce and circumcision.

Jews and Christians had their holy books. To drive out his competitors, Mohammed also needed one. He hired scribes to compose his Book, his Koran, to be learned parrot-fashion, with its hypnotic, sing-song, lazy rhythm, which he dictated in private or in public before his followers, who then memorized it. These public scribes followed the Prophet wherever he roamed and noted down his words faithfully, sometimes, lacking other materials, on makeshift items like palm leaves, skins, bones from camels' legs or stones.

As he flipped through the book he had in his hands, Tom's eye lighted on one page in particular.

A good number of the chapters of the Koran had as their title or their first verse groups of single letters, such as "A L M", the meaning and value of which were unknown. At least, that was what certain translators of the Koran said, purely and simply leaving them out, throwing the numbering of the chapters' verses out of kilter.

Why would they want to suppress the word of God, even if it was just one letter, when it was supposed to be of a divine nature? Was the Koran not absolutely the Heavenly Will of the Almighty? What could be the reason for this incomprehensible voluntary censorship?

In fact, A L M meant "Amara Li Mohammed", translatable as "thus Mohammed spoke to me", or perhaps "ordered by Mohammed". Traces of the original drafts that escaped censorship through ignorance, these unfortunate dedications by the writing professionals clearly exposed how they had worked alongside the Prophet, and it was better to suppress them rather than reveal the sham of the creation of the Koran.

Tom smiled ironically.

So, after having memorized a screed to recite and having hired scribes to note down his slightest word, all Mohammed had left to do was to get in touch with God and dictate the Almighty's will.

He thought up a careful plan with his accomplice, his wife Khadijah, who herself was more than keen to set up the New Jerusalem in Mecca. As she was the wealthiest woman in the city, the caravan trade was largely in her hands and she was far from willing for Christian teaching to cast a shadow on her business. As additional partners in the crime of fraud he was about to commit for the good of his home town, Mohammed could count on his uncle Abu Talib, and on Waraqa, a blind scholar and Khadijah's cousin.

Mohammed had to put on the mantle of the figure of Moses, who he was planning to topple from his pillar. The Jewish prophet had received the tables of the Law from God on a mountain top, so Mohammed would go one better. He would not

receive just Ten Commandments set in stone, but a whole bookful of divine commandments engraved in his mind, God's last will, the original of which was supposed to be written in letters of gold in Heaven.

There was an obvious problem with this weird fairy tale. If God's Book containing his absolute will had really been engraved in Mohammed's head, he would have been able to dictate it in a single sitting, with the end product of a pure and perfect Koran that could rapidly be sent to every corner of the Earth.

That was a stumbling block for the strategy Mohammed had devised to impose himself as setting the seal on the line of prophets in the monotheistic religions. He was no clairvoyant, and could not know what the future might have in store for him. He could not tell what his future needs might be, who might stand in his way, and who God should be supposed to curse in order to discredit these shadowy future opponents, as happened with his Uncle Abu Lahab and his aunt. Consequently, as it was unsure what the definitive contents of the Koran would have to be, it was better to spread God's word, or rather Mohammed's desires, as circumstances evolved.

Thus, Mohammed affirmed he had received Allah's Book from Jibril, God's angel, on the mountain at the gates of Mecca, but that he had forgotten its contents.

Through great good luck, as viewed by gullible believers, Jibril would regularly come and visit Mohammed to remind him of what his shaky memory had not retained.

To do this, the fantastical Jibril appeared to Mohammed in dreams, breathing God's revelation into his heart or coming to him in the shape of a man who would speak to him. These types of "divine" contact were used above all towards the end of his career, when Mohammed no longer had to bother much about convincing an audience he could already twist around his little finger. Earlier on, though, Mohammed utilized a much more spectacular and theatrical technique of setting the stage to impress his disciples: Jibril was to take possession of his body.

Faking unexpected epileptic attacks, Mohammed fainted and fell suddenly to the ground, moving his lips but not making a sound, as if Jibril was trying to speak through his foaming mouth.

Then, once he had gotten the message, Mohammed would stand up, sweating profusely. He was wrapped up warmly, and given time to collect his wits, then he dictated Allah's orders. This miraculous and highly sensational process, watched by spectators, led them to set extraordinary importance on the Prophet's words. Whenever any skeptics happened to be present, Mohammed found it impossible to decipher Jibril's message, so they were thrown out in order that they would not corrupt the divine will sent down from Heaven. Later on, to avoid any such unpleasantness or the presence of hecklers, new adepts were obliged to confirm their absolute faith long before they were presented to Mohammed, no-one being admitted to see him who was not convinced of his prophetic mission and fully prepared to venerate him.

As time went by, Mohammed became increasingly identified with this character, striving to live appropriately, wearing a veil to enhance his solemn status, acquiring mild and fatherly manners. When he shook someone's hand he never took his hand back first, and when he looked at people he waited for them to turn away before he did. He took great care of his appearance: every night he painted his eyelids and his body was always soused in perfume. He did not let his hair grow beyond shoulder length and he dyed it at the slightest sign of gray. He had a knack for speaking to new converts, finding the comments necessary to flatter their personal inclinations or to remind them of some relationship they had in common.

Mohammed had the sort of intelligence shown by modern mediums, knowing all the tricks that would allow him to acquire private personal information or to give the impression he had it. That was what had made it possible at the beginning to convince a small group of credulous folk gathered on the quiet in the home of one of them. Mohammed had fine-tuned his mystical personage in this context, and built up around himself an escort of the faithful like a guru with his sect, a hard core of brain-washed believers in the shadows.

Once this shadow base was ready, made up of "shades of God on the Earth" as Mohammed flatteringly called them, he decided it was high time to make his first appearance in Mecca in the full light of day.

He ran into a brick wall.

“Obey Allah and the messenger”, Tom chuckled, reciting from the Koran.

Unfortunately for Mohammed, the opposite happened.

In a natural reaction, not being fools, the Meccans did not obey the orders of this puppet God sprung up from nowhere, and they rejected the Koran, root and branch.

After five years of incessant preaching, Mohammed had managed to indoctrinate only under one hundred of the gullible, mostly poor folk or beggars, and all delighted to be able to dip into Khadijah’s funds.

A total failure.

Worse still, he brought down on himself the enmity of various Meccan clans, being mocked, insulted, spat on and even having rocks thrown at him. Some of his companions, both men and women, were tortured and killed for not renouncing the new religion. Mohammed was obliged to tell them to leave the city and head for Abyssinia, today’s Ethiopia, while waiting for things to improve.

Mohammed himself was at practically no risk. He could always take refuge with his protector and uncle, Abu Talib, and he made good use of this to spread his message of Islam. The members of this powerful clan, regardless of what they thought of the black sheep of the family, were expected, by custom, to defend him if he was attacked. No other clan was crazy enough to kill him, because such a murder would have led to open war in the city. Each person’s strength lay in the unity of all.

Seeing that he would never get all the clans to accept his single God, Mohammed in despair tried a compromise position, watering down his demands.

Sitting with a number of influential citizens of Mecca on the Kaaba esplanade, Mohammed recited several verses. In them he stated that the three favorite goddesses of the townsfolk could be considered divine beings, and had the power to intercede with God. This sudden change in the situation had a big impact. The idolators were delighted he had recognized their deities and for a

while worked hand in hand with the Moslems, some even embracing this new pagan religion.

Relations immediately became less tense between the rival clans, and the exiles from Abyssinia made their way home, believing that the Meccans had finally converted to belief in the one true God. However, once they were back, consternation reigned: why had they faced up to such sufferings if in the end they were just going to go back to disguised polytheism?

To soothe these legitimate complaints, understanding that in the end this compromise was counterproductive, Mohammed had to go into reverse. Besides, if in the short term he had more or less won over the Meccans to his cause, in the longer term he would never convince Jews and Christians with this story of the three goddesses from the Meccan pantheon, presented as intermediaries between men and Almighty God. Jews and Christians would turn away from the last of the prophets, as he wanted to be seen, and their well-organized missionary work would eventually win over his city.

What had been said was said, and Mohammed could not erase his lies with just a click of the fingers. Luckily for the early true believers, the angel Jibril appeared to the Prophet to reveal to him an incredible secret: the verses Mohammed had recited on the esplanade of the Kaaba had been whispered into his ear by the Devil.

Satanic verses.

So, the scribes could correct them without any constraint, and the disciples forget them without remorse. This was the case even if some, somewhat sharper-witted than others, might have asked what credence to put in a Messenger of God that could so easily be corrupted by the spirit of evil. Or again, how could they be certain that other verses in the Koran were not inspired by the same Satan? Above all, why had God let the Devil do his worst, causing reflective minds to puzzle over the contradiction between the statement that there was just one single true God whose name was Allah, and recognition of an enemy of his who must necessarily have an equivalent divine nature, in order to be able to oppose God so effectively.

Once the Satanic verses were rectified, the Meccans abandoned Islam and went back to their original paganism.

Persecutions against Moslems restarted, more brutal than ever.

At this point Mohammed himself was directly threatened: his rich but elderly wife Khadijah, along with Waraqa and Abu Talib, his uncle who protected him, had by now all died. Worse still, Abu Talib had refused right to the end to convert to his nephew's religion, not wanting to call down on himself the curse of the true gods in which he still believed. He had declined to embrace a false religion which he had all the same contributed to creating with the aim of saving Mecca from future ruin. His refusal to recognize Islam as a true religion played into the hands of Mohammed's enemies who were on the lookout for the slightest snag in order to be able at long last to bring down this messenger of evil omen.

One of the leading lights among his opponents was another of his uncles, Abu Lahab. He could not see beyond the end of his nose, and cared not a thing about Christian missionary work because he knew nothing about it. He could see only a loss of immediate profits and the disappearance of the flows of pilgrims if he let his nephew destroy the idols in the Kaaba and set in their place a God who wished even beggars well.

In this Meccan period, Mohammed had not been a wicked man; on the contrary he had behaved like a real sage, the Sage of Mecca. He had spotted future dangers for his home town and had tried to stem the Christian tide that was coming over the horizon. Similarly, he had tried to impose more humanity on his folk, with more mutual aid, especially for the poor and for orphans, sincerely attempting to improve their day-to-day conditions, even if he had had to use lies to achieve his purpose.

If he had taken his Uncle Abu Lahab into his confidence, if he had shared his secret plan with the heads of the various clans, they might have been willing to go along with him in his ploy. The Moslem religion would then have spread peacefully like the Buddhist creed, promoting the good of all instead of Jihad, the Holy War that used force, weapons and tears to demand belief in the concept of a compassionate God.

The animosity of his opponents was too great to let them into the secret. There would have been a high likelihood that they would unmask Mohammed and his lies in full public gaze, crushing his new-born sect. As years went by his fear of having his imposture revealed in the glare of publicity gradually became a paranoia. Mohammed first cursed poets in his Koran, then had some of those who had helped him to produce his marvelous poetic work executed. These included the poet Kaab ben Ashraf and the poetess Asma, the daughter of Marwan, murdered on his orders under the horrible pretext that they had insulted Islam.

Tom's eyelids drooped briefly.

It had never been a good idea to proclaim the truth, just as much then as at the present day.

In Mecca, wise Mohammed had had to play around with the truth for the good of his town. Despite this, he was still in a fix, and ever since Abu Talib had died, death had been lurking in wait for him on every street corner, as his enemies had decided to get rid of that trouble maker once and for all.

After ten years of trying to get his way with the aid of Allah, Mohammed bitterly recognized his failure and saw he had no other option: he had to run away.

Having no success in gaining support in the nearby town of Taif, he left Mecca with all his disciples to take refuge in Yathrib, some two hundred fifty miles to the north.

The town was pleasantly situated in an oasis yielding succulent dates, but was nonetheless the scene of constant tribal conflicts. Jews fought against other Jews, and Arabs against other Arabs; Arabs sometimes allied themselves to Jews against other Arabs, themselves allied to other Jews. These wars had brought the death of many tribal chiefs and all of the weakened tribes were trying to find some way out of the impasse. While Mecca prospered, Yathrib lived in poverty, and had urgent need of a referee, a leader to back up a negotiated peace treaty that would manage to unite all the various inhabitants, so that they could all finally live there in tranquility.

When they came as pilgrims to Mecca, men from Yathrib had met the Prophet, whose paternal grandmother had her origins in one of the Arab tribes in their city. They had found inspiration

in his message of peace and mutual assistance. They had brought this message home with them, triggering hope in all hearts, and soon there was not a single house in the city where they had not heard about Islam and its Messenger. Everyone was asking the same question: could this be the “Messiah” the Jews had been waiting for since times so long past?

In any case, he would be welcome as a mediator. In fact, Mohammed enjoyed an excellent reputation in the region thanks to his work as a caravan leader. In the past he had resolved numerous commercial disputes in a fair way, and he was considered trustworthy under all circumstances. Besides, the repute of his powerful Meccan clan would damp the warlike ardor of the various warring factions present.

At least, that was what these inhabitants naively believed, weary of internal conflicts, just wishing to live in harmony one with another. They had not the slightest suspicion that they were bringing a terrible, cunning wolf into their sheepfold.

Mohammed was no longer the man he had been; he was no longer the Sage of Mecca.

The death of his beloved wife had changed him deeply. When she passed away, as did his uncle Abu Talib, he was in the midst of a painful problem. The various clans in Mecca had finally come to an agreement that they would all boycott Mohammed’s clan, and all the members of his tribe, like himself, had been banished from the town.

Until they gave up supporting the Prophet.

For three long months, mutually supportive as was their custom, his clan had had to face the burning heat of the sun out in the desert, the cold of the nights, hunger and thirst. A few compassionate Meccans ended up by getting the ban lifted, and Mohammed’s clan was able to return to Mecca. The harm had been done, however, and the heat and privations had been too much for Khadijah’s health. At the age of sixty-five she had died in her husband’s arms. Over her death bed he had promised her that he would continue the fight, so that she would not have died in vain, and that he would bring down punishment and suffering on every Meccan responsible for their exile, finishing on his own what he had started with her.

Whatever the price, even, perhaps especially, a blood price.

Tom understood Mohammed perfectly. If in some other life he had been Mohammed and Camilla had been Khadijah, he would have done a thousand times worse to revenge his soul mate; he could have wiped out all of humankind for her. When a loved one was lost, the accompanying nobility of heart was also lost, and a cold, destructive machine took over, with an inhumane human beast emerging.

For a while, Tom had dreamed of taking revenge, killing everyone he felt was responsible for Camilla's death. Nonetheless, realizing that killing them all would never have brought her back to life, he had dropped this crazy scheme thought up under the influence of rage.

Mohammed had not done so.

His plan for vengeance and for completing the prophetic mission he had assigned himself would take definitive shape as he fled to Yathrib. He brandished this journey as his version of the crossing of the desert by Moses, who he claimed to incarnate through God's grace, drawing parallels between the departure of his group from Mecca and the flight of the Hebrews from Egypt towards the Promised Land.

A new divine exodus, leading to a Holy War to reconquer Mecca.

Known as the *Hegira*, this exile in Yathrib left a permanent mark on the minds of Moslems, who dated their calendar from that moment. They also changed the name of that city into *Madinatu an-Nabi*, "The City of the Prophet", or even *Al-Madina*, "The City": Medina.

Presenting himself there as the Messiah, Mohammed forced the various groups living there, Jews, Arabs and Moslems, to sign the *Constitution of Medina*, a treaty of mutual protection for the inhabitants and for solidarity in adversity. Mohammed drew it up in the name of Allah, giving himself the title of Prophet, and claiming to be judge and arbiter of conflicts, taking for himself the position of religious, political and military head of state. Every important problem had to be resolved exclusively by him, or rather by God and him, as judge and jury. He cunningly granted all citizens freedom of conscience, guaranteeing the Jews' religion

and property, assigning them rights but above all duties, one in particular: to defend the Prophet in arms against any enemy attack.

The Jews saw no harm in this clause stating a cause for war, as they thought they were signing a common peace document, when in fact they were putting their names to a treaty obliging them to go to war. They had no idea that they would be obliged to fight on behalf of the Messenger of God; quite the contrary, he claimed to have come to bring peace to all the warring groups in their city. Not for a moment did they imagine that such a mild, pleasant man, who repeated in friendly fashion “peace be upon you”, could be a bloodthirsty manipulator.

While the Jews had been very naive, others had understood perfectly what Mohammed’s intentions were when he installed himself in Medina.

He had always kept in touch with the Arab tribe in Medina, the Khazraj, from which his grandmother was descended. He had made secret links with them and then with another tribe, the Aws, by means of strong oaths. Through this shadowy alliance, these Arabs became his henchmen, protectors known as Ansars or Auxiliaries, the Helpers of Mohammed. These violent mercenaries had just two ideas in their minds: sex and wealth. They envied the fortunes of the Meccans and the revenues of the Kaaba. They had never been able to attack Mecca, directly or indirectly, without having to face all the Arab tribes for who the sanctuary was sacred. With Mohammed at their head, he being a representative of a dynasty in charge of the holy place, an attack finally became legitimate. Besides, thanks to the spies he had left behind, Mohammed was well informed about the departures of the caravans that the Meccans regularly sent to Syria.

As a reward for protecting Mohammed and offering him asylum in Medina, the Ansars had negotiated not only a promise of future booty, but also that of becoming the only real masters Medina, under the leadership of a man who was one of their own thanks to his genealogy, and who claimed to be the legitimate representative of the God of the Jews. Even if the Helpers hoped to get rid of the Jewish tribes and take possession of their wealth, Mohammed reined in their enthusiasm. As a cunning strategist, he preferred to bring the Jews over to his side: if he succeeded in

convincing the Medina Jews that he was the last of the Prophets of the Old Testament, they would convert to Islam and all the others in the region would join them without any war, following the herd. He also needed this community's money to equip his warriors for the re-conquest of Mecca.

Using his superb manipulative skills, Mohammed relied on flattery to twist the Jews round his little finger, taking great care never to rub them up the wrong way. First, he perpetuated what he had already established: the direction for praying.

The faithful should pray to God facing Jerusalem. The Prophet had ordered this in order to bolster his claim to the true Messiah taking on the mantle of the Holy City, and if pious Jews prayed three times a day, Moslems should show they were even more respectful of the Almighty by praying five times each day.

With this same aim, Mohammed shamelessly took over their customs: he set a fasting period like those dear to the Jews during their Day of Atonement or Yom Kippur, he adopted their calendar with months organized around cycles of the Moon, and he imposed food prohibitions relating to pork. This was all the easier because there were no pigs in Arabia and their flesh was never eaten. Mohammed could just as well have prohibited kangaroo steaks or dinosaur liver, this would have put no burden on anyone, as no such things existed in the area.

Simulating epileptic fits, Mohammed doubtless played out his act once more, so that God took possession of his body through the intermediary of an angel. Then, coming to, wrapped in a veil, he recited the lesson he had learned in Khadijah's house: Allah narrated the main episodes in the story of His Chosen People and his Alliance with them, talking of their ancient prophets and presenting Mohammed as their worthy final successor.

The compulsive liar of Medina did not notice the wide-eyed Jews, their subtle smile and discrete nudges. For many months, he thought he had his audience in the palm of his hand, and responded to their queries that had double meanings and to their subtle questions, not realizing he was being mocked behind his back and even openly.

Then came the day when Mohammed finally saw his dreadful mistake.

An imprudent rabbi sold a book to an educated Moslem, who was shocked and took it straight to Mohammed. It was the book that Waraqa, his wife's cousin, had translated into Arabic and had made Mohammed learn by heart in order to compose his Koran. This version was by no means the official Bible account of the Jews, nor Genesis or Exodus: it was just a book of stories for children in which the tales of the prophets were told

Tom's eyes lit up with amusement.

Mohammed had always believed he had had access to the supreme wisdom of the Hebrews, never for an instant imagining that his recitation had been made up on the basis of a book of fantasy tales, full of mysteries and miracles patched together with vaguely Biblical elements. Produced a few centuries before Mohammed, such mythological collections, varying in their content from place to place, were told to little children as bed-time stories at the fireside.

Thus the surprise among the Jews listening to him, who had been unsure whether to laugh at, or be afraid of, the results of Mohammed's burning of the midnight oil. Grasping the situation, he bought "official" books from Jewish tribes and from Christians, and ordered a cultured Moslem to translate them.

Mohammed then fully saw the extent of his error: he had made a fool of himself putting forward legends about the prophets and especially Moses, and was considerably annoyed to find that his real "divine" source, supposedly mystical and revealed by the Angel Jibril, was actually known to the Jews in the form of fairy-tales for children. He had lost all credence among the Jews, but was also discredited for Christians because in his recitation he had mixed up the mother of Christ, Mary, with the sister of Moses who happened to bear the same name. Not only had Mohammed had no access to the Torah, he had also based his knowledge of the Nativity on apocryphal gospels, not the New Testament. That led to his vague and sketchy idea of Christian beliefs, so he believed that the Holy Trinity was made up of God, Christ and the Virgin Mary, thought that Jesus had received the Gospels from God during his lifetime, and imagined that his favorite angel Jibril, alias Gabriel, was also the Christians' Holy Ghost.

Mohammed's lies might be swallowed by the ignorant, but not by priests supporting religions and having accurate knowledge of their foundation texts, not by erudite rabbis dedicated to preserving traditions that had survived even the worst persecutions. It stood to reason that they would refuse to kneel before an impostor.

Fearing his imposture would be denounced by the Jews, Mohammed asked himself what he should do, having based his doctrines on a children's fairy-tale, like a sandcastle in the Arabian Desert that would be blown away by the slightest breath of wind, the least whisper of the truth.

He could not go into reverse, as the Koranic fables that his scribes had conscientiously noted down had already been spread too extensively, and preserved too carefully. Mohammed could not play the trick of Satanic verses again, because he would have lost all credibility and been accused of being the Devil's puppet.

Nonetheless, to avoid being faced by this sort of situation again in the future, there was a need to be able to suppress any older verse as necessary, while claiming that it had not been abolished. So, to achieve this sleight of hand, the angel Jibril was dragged into proclaiming that not one verse of Allah's revelations would in future be abrogated or forgotten unless one better than it, or at least like it, was brought in its place.

The bigger the lie, the more likely it would be believed.

This evasive maneuver gave Mohammed the immense advantage of being able to change his mind at any moment, putting in force one "divine" order one day, another the next, and to make believe that Allah's commandments, changeable as a weathervane, were just tests sent to determine the level of faith of Moslems.

Bolstered by this new verse, the evil Mohammedan cat landed on its feet and prepared to sink its claws into the tiny Jewish mouse. Mohammed did not have the poetic talent needed to compose new Koranic texts, so at a high price he hired the least unintelligent of the poet-scribes that followed him and that noted down his slightest word.

At this point Mohammed swept aside his religion of peace, replacing it with a cult of hatred, thanks to his new batch of recited propaganda. He attacked the Jews, calling them hypocrites

deserving God's wrath, and also the Christians, describing them as having gone astray. He accused them of having corrupted God's message, writing their own false books which they sold at premium prices, hiding the truth of the Koran under their forged scriptures. He charged the wicked rabbis of falsifying ancient writings, hiding information and distorting the divine will by opposing the Prophet. He reproached the Christians for worshipping Christ and wrongly considering him the son of God.

He called the Jews donkeys, monkeys and swine, eaters of forbidden foods, and accused them of fanning the flames of war and sowing discord on Earth. It was clear that it was no longer legitimate to read their fake and blasphemous works, known as the Old Testament, but also the New Testament. Only pious recitation of the Koran was prescribed, since any intelligent reading or detailed study of its texts, as practiced by rabbis, ran the risk of exposing Mohammed's imposture and his verses based on children's fairy tales.

All these Jews and Christians had left the straight road of Allah, and should thus be brought back, willingly or by force, to the one true religion of God, whose only authentic representative was Mohammed. As his hatred grew toward his opponents, who had only their freedom of thought to fight him with, Mohammed in the end ordered his followers indirectly through the Koran to cut off their hands and feet, to crucify them or to behead them.

In 627, to bring to an end the attacks on their caravans, the massacres, rapes and pillage perpetrated by the Ansars or Helpers under Mohammed's guidance, the Meccans decided to besiege the fantasist of Medina. However, for several weeks they were unable to get past a trench that the Moslems had dug on the advice of Salman the Persian. When the Meccans retired, by Allah's will, as Mohammed claimed, he started to brag and decided to exterminate the rich Hebrew clan of the Qurayza, even though they had granted him asylum when he fled Mecca. He accused them of conniving with his enemies, since these pacific Jews had not actively taken up arms to defend the Prophet. By virtue of the Constitution of Medina that they had signed, the Jews were under an obligation to do this. As these "People of the Book" were not respecting their

promise, Mohammed could also break his word, and no longer continue his guarantee of their physical safety.

Mohammed had these innocent men and adolescents thrown into jail, while trenches were dug on his orders in the market place. The Ansars then brought the prisoners out in small groups, and every single one was beheaded, with their corpses falling into the trenches. That dark day more than eight hundred victims were executed simply because they belonged to a different community.

It was a war crime. Worse, it was a crime against humanity.

The women and children of those murdered were sold at auction as slaves. The wealth of these Jews was immense, as their estates and businesses had been prospering for centuries. Mohammed kept the lion's share for himself, but assigned houses, lands and goods to the Ansar Helpers, to orphans and to the poor.

The time of the Sage of Mecca was long gone, since Mohammed had turned his back on that noble period to impose on Moslems a totally different side of his character which from now onwards he ostentatiously brandished: the character of the Murderer of Medina.

When Tom had spoken on the phone to the chief executive of the great publishing house, the latter had been shocked by the claims Tom had made. He said that such accusations of crimes against humanity were extremely serious, asking where Tom had found any information supporting his claims.

Tom had laughed.

The reason was that the historical source for these crimes was the Koran itself. The Murderer of Medina had signed his bloody admission in the book which his believers used to confess their faith, stating that no prophet had been able to take prisoners without perpetrating great massacres on the Earth.

Consulting the Koran he had in his hands, Tom stopped at the chapter entitled "The Confederates". In his mind the verses on which he cast his eyes flowed like tears in a flood of words and of evil.

*And He brought those of the People of the Scripture who supported them down from their strongholds, and cast panic into their hearts. Some ye slew, and ye made captive some. And He caused you to inherit their land and their houses and their wealth, and land ye have not trodden. Allah is ever able to do all things.*

Of course, some Moslems capable of compassion were horrified by these massacres, in addition not being sure if they should accept the goods seized at the price of the blood of their near neighbors. It was precisely for that reason that a “revelation” came down from Heaven immediately after this ignoble barbarity inflicted on the Jews, in order to justify the unjustifiable. As often was the case, Allah was the God of the done deed: first the sect’s hitmen committed their crimes, and then, like a magician pulling a rabbit out of a hat, Mohammed produced verses justifying them.

Making an abrupt turn in his basic theology, Mohammed no longer presented himself as the Messiah of the Jewish tribes, he gave up any claim to represent Judaism and started to develop a religion harking back to the authority of Abraham, and not to that of Moses any more. Islam was from now on an independent religion, far superior to other Judeo-Christian beliefs.

Once he had freed himself of Jewish ties, Mohammed flattered Arab nationalism, designating his fold as the new chosen people of God, the best of nations, raised above all others. Humans were henceforth to be unequal: non-believers were inferior to Moslems, women to men, slaves to their owners. Mohammed defined a racist hierarchy: at the bottom of the pyramid were apostates, then came non-Moslems, called dogs and bound for Hell, and on the higher levels were Moslem men who could be polygamous, and were invited to benefit from war booty and to rape female captives, with a number of religious duties, including “charity” which went as much towards war expenses as it did to aiding the needy.

At the very top was the position the Prophet had reserved for himself.

He had special privileges relating to the spoils of war, could have all the women he wanted, and was the sole and definitive maker of laws in the form of divine revelations. So, any attempt to make Islam more moderate ran up against a major problem: no-one

had any authority to change it other than the man who died in the year 632.

Having swept aside the religion of Moses, Mohammed had proclaimed himself the authentic representative of that of Abraham, who was affirmed to be the ancestor of the Arabs. He had developed the myth of Ishmael that was put forward to explain the origin of the Kaaba.

Instead of the Temple of Jerusalem, Mecca now became the new Kingdom of God on Earth, towards which the faithful henceforth were obliged to direct their prayers. The weathervane Allah justified this as a test to try those who followed the Messenger, and separate them from those who faced away from Him. However, Mohammed had to reassure his gullible followers that saw prayers as magical acts, totaled up to calculate who would obtain the best places in Paradise, guaranteeing them that their former prayers recited while they faced Jerusalem would be in no way erased from the divine ledger.

In disgust, Tom flung the Koran into the swimming pool, unable to stand any longer this literary hypocrisy that seemed to be burning his fingers.

In modern times, Moslems were immunized against any sort of rational thought and refused to look truth in the face. Some had managed to put readings on the Koran that saw no kind of hatred in it, focusing on the verses from the Sage of Mecca, and hiding those from the Murderer of Medina, like a pregnant woman refusing to accept she was expecting, for fear her child might be a monster. Others took as their model the killer that Mohammed became towards the end of his life, perpetuating acts of terror for love of the Prophet, and finding it perfectly legitimate to massacre in the name of God.

After all, all the older chapters belonging to the milder period in Mecca had been superseded by the new revelations from Medina times, including those ordering mutilations, beheadings and executions. The famous verse from Medina, *slay the idolaters wherever ye find them*, in fact annulled one hundred eighty verses from Meccan days that enjoined tolerance and patience.

In other words, God had abolished tolerance in favor of intolerance.

So terrorists, obeying with brutish pleasure the orders of a tyrant who was a compulsive liar and a ravager, were following good divine law as they applied the final will of Allah as laid down in the Koran.

It was a mistake to say that Moslems could be Sunnis, Shiites or others. There were really just two groups of believers: Medina or Mecca versions.

Those following Medina were the religious fundamentalists that preached modeling life on the lines of the canceling verses of the Murderer of Medina. Meccans were the vast majority of Moslem humankind who put into practice the virtues of the canceled verses composed by the merciful Sage of Mecca, disregarding Mohammed's sectarian orders forbidding them to have a non-Moslem as a friend or an employer. This deliberate disregard was their way of avoiding the withering away of their community.

Nonetheless, it was wrong to say they were open-minded in their view of the world. For them, the world was divided into two categories: Moslems and others.

Only Islam counted.

Tom's eye fell on the cover of a magazine that lay on the garden table.

It bore the photo of a woman clad in a black burqa.

Tom's eyes lit up with an angry glare.

Just imagine that the life of these Moslem women would have been very different if Mohammed had not prescribed veils because of the strange ailment from which he suffered. No-one had an inkling that the Prophet had .....

A tune rang out, interrupting his train of thought.

Since the previous day, his cell phone had never stopped ringing at regular intervals. Every time it was an unknown number and the caller left no message on voice mail. Tom took the smartphone out of his jeans pocket, glimpsed at it mechanically and suddenly threw it into the swimming pool.

He had no wish to talk to a friend, a family member or anyone else. He just wanted to think in silence. Even his thoughts were beginning to get on his nerves, curse them.

It was time to end it all.

Above Tom's head, the sky was now sprinkled with stars and bore a young moon. The light from this, and the subdued illumination which had turned on automatically, projected giant shadows that seemed to wish to flee these lonely surroundings.

Tom got up, grabbed a beer from the ice bucket, opened it and drank it down in huge swigs. Almost as much of the intoxicating liquid ran down his beard as went into his mouth. He put the half empty bottle down on the table and wiped his lips on his sleeve. Staggering slightly, he headed for the terrace and went into the house. His heavy hand flicked a switch and wall lights lit up a long corridor. Once he reached the end of it, he found himself in front of the open door of his bedroom.

Tom turned the switch but could not help letting slip an oath.

*“Scheiße”.*

The bulb in the ceiling light had just burned out.

Instinctively, Tom stuck his hand into his jeans pocket in search of his smartphone so as to use its flashlight function as a lamp.

*“Scheiße,”* he muttered again, realizing his phone was currently drowning in the chlorinated water of the pool.

He certainly was not going to bother changing a bulb now. In any case, the light from the corridor would be enough for what he had to do.

Tom walked round the big canopied bed, slid open the mirrored doors of the closet, leaned towards the keypad of the wall safe, and tapped in Camilla's birth date.

With one hand he took out of it his revolver, opening its empty cylinder and fishing around in the small dark cardboard boxes to find a single shell. He slipped it into one of the gun's six empty chambers. As he went out into the corridor, he glanced to check that the shell was properly in place. Then, he closed the cylinder and spun it around several times: Russian roulette was now ready for him to play in the last instants in his life.

Tom went back out to sit on the chair. He tilted his head back and stuck the six-shooter into his mouth. Up above, the starry

sky seemed to be staring at him through thousands of tiny bright windows. Tom looked at them for a moment then quickly pulled the trigger.

*Click,*

Tom remained inert for a moment, motionless and cold as if he had already died.

He was still alive, though.

His eyes followed the movement of a few scattered clouds. They were quite thick and moving quickly, carried along by strong high-altitude winds. The first of them came into Tom's field of vision, displaying an attractive form like a woolly sheep and gleaming in the moonlight. Under the effect of gusts that cut into it, the second cloud following close after it shifted shape in the sky and took on a new form, giving rise to an image of an animal's body folded back on itself and a head with long, large ears.

This cloud now looked like a white rabbit.

*Click.*

The gun's hammer fell on an empty chamber. Tom had pulled the trigger a second time.

A third cloud arrived and changed shape in its turn, outlining a sort of face with a long beard, topped with a typical turban and with big woolly eyes. As he picked out this visage which he identified with Mohammed, Tom was shaken by an electrical tremor, a tremor of rage.

He took the gun out of his mouth, set it down on the table in front of him and tapped his two fists against his temples several times, trying to drive away that devilish vision that was gnawing at his mind. Tom wanted to empty his brain. However, that satanic image of Mohammed kept on returning to his mind's eye, as if it was a foretaste of the promised Hell before he leaped into to next world. However hard he hit the sides of his head, the specter of the Prophet continued to haunt him down to the last seconds of his life, like a phantom from another age, a mythical being that existed nowhere but in his head, existing only in people's heads, as his friend Patrick had explained to him.

Tom's gaze became troubled.

He remembered the last call his friend had put through three days earlier from Saudi Arabia. Patrick was a brilliant French Canadian college professor, a leading specialist on the Arab world and Islam in particular. For years he had worked on a whole range of books available to him about the Koran, God's words, or the hadiths, words and actions attributed to Mohammed. He had combed out the faint indications, tiny pieces of information which were mostly passed over because of the very slight importance granted to them, insignificant for the most people, but not for those who knew how to approach them with particular attention and careful logic. Among these minimal hints, Patrick had taken a close look at the meaning of the name "Mohammed", the ages of his children, and how old Aisha was when she married the Prophet.

This was the last straw of doubt that had finally broken the camel's back and led to Patrick's strong suspicions. Aisha's age at marriage was the little thread sticking out of a hank of lies. Patrick had methodically teased it out, patiently building up a history that was totally contrary to the tales in schoolbooks taught to children, and also very different from Tom's ideas.

Patrick saw Mohammed as no more than a myth.

The Prophet, he believed, had never existed outside folk's minds. He was not a historical figure, just a ghostly image with a life story based on the legends about Moses.

Patrick was sure he would soon have definitive proof, even if he had not yet explained the ins and outs of this future discovery. He had simply asked Tom for help in making the truth triumph. Nevertheless, Patrick had not asked the right man: Tom had already taken another decision that he was not willing to admit to.

Tom picked up the bottle of beer in front of him and took a swig. Then he used his other hand to grasp the revolver and look at it for a moment.

What if Patrick had been right in the end? He would have needed him to bring into the light of day such an extraordinary finding?

Of course.

Tom was tired of everything, though, and had no desire to struggle against those sick people who did not want to be cured and would never accept a remedy for their affliction.

Tom pressed the barrel of the gun against his temple.

Up above, the strange cloud had disappeared. The sight of the empty sky was strangely comforting to him.

In the starry firmament, he imagined the angry marionette Mohammed brandishing the sword of Islam, the strings being pulled by a timeless poet puppeteer. His murderous combats were conducted against a background of pens sliding across parchments covered with grammatical, syntactic and phonetic booby-traps.

Tom had a smile on his lips.

*Bang.*

The explosion blasted him instantly.

His body fell to one side, splintering the chair on which he had been sitting, and fell onto the tiled floor of the terrace.

For a long while blood trickled from his damaged temple.

## 2

### The Revelation

With firm and steady tread, Mohammed climbed towards the peak of the mountain.

Under a sun at its highest in the sky, he took no heed of the terrible heat that made big drops of sweat run down his broad forehead. His dark, curving eyebrows acted like impenetrable dams to hold back this flow of salty, dusty liquid, protecting his somber eyes as they looked out for the dangerous loose rocks on the rough and narrow path with the assurance of a confident man.

Wearing just a lengthy brown tunic that was now stuck to his fine pale skin, Mohammed had wrapped his large head with a voluminous emerald-green turban, which also gave shelter to his long black beard. Under this lightweight cloth garment which hid his powerful limbs, the hair that ran down from his burly chest to his belly-button formed a long line down which ran the perspiration of a hiker.

He glanced over his shoulder, observing the path he had taken down in the plain from the edge of the town in order to reach this point.

All around, a desolate landscape extended as far as the eye could see. All that was visible was an infertile ocher-colored desert burning under infernal heat.

*Hell.*

Was this vision a foretaste of the Hell described by the People of the Book? No, not at all! Quite the contrary, for

Mohammed this place was a Paradise, his haven of peace where he had been born forty years before.

He was an orphan that had never known his own father and only for a short while had had the company of his mother, who had died when he was only six. Besides, she had handed him over to a wet nurse to feed him, and had sent him to pass his tender youth with a Bedouin tribe outside the city. That was seen as good for gaining solid health, but also as a return to ancestral roots and a chance to enjoy the freedom that came from the vastness of the desert. So, Mohammed spent several years with a Bedouin family, looking after their sheep as soon as he was old enough to walk, living the life of the desert folk and learning to love the surroundings where they resided.

Once more, Mohammed focused on his final destination.

His muscular legs, with beefy feet shod in leather sandals, had no difficulty and climbing up the last few yards of slope that separated him from the summit.

When the forty-year-old finally reached the desolate plateau, he leaned slightly forwards and marched ahead with his brisk pace as if he was actually going down a slope.

Without hesitation, his upright, noble figure made for the massive rock that overhung the escarpment. There Mohammed sat to get his breath back. The delicate nostrils of his fine nose made an almost imperceptible hissing sound. He used his sleeve and the back of his fleshy hand to wipe away the sweat from his lined face.

Mohammed then calmly contemplated the shameless city lying way below him.

*Mecca.*

To travelers reaching it for the first time, Mecca seemed to be a divine city emerging as if by magic from the golden sand surrounding it, an oasis of peace and beauty which inspired such visitors with admiration and comforted them after the long waterless route they had to travel to get there. On the outskirts a mass of humble, low houses gave the general architectural tone, but in the center, where the great families of caravan organizers lived, buildings lay like a huge wheel around the Zamzam well. Against the other backdrop of the ground and of the surrounding

mountains, these white constructions made Mecca seem like a precious pearl in a heavenly jewel case.

As time had gone by, the trading town had become prosperous, receiving the visits of multitudes of merchant caravans buying and selling incense, spices, silks and ivory, pearls or weapons. It was the pride and the fortune of the various tribes living there, especially the Quraysh, the tribe that had founded the city. Through his father, Mohammed was himself a descendant of the patriarch who had established Mecca. Nonetheless, Mohammed much preferred the Hashemite tribe of his uncle Abu Talib. He was the man who had brought him up after his mother's death. *Uncle Abu Talib.*

Tall and burly, Abu Talib naturally inspired respect, and Mohammed was devoted to that man with his handsome, long, bearded face and deep, ocean-blue eyes that gave the feeling it would be pleasant to dive into them, to drown in them, or to fall calmly asleep in them.

Mohammed considered him as his father, because Uncle Abu Talib had taken charge of him as he had had lost all his close family by the age of nine. The young orphan had accompanied him to Syria in a caravan in order to learn the basics of trading and round out his knowledge of the world.

Back in Mecca, Mohammed had stood out among those of his age. He was strong, careful in what he said, forceful in expressing himself, faithful to his friends, and even more so to his promises, candid in his actions, and avoided with extreme care anything that might lead to suspicions he had any taste for vice.

Mohammed sighed and examined the arid mountain.

He often came here for a spiritual retreat. He enjoyed leaving the town behind and taking refuge on this high point where he meditated long and hard. He needed to do this because he always felt not quite at ease in Mecca.

*Khadijah.*

At that moment, his thoughts went to his adored wife, the chosen one of his heart.

At the time malicious tongues had claimed that he had married his employer Khadijah, a rich trader's widow that

continued her late husband's business and was fifteen years older than he was, simply to get hands on her fortune. At twenty-five, Mohammed had become the trusted subordinate of this forty-year-old after the pleasing outcome of being noted for his integrity in running her caravan trading with the lands in the North. Khadijah had proposed marriage, and Mohammed had accepted with despairing resignation.

How he would have enjoyed sating himself with those young girls barely past puberty, losing himself in the bewitching beauty of their faces and drinking deep from their most private wells just like those lucky men who became drunk on alcohol!

However, he could not do it.

Some time ago, while an adolescent, he had tried to go to a party, but had been overcome by an inexplicable sleepiness, so strong that he had never made it to the event. Later on, the same had happened every time that he had come near such festivities. Similarly, when he met young girls their marvelous beauty made his heart beat beyond all understanding and a black cloud came over him like a veil, leaving his vision blurred for a long time. How he would have liked a black veil to be cast over those angelic faces, not over him! He was tired of incomprehensibly finding himself blinded in their presence and hoped that one day he could live a normal life like other men.

He had hoped that as time passed this curse would go away.

*The curse.*

However, despite all the years that had gone by, the ailment endured in him, still and always.

So, he had abandoned hope and married Khadijah. The faded beauty of this woman who looked like a mature queen had allowed him to satisfy his manly passions. She had given him children. She had also made him acquainted with true love, authentic love far removed from the lecherous urges of youth that made men change their partners frequently to enjoy the pleasures of the flesh.

His married life with Khadijah went very smoothly, and he was an honest man, sincere and well liked. He carried on with trading business and even sorted out legal proceedings between other people. His sense of justice and his integrity had won him

the nickname of “trustworthy”. Added to his name, with its meaning of “admirable”, this made Mohammed more than respectable in the eyes of all.

*What more could he ask from Heaven?*

Sunk in his thoughts, Mohammed remained there like a man turned to stone, no longer aware of time going by, of his own body or of his surroundings.

When he finally looked up to the sky, the sun had already begun to sink down into the shadows.

Mohammed unwound his bulky emerald-green turban, exposing his face to the sun’s last rays. A faint, warm breeze stirred his long black hair, black as the stone in the.

*The Kaaba.*

Over thirty feet high, that cubical building of outstanding beauty had been first constructed by the hand of Adam himself, the ancestor of all men. It had several times been destroyed. Abraham in person, with the aid of his son Ishmael, had rebuilt this first ever temple on the Earth to honor the one and only true God.

However, over time men had forgotten all this and had turned aside from God.

The centuries that separated them from the great patriarchs and prophets, combined with their isolation in the desert, had led to the appearance of idolatry among them. They had taken to invoking minor deities so that they would intercede with God on their behalf, imagining that they had the power to transmit their prayers to him. Each tribe, each household had its own particular little god. Three hundred sixty idols were installed inside the Kaaba and in its outer courtyard. These mistaken men not only worshiped idols sculptured out of stone, even making an annual pilgrimage to them, they also worshiped whatever they considered supernatural, such as the black stone of the Kaaba.

*Gabriel.*

Given by the angel Gabriel to Abraham’s son, that invaluable stone, sent down from Heaven, was the soul of Mecca for them. It was what kept the idolators faithful to the city. It had become the sublime goal of men arriving from distant lands, the

reason for the journey of those unreasoning people who crossed vast tracts of arid land just to gaze upon it.

Mohammed rubbed his two beefy hands one against the other.

When he was still a young man, the foundations of the Kaaba had been seriously affected by torrential rains. As it was on the point of collapsing, it had been necessary to demolish the sanctuary, and the Quraysh, as guardians of the temple, had taken advantage of this to extend it. When it came to returning the black stone to its place, the tribes of Mecca could not agree on who should have this honor. In secret, the chiefs of the tribes reached an accord that it should be the first person arriving at the temple door the next day. Uncle Abu Talib had alerted Mohammed, telling him that he, as a descendant of the founding father of Mecca, should have the privilege of taking responsibility for the stone. After some reticence, Mohammed finally went along with playing the role his uncle had planned for him.

On the appointed morning, he had gone early to the temple door. Feigning surprise, he had been invited to insert the stone into its place. On the advice of his Uncle Abu Talib, he had taken care to wound no-one's susceptibilities, removing his cape, laying it on the ground and gently placing on it the object of so many desires. He had then asked two Elders from influential tribes to lift up his cape: he had taken the stone from it and placed it in the Kaaba. Word of mouth had brought almost all the inhabitants of Mecca hurrying to see this spectacle choreographed by Uncle Abu Talib. Their applause had greeted the final touch in this ceremony, and their approving glances had shown they were delighted by such a noble action on the part of the young man.

Mohammed raised his large head towards the first stars as they appeared.

He was weary of all these tribes greedy for control over spiritual powers and for wealth, tribes that constantly made comparisons of their respective splendor. Each saw itself as brilliant as the sun, in contrast with the mere starlight of all the others.

He detested their money and their usury, hating these rich folk that took advantage of the poor. As he had been an orphan

himself, he knew better than anyone how important it was to assist these individuals abandoned by everyone, rejected, exploited, humiliated.

Inwardly he hope that one day the wretched of today and the orphans of tomorrow would become no more than a bad dream long past.

*One day God would provide for them.*

Mohammed was deep in his thoughts. When he noticed that night had fallen, he was surprised by it.

Below him, the city had become illuminated as if by magic, flames lit by men trying to rival the stars in the sky. Emerging from back of the high mountains that topped out the area, a full moon cast shadows on the rocks around him.

Mohammed stood up slowly, with a lengthy stretch of his muscles that were painful from so many hours of inactivity. From his haversack he took out a leather bottle filled with herbal tea that his wife had prepared for the day.

That very morning he had gone back down to his home to replenish his supplies of food and drink. He had quickly then headed back to this mountain that he hallowed.

He let the delightful liquid trickle into his throat, savoring the beverage.

How many days had he been here? To tell the truth, he was no longer too sure about that, but in any case did not care. His spiritual retreat would end when it ended, even if this was the very first time he had stayed here so long.

Above all, in this isolation he wished to understand why the dreams he had each night sometimes came true.

*Warning dreams.*

Had he become some kind of clairvoyant as he aged? Could he really see events that were to occur in the near future? Those were questions that troubled his mind at this moment.

He remembered how one night he had dreamed of a visit from his Uncle Abu Talib. The very next day as he woke up, his uncle had come to see him unexpectedly. He was dressed as he had been in the dream, in an attractive, long, blue tunic that Abu

Talib had just bought that same morning, a tunic that he had never seen anywhere before, except in his dream.

Another time, he dreamed of his wife Khadijah. When he woke up during the afternoon, he saw her coming back from the market wearing a brand new kerchief, the same red kerchief that he had seen in his night-time dream.

How could that be? What was the meaning of these representations of the future that came to him in his sleep and shone with a light like the first rays of dawn?

Mohammed had told his wife about his visions. Laughingly, Khadijah had asked him if he had become a prophet.

Her laughter still resonated within him like the sound of a bell.

Returning to the reality of the here and now, Mohammed stowed the leather bottle of herbal tea in his haversack. With a tired hand, he smoothed down his bushy black beard, in which the first few white hairs had appeared shortly before, a sign of wisdom. Then, with the skill of a desert dweller, he lit a fire just in front of the small cave, some twelve feet deep by six feet wide, where he normally stayed during the daytime in order to have protection from the furnace-like heat outside.

He squatted mechanically and ate a few dates. Then he tried the spiced cake that Khadijah had baked for him: it was really delicious and he finished it to the last crumb.

Mohammed yawned with tiredness. Now was the time to sleep.

He put a log on the fire, spread a blanket on the dusty floor of the cave, and lay down near its entrance. Up above, reflecting the rays from the sun that was now hidden back of the Earth of humankind, the Moon shed a soft light.

He tried to keep awake for a while more, but it was useless. His eyelids drooped time and again, then finally shut completely.

After a moment, a strange sensation came over him.

Was he really asleep?

His feet started to tingle, as if ants were moving over them. He was affected by a sensation of heat, as if there were a fire

forming inside him. This moved slowly up his body as far as his throat, and Mohammed began to sweat heavily.

Suddenly his throat was clutched in a vise-like grip. He tried to shout out, but not a sound came from his mouth.

At that point, terrified, Mohammed opened his eyes wide.

Hovering just above him, a luminous being was gripping his throat in one shining hand, while the other held out to him a roll of cloth covered with symbols

“Read!” ordered a voice that came from nowhere and from everywhere.

Mohammed vainly struggled to break loose from the throttling hand that was cutting off his breathing.

*I do not know how to read.*

As if it had heard his innermost thoughts, the luminous being insisted.

“Read!”

The being loosened its iron grasp.

Mohammed, struggling and trying to resist, did manage to gasp out, “I do not know how to read.”

Once more the fierce grip crushed his throat and his willpower.

“Read! In the name of your Lord, creator of all things, who made man from a clot of blood, read! Your Lord is the All-Bountiful, who taught with the pen, instructing men in that which they knew not.”

*I do not know how to read.*

The hand that held the cloth scroll plunged forcefully into Mohammed’s heart.

“I am Jibril sent by your Lord, and you are the Messenger he has chosen!”

The pain was awful and Mohammed woke up fully. Wild-eyed, he watched as Jibril headed off into the starry sky and finally disappeared completely.

Rubbing his chest, which felt as if it had been branded with a red-hot iron, Mohammed had the strange feeling that there was a

book written inside his heart. He slowly got up, raised his head and started looking around for Jibril.

At that point he saw the Moon staring down at him. However, it was not the Moon, but a huge eye, incredibly immense. When he grasped fully whose eye it was, Mohammed howled in terror and flung himself out of the cave. Running flat out, he shot breathlessly down the mountain at a breakneck pace.

“Mohammed! You are the Messenger of God and I am Jibril.”

He heard the voice coming out of every stone, echoing from every hill, near or far. As he turned towards the Moon, he once more saw Jibril, now totally changed into a monster filling the whole horizon. Then, whichever direction he looked, Mohammed could see nothing but him. He lowered his eyes in order to see this nightmare vision no longer, and continued running away.

After what seemed an eternity, he finally reached his whitewashed house, which he rushed into like a whirlwind.

Khadijah was not asleep, but sitting on cushions on the floor and apparently waiting for him. With one hand she lifted up a little oil lamp, setting in motion the shadows in the house that danced around like drunken men.

“Cover me up!” said Mohammed, gasping for breath. “Cover me up!”

Trembling with fear and cold despite the sweat that beaded his brow, he flung himself face down on the cushions and hid his head as far into them as he could.

Khadijah’s white eyebrows curved in a frown that spread to the whole of her age-wrinkled face. She quickly grasped the situation, though, and set down the lamp on the floor, then standing up to go look for the first mantle she could lay hands upon.

She covered up her husband’s body and the top of his head. He was shaking all over.

It was a long while before Mohammed recovered his spirits completely.

Once he had calmed down, Khadijah slid her hand under the mantle and gently stroked his long hair, damp with sweat.

“What happened?” asked the woman finally in a gentle tone.

His voice muffled by the cushions, Mohammed told her of his encounter with the luminous being.

“I am afraid for my life,” added Mohammed. “I thought I was going mad.”

He raised his head, opened his eyes and turned around slowly.

He then cautiously slipped his head out from under the mantle and looked round at the threatening shadows that wavered with the flickering of the little oil lamp.

“I am afraid I may be possessed by a demon,” said he in a still small voice.

“Why do you think that?” asked his wife.

“I can see signs of possession in me. I hear voices coming out of every rock and every hill. Tonight I saw the huge being that came to me, this Jibril. A creature whose head touches the ceiling of the sky while his feet are firmly on the ground. I do not know who he is, but he knows me well and comes after me.

“Shh,” murmured Khadijah, gently caressing his hair, as if she was a mother trying to soothe a child that had just had a bad dream.

She leaned over and kissed him affectionately on the forehead.

“You do believe me, is that not true?”

“Of course I believe you! I believe in you and in what you saw.”

Soothed, but praying that the nightmare would never occur again, Mohammed closed his eyes once more.

“God will never dishonor you,” continued his wife. You are on good terms with your whole family. You help the poor. When you have guests, you serve them generous amounts and you aid the victims of disasters.”

Khadijah planted her lips on his ear and whispered calming words.

“Nothing bad can ever happen to you, Mohammed, because you are on the side of God the Beneficent.”

When the sun rose and ended his night-time terror, carrying off the dancing shadow specters, Mohammed went with his wife to the home of her cousin, Waraqa, a scholar well familiar with the holy scriptures of the Jews and the Christians.

If there was any explanation for the strange ordeal to which Mohammed had been subjected, there was no question that Waraqa would discover it. At least, that is what Khadijah seemed to believe. The couple headed for the house where this close cousin lived. They drew aside the curtain that closed the entry to the main room and the pair found themselves before the elderly man, sitting on the floor, which was made of attractive tiles that were pleasantly cool.

The old man, who had been blind for some years now, had a long beard and wore a white robe. He listened calmly to the tale of what had happened the previous night on the outskirts of Mecca, then sat thinking in silence. His face was lined with deep furrows, and little nervous tics affected it, fluttering the eyelashes on his closed eyelids.

Long ago, while his eyes were still able to transmit images, he had translated into Arabic the Holy Book of the Nazarenes. He knew every chapter and every verse of it by heart. He might even have been able to recite them all in order without mistakes. He knew that God only rarely spoke to humans. Rather than any direct intervention, God preferred to entrust such a mission to his angel of revelation: Gabriel.

“Jibril must be the angel Gabriel!” exclaimed Waraqa in his high-pitched voice. “He is the guardian of the secrets of Heaven and the one who appeared to Moses! The angel of the burning bush. Mohammed, my child, God has picked you out! You are his chosen one and he has found you worthy of receiving his revelation.”

With smiling face, Waraqa went on to state that Mohammed had to be the man that the Holy Scriptures described as the long awaited Prophet. In the blinding light of the day and through the clear desert nights sprinkled with stars, Mohammed’s spiritual retreats had prepared him, without his knowing it, to receive a crucial revelation, and to be entrusted with a massive

mission: to become a prophet and transmit to his own people, but also to all humanity, the truth that came from God.

In that night of destiny, the most extraordinary of tales had had its beginning, the tale of the final revelation of God to humankind, a revelation that would remain in force until the end of days. Mohammed's encounter with the angel Gabriel, the same angel that had gone to see Mary, the mother of Jesus, was an event of such importance that it would shake up the lives of everyone on the Earth without exception. That was because the Paradise promised to the crowds who would submit to the will of God would emerge from that meeting like water flowing from a living spring.

Aghast, Mohammed listened to Waraqa without daring to interrupt him. Nonetheless, a thousand questions were just waiting to come out of his mouth, one in particular burning on his lips.

*Am I really God's chosen one?*

It was as if he had been struck by lightning.

*O Lord, why me?*

He did not feel himself in any way capable of taking up this unexpected burden. Above all, he had no desire to face another time the atrocious suffering that had come from his confrontation with the angel Gabriel.

Never again.

Suddenly, not wanting to know any more about it, Mohammed said goodbye to Waraqa and went off in a hurry. He shut himself up in his house and sent away the maidservants. For four days, with Khadijah at his side, he lived like a recluse, jumping at the slightest noise from the street, nearly fainting at the least breath of wind.

On the fifth day, Uncle Abu Talib and Waraqa were brought into his home by his wife. The three of them stood to one side, as if helpless in the face of Mohammed's deliberate silence.

In the large chamber where they stood, heavy curtains of dark cloth covered all openings, leaving the room and its occupants in almost total darkness. Mohammed was sitting in a corner, where Khadijah had arranged comfortable cushions for him. His features were drawn through lack of sleep and twisted by fear,

while his mind wandered far away from a present time that he obstinately refused to face.

It was then that a chiming, tinkling sound was heard as the heavy curtains were shaken strongly by a gust of wind that seemed to come from outside. All at once, intense light flooded the room.

Then all was calm once more.

The three companions were struck by fear and clustered together in the corner where Mohammed sat. As if moved by a superhuman force, he rose to his feet. In front of them, they saw a being taking shape in the center of the chamber. This was the shining source of the light: a tall oval form gradually changing into a motionless human shape.

Waraqa was the first to speak.

“I can see it, I can see it.”

The blind man pointed his finger in the direction of the totally naked being that was standing fifteen feet away from them.

“I can see a young boy with long golden hair.”

They were all stunned to see the vision of a child emerging from the light.

“It is the angel Gabriel,” cried Waraqa. “Oh, my God!

He immediately fell respectfully to his knees. Abu Talib and Khadijah did likewise.

As for Mohammed, he was unable to make the slightest movement. His eyes wide with fear, he was paralyzed by terror.

The angel came two steps closer, and with a roguish smile on his lips said in a childlike voice:

“Ahmad, you are God’s Chosen One! His Messenger to men. Fear nothing, you are not possessed by a demon,”

Gabriel gave a small crystalline laugh.

“I shall come to you as often as is needful,” chuckled the angel. “I shall read to you the Mother of Books that lies on a table standing in God’s Heaven.”

For a few short seconds, the divine creature that had taken the shape of a child bowed politely. He then straightened up again and stood still in the same majestic pose he had adopted on

arriving. Then, with a chiming noise from the heavens, the shining form vanished into nothingness.

Thrilled to have recovered the power of sight, even if only for a moment, Waraqa exclaimed:

“I cannot believe it. I saw the angel Gabriel! Now I can die with a calm mind, because I know that God is God, and Mohammed is his Messenger!”

Seven days later, Waraqa’s words sounded in Mohammed’s ears as a prophecy. Khadijah had closed the elderly man’s eyes for his final departure. The shock of his meeting with the angel Gabriel had been too much for the blind man’s heart. Khadijah insisted to her husband that they should never reveal to anyone this episode in their life, an encounter with the angel of revelation, for fear that the inhabitants in the city might interpret Gabriel as an evil angel of death because of Waraqa’s passing away.

Mohammed promised her this and sealed his lips for ever about this tale.

In any case, who could he have told about all this? No-one would have believed him. They would have accused him of just being a liar with far too much imagination.

*But it is all true, as God is my witness.*

An accusation of lying would bring with it dishonor.

Mohammed did not want to be the laughing-stock of his neighbors, his friends or his clan. The only honorable solution open to him was to run away from this life, escaping from the shame and humiliation that were looming on the horizon.

So, unbeknownst to anyone, he three times climbed the mountain with the aim of throwing himself into the abyss. Three times, however, Gabriel appeared to him to prevent him from committing an irreversible folly.

“Oh, Mohammed, you are truly the Messenger of God.”

Each time, these words were enough to calm his heart and soothe his soul.

On his return home after his last attempt at suicide, at the end of the evening, Khadijah became worried by her husband’s gloomy face. She openly questioned him about what he had gone to do on the mountain. Like a child that knows it has behaved

badly, Mohammed admitted to her he had had the intention of killing himself and told her about the appearances made by the angel of revelation to dissuade him.

Her only rebuke was to kiss him on the forehead.

“Night will bring counsel,” said his wife to him. “Rest well.”

She went off to her room to go to bed.

Mohammed did the same. He took off his footwear and lay down on a mattress on the ground, in his house’s courtyard open to the sky, huddling under an old blanket.

Physically and mentally exhausted, he rapidly found sleep under the peaceful gaze of the stars.

Gabriel took possession of his body.

The sensation was not painful. On the contrary, Mohammed felt a great fullness within himself. He slowly noticed himself becoming detached from the divine force that holds all things down to the Earth. Surprised, he realized he was no longer himself: he was inside Gabriel’s body.

“I shall take possession of your body to talk to men in their lifetime. However, before that God is giving you possession of my body so that you may discover where men go once they are dead.”

The voice of the angel of revelation seemed to echo within Mohammed. Nonetheless, he realized that it was not Gabriel’s voice that he was perceiving, but rather his mind. Mohammed was seeing through his eyes, hearing through his ears and had access to all of his thoughts.

Amazed, Mohammed floated inside the angel’s body, hovering over his own sleeping self on the mattress.

Then, turning his new face encircled in long golden hair towards the starry sky, Mohammed flew towards the gardens of delights.

God’s Paradise.

Rising ever higher, he went through a thick gray cloud, then burst out of the night-time darkness into shining light. Like a bird with outstretched wings, he glided over a magical landscape. Beneath him, as far as the eye could see, lay orchards, vineyards and luxuriant gardens. Among rivers of crystal water there were

scattered rubies and diamonds. Streams of wine, of honey and of milk always of the freshest flavor flowed in abundance. Celestial music accompanied by chanting came from the sweet air to soothe the heart in these prodigious surroundings.

Near a limpid fountain, the angel descended towards a garden fringed by majestic trees with various succulent fruits that cast a shade all around. Bursts of joyous laughter rang out: they were the voices of men facing one another in garb of green satin or of silk and wearing silver bracelets. In total rapture, they relaxed on couches adorned with jewelry, sat on golden thrones or reclined on brocade mats covered with emerald-green cushions.

Wandering naked between the lines of couches or seats, children eternally young served a multitude of different foods in silver dishes and crystal bowls. There was fruit, exquisite meats and the flesh of the rarest birds. From jugs they held by the handle these charming young creatures also poured inexhaustible supplies of delicious wines that caused neither drunkenness nor sleepiness in those who drank them, who remained fully sharp-witted.

*But why do they need to eat and drink if they are dead?*

Gabriel's mind did not respond immediately to Mohammed's question. As if it was asking God in person for details first, it finally answered that, by eating these foodstuffs of eternal youth, the believers risen from the dead could retain immortality.

"Men here remain for ever youthful, like the virgins created especially for them by God."

With a nod, Gabriel pointed out women with perfect complexions and large, dark, modest eyes who stood deferentially beside the jovial men. They were totally naked and could be seen to have not the least imperfection, being irresistibly beautiful.

Two men who had been lying face to face on couches drank down their ginger-flavored beverage and stood up. One took a young man by the hand, the other a virgin who gave the impression of being an adolescent.

Unseen by the quartet and flying above them, Gabriel followed the four people as they headed for large pavilions made of cloth covered in white pearls. The two couples separated and Gabriel went into the tent entered by the man with the virgin.

Once inside, she went over to join others, who were all equally females to dream of, where they lay completely naked. They waited in clearly lascivious positions, showing off their rounded breasts and sweet intimacies which were ever virginal. The man, who seemed to be around twenty years old, undressed rapidly, his long black hair cascading over his powerful muscles. With perpetual and unbounding vigor, he set about pleasuring these women subjected to his most unconfessable desires.

In these endless pleasures, with orgasms that seemed to be exclusively for the male partner, Mohammed wondered where the mothers, wives or sisters that had died on Earth might be, since the virgins created especially for Paradise were clearly not women who had died in the world below. Through Gabriel's eyes, Mohammed stared at the man with the long, black hair and had the impression he had seen him before someplace. He concentrated and was dumbfounded to realize he was well acquainted with this stranger.

*Waraqa!*

Indeed, the young man with powerful muscles was none other but the blind man who had died in the arms of Khadijah. Without his long, white beard, and restored to the age of around twenty, the old man had been hard for Mohammed identify.

Gabriel confirmed it.

“That really is Waraqa, who died a short while back. Mohammed, you shall now see where men who willingly commit suicide find themselves in the end.”

Floating in the air, the angel of revelation passed through the fabric of the tent. He emerged into a gray, cloudy space where there was a reddish door. As it opened to a sound of wailing, black smoke poured out, plunging this place into darkness. Gabriel went through this suffocating curtain of smoke and burst out into a cave of horrors.

Hell.

Whipped by stinking, furnace-hot wind, hundreds of naked men and women of all ages were being subjected to the worst of torments, their movements restricted by chains or pillories. In an endless cycle, festering wounds covering them, their skin was stripped off, their bodies disemboweled and their skulls smashed

with iron maces. To the accompaniment of howls emerging from their chained throats, the unfortunates had poured into their mouths boiling water that they were forced to swallow, ripping apart their entrails.

Shrieks rang out and terrified voices asked Malik, the guardian of Hell, to beg God to finish them off.

Nothing, though, could end all these atrocities, as their deathless bodies constantly regenerated and the tortures began again and again.

Hanging over a chasm, a group of men and women were the victims of roaring flames that roasted their flesh. Once it had shriveled and blackened in appalling suffering, it was instantly replaced by fresh human skin, so that the punishment of these prisoners would be never-ending.

As he burned in the flames, an old man stretched out towards the angel, begging for help. The only result was that a jet of molten metal poured over him, disfiguring him utterly.

The angel of revelation floated a dozen or so feet above the ground, which as far as the eye could see was one immense bed of burning coals swept by fierce eternal fires. The intensity of the heat was starting to roast Gabriel's feet, and a sensation of terrible evil spread through his mind.

Mohammed felt this burning in his own feet. He instantly went back to his earthly body where it was still sleeping on the mattress. He woke up screaming as a thousand invisible flames played over his bare feet. In a single bound, he leaped up and plunged fully clothed into the small central pool of the courtyard. After long minutes, the water finally managed to soothe to some extent the agony of his burned skin. As he sat there, Mohammed gingerly touched with the tips of his fingers the blisters that had appeared on his soles.

"Hell truly exists," muttered the injured man in a dazed voice. "Hell really exists."

His dark eyes raised towards the starry sky, Mohammed prayed never again to return there.



### 3

## One-Way Ticket to Hell

Hell really exists!

That was the first thought that Tom's bewildered brain managed to bring into his emerging consciousness.

His face was burning, his lungs seemed to be on fire inwardly as if full of sulfur, and his throat felt as if incandescent lava was trickling down it.

Tom tried to open his eyelids to peer into the surrounding darkness, but closed them again at once. His eyes were boiling in their sockets.

He groaned with pain.

Despite the fear gripping him, he made an attempt to grasp what was happening to him. Despite not functioning on all cylinders, his brain did manage to indicate his position. He was lying face down on a surface into which sharp razor blades were stuck, torturing his flesh and harrowing him at the slightest breath or least movement.

However, he could not stay stock-still, as a hellish furnace heat surrounded him. With a painful effort, he stretched his arms out in front of him, forcing them to move in a large semicircle. This added a fresh pain: he felt the cutting edge of the blades hack into the palms of his hands.

In the uncontrolled movement that followed, his right hand collided with a metal tube and sent it flying into the distance.

The object slid along the ground and fell into an opening with a characteristic sound.

*Splash.*

Roaring like a wounded beast, Tom got onto his hands and knees and crawled blindly and as fast as he could towards the liquid that promised him respite, hoping he could extinguish the fire raging everywhere inside him. He had gone no more than a couple of yards when the ground fell away from under his hands and he went head first into the unknown.

His body sank into a liquid universe, but then he felt resistance under his feet. Supporting himself on what seemed to be the bottom, Tom pushed with his legs as hard as he could so as to go back up to the surface. He achieved this and gulped down air that still seemed to burn as it entered his innards.

That water did not put out the fire within him. Quite the contrary, it was even as if it stirred up the flames.

Could he have fallen into the heart of an erupting volcano? No, the liquid into which he had plunged had actually been rather cold. So, how come he was still burning?

Tom quickly rubbed his eyelids with the backs of his damaged hands and forced his eyes open.

What he saw with his blurry vision drew and oath from him.

*“Scheiße”.*

Tom was not in Hell at all, nor was he dead.

He was alive and kicking and was splashing around painfully in his own swimming pool under the mocking eye of a shining moon.

Despite the pain caused by every movement, he swam to the pool ladder and climbed out of the dark water. Streaming with water and with his vision blurred, he could still make out the broken chair on which he had been sitting just a while before. On that part of the terrace the soft illumination from the wall lights that had come on automatically revealed a sinister picture. For several yards around trails of blood mingled with scores of green fragments of broken glass. Tom realized that when he had fired

the bullet at his head his body had fallen onto the beer bottle and smashed it, inflicting serious cuts on himself.

All the same, how could he still be alive?

“*Scheiße*,” he cursed.

Tom had just understood the reason the shell had not done its work. This was the outcome of his thoughts about the nature of the invisible flames that were devouring him.

His face bright red and with tears pouring from his eyes, he went quickly into his house and rushed into the bathroom. Between two bursts of nausea he searched in the medicine cabinet above the wash basin. He tipped a pile of medications onto the floor and finally found what he desperately needed: a saline solution aerosol.

He sprayed his whole face, but particularly his eyes, so as to counter the effects of the CS gas that was gnawing at them. It had been a teargas shell: the difference between one and a shell with a bullet was very small, and they had the same metal casing. That was how Tom had made his mistake, taking a shell out of the wrong box.

With the pistol against his temple, the detonation should even so have been lethal. Nevertheless, the teargas shells were years past their sell-by date and the cordite in them must have lost most of its explosive force.

Bad luck or good? A strange feeling of having suffered a reverse was added to his purely physical hurt.

He sat on the floor and waited for the aerosol to calm his shrieking pain.

After the passage of what seemed endless time, he finally stood up. He needed to check on his wounds and bruises. He undressed with great care and once he was completely naked he examined his belly and chest. A few cuts, it was true, but nothing serious. He slipped on the blue bathrobe that hung on the door.

It was then that he spied in the medicine cabinet mirror the face of a monster with a beard covered in blood that stared back at him. On the side where the revolver had spat out what he had hoped would be death, there was a blackish depression. On the opposite side there was a large fragment of glass still stuck into his

temple, held by the flesh which blood had flowed from before in the end congealing. With one swift movement, taking no precautions, Tom pulled the glass out and blood once more began trickling over his skin.

The wound really needed at least three or four stitches, but after dabbing it dry with a towel Tom simply closed it with a long strip of medical tape.

His whole body hurt. The pain he was feeling was nonetheless insignificant, compared to the terrible fate that Camilla had had to suffer because of him. She had drowned in an icy ocean, slowly and terrified of the arrival of the one final wave that would bring her life to an end and remove her last hope.

Tom, on the other hand, would be lucky enough not to feel anything.

Just because he had messed up his meeting with death, he had not given up on dying. He left the bathroom and went back to the terrace. His eyes scanned the area, searching for the revolver. Despite looking carefully at every square inch of the tiled floor, he could not find it.

Tom now realized that the metal object he had knocked into the swimming pool during his “hellish” awakening must have been his gun.

Barefoot, and treading carefully to avoid the broken glass on the ground, he went to the edge of the pool and stared into it. The bottom was dark. In the moonlight Tom managed to make out one shiny rectangular object: his cell phone. Then a little further out in the water, he spotted the black pistol, right next to a second rectangular object, this time white.

The Koran.

Tom had thought that before he died his life would flash past him. In fact, it had been someone else’s life.

Mohammed’s.

As Tom’s friend Patrick seemed to believe, Mohammed might have been no more than a figure dreamed up by some preacher in olden days. Nevertheless, the Koran lying at the bottom of the pool was very much a reality.

In the silence of the night, Tom stared at it.

Moslems said of it that it was impossible to understand its deepest sense, because it was in code. The supposed “Prophet” had stated that the Koran contained some explicit verses, and others with a hidden meaning that God alone knew. Nonetheless, God was by no means the only one to be aware of the real sense: there were very many people in the know.

The Koran was indeed in code, but this was no divine cipher, as those excluded from knowing its meaning believed. The holy book of the Moslems was coded with a perfectly down-to-earth double sense, which was painfully simple after initiation into it, so no hidden spiritual meanings should be sought in it.

This was so obvious, so clear, because it was written down in black and white in the eighth chapter. This was a chapter that blindly devout hearts knew by heart, yet its title alone should have aroused their suspicions.

Was there anyone blinder than those who did not want to see?

Since Moslems lacked the strength to renounce God, they could not grasp the story of the book’s true purpose. They continued to believe in a supernatural coding, convinced that the Koran contained the words of the Almighty.

They were deeply mistaken.

The Koran was in no way the book of Allah.

The truth was that the Koran was the secret book of a mafia.

If some of its verses had a hidden sense, there was a very practical reason for this. It helped hide from gullible believers the fact that the Murderer of Medina had been the brains of a mafia-like criminal outfit.

When Mohammed had fled to Medina, he had set up a system, simple in some ways, complex in others, for transmitting orders to his Ansar mercenaries in full public gaze but discreetly. Criminal organizations often used coded language that hid their evil actions from the uninitiated. Gangster slang was incomprehensible for “marks”, only making sense to “hoods”. In just the same way, Mohammed had used indirect wordings to mention his criminal operations to the “hoods” who acted as his

hitmen, while concealing them from his devout “marks”. These tender consciences had unwittingly acted on behalf of a mafia-like sect. They were accomplices without knowing it, passive actors paralyzed by their denial of reality, the hostages and in the end the real victims of the tyrant.

In the time of Mohammed, there had been two types of Moslem. On the one hand there were the starry-eyed who prayed sincerely, but to a God that in truth was imaginary. On the other there were the bandits in the know, who had deliberately exploited the religious card to gain sex, power and wealth. Hidden underneath a metaphysics made up of artless fables, the Koran was in fact nothing more than an elaborate handbook for bandits, a mafia encyclopedia still in use in our days, indicating how to pass off criminal actions as pious acts. The supernatural was no more than a pretext in it, while extortion and the organizing of a gangster set-up were at the heart of its text.

Tom shut his eyes and concentrated.

The verses were put in their true light when it was understood that Mohammed described himself in them with a range of smug and pompous adjectives. He was Allah the Omnipotent, the All-Knowing who was to be feared, the Self-Sufficient that satisfies all needs, the Eternally Alive with power over all things, the All-Seeing that observed every action of the bandits in his pay, the Sovereign Lord to whom belongs every thing on Earth or in Heaven.

It was the usual trick of thieves, claiming that the wealth they coveted was theirs by entitlement. Denying any rights to owners, they affirmed that all they were doing was to recover goods they had lost.

Expressions with double senses for these gangsters abounded in the Koran, such as “evil”, which signified the act of mocking the pretensions of the false prophet, making objections or opposing him. Another was “good”, which signified fighting on behalf of, submitting to, or handing over a share of booty to the leader of the Medina underworld, who demanded one-fifth of any plunder for himself. In the psychopathic mind of Mohammed, good was anything that bolstered his ego and prestige or filled his coffers, while evil was whatever involved damage to his narcissism

through criticizing him, or denouncing his imposture or his crimes. The believers and winners, the people that profited from and enjoyed the benefits, were those in his organization. The wrongdoers, the transgressors, or perverts condemned to the fire were in reality the victims of his religious mafia.

For his brigands, when the godfather used the cipher “do good”, it was an instruction to get weapons and horses. The virtuous believers understood it naively in the Christian sense of the term.

Verses with a hidden sense were as numerous as the grains of sand in the desert where this Arabian Pablo Escobar had built his evil Islamic criminal empire.

The word “Islam” had the translation “Submission”. Moslems were the people who were safe from any exactions by the sect because they had submitted themselves to Allah, or more precisely to Mohammed and his bloodthirsty Ansar Auxiliaries or Helpers. They “enjoined right conduct”: they carried out armed hold-ups on Meccan caravans, killing prisoners or holding them for ransom, and ran protection rackets on all the villages round about. If ever they were caught in their criminal acts, the underworld godfather invented a few chapters to justify everything to the horrified “marks”.

That was why the eighth chapter of the Koran brazenly bore such a criminal title, exposing to the light of day the intrinsically delinquent nature of the desert sect.

The chapter had the name “The Spoils of War”, in other words “Loot”.

Apart from all the other hundreds of verses dedicated to war that were to be found in the Koran, this chapter taught that it was legitimate to steal, rape, or seize property, killing in the name of Allah. It was the primer for criminals, ordering the extermination of non-Moslems by beheading, claiming that it was not Moslems who killed, but God through their intervention: a divine intellectual excuse showing how the madness of a single man became the collective denial of responsibility by all.

Unaware of the real danger posed by this outlaw’s manual, the handbook of death that was the Koran, some folk believed that Allah’s lunatics as seen on the television were twisting the words

of the Butcher of Medina to provide a rationale for carrying out for their own purposes the worst rapes, killings and mass slaughters.

That was not so.

They put no interpretation or gloss on them whatsoever: they simply applied them.

Tom opened his eyes.

Mohammed was no Messenger of God. He was just the godfather of a petty local mafia which had grown by force of arms. This undeniable historical fact should have been made plain in modern encyclopedias, instead of the lies printed despite history, despite common sense, and despite what was nonetheless clearly recounted in the Koran.

With a tone of provocative black humor, Tom had posted on line in a shared encyclopedia the tale of the Godfather of Medina and his religious mafia, summarizing truths that were murderous for the Murderer of Arabia. They had swiftly been wiped off the Internet by shadowy censors.

Tom had started off by recounting that it was pretty much a gang war for the control of the lucrative territory of Mecca that had constrained Mohammed to go into exile in Medina. Luckily for him, he had been able to make alliances with various regional mafia clans. As a new godfather of the local underworld, Mohammed had launched raids against Meccan caravans. His early successes had drawn to him all the shifty characters in the region, in search of loot and women, swelling the bandit ranks.

Nonetheless, he had had to discipline these dimwitted hoodlums. Mohammed had established rules for the sharing out of booty and of captured women, who could legitimately be raped. Only rape within the gang was severely punished. Likewise, it was forbidden to take the women of any other member of the mafia congregation.

On the other hand, outside the group, anything went: the brigands had a free hand.

Flattering the ego of these brainless brutes, Mohammed had allowed his men to beat their wives, who were not permitted to deny them sexual intercourse. He had ordered women veiled for a personal reason he was too ashamed to explain and to reduce the

likelihood of jealousy or lusting within the group. As well as authorizing multiple marriage, Mohammed had personally indulged in pedophilia with Aisha when she was only nine years old. His example had been followed, since the Prophet was seen as a great model, to be copied without hesitation.

As the number of its hangers-on grew, the Medina cartel had become a power in the land, setting up alliances with those it was still not strong enough to defeat, and attacking those who were weaker, accusing them of treachery. The vocabulary of the verses made up at this period was typical: they spoke of alliances, of false alliances, of treachery, plots, ransoms, tribute, protection. Over and over again this was said to be in relation to Allah, but the full meaning of these texts could not be completely grasped unless the name of Allah was replaced by the name Mohammed.

When the persecution of the population had finally brought the ruin of this economy of predation, Mohammed decided to allow a status of inferiority, without commitments about its length, in exchange for ready money, imposing on non-Moslems a protection racket worthy of the worst of today's mafias. To demean them, the terrorized victims were forced to stand and bow before the armed collector of this tribute as he remained seated. When they paid up, they were struck on the nape of the neck to humiliate them even more.

These innocent sufferers had been given the name of *dhimmi*. This word had its origin in Mohammed's attack on the oasis of Khaybar in 628. After confiscating their lands and torturing one of the leaders of the Jews to find out where the tribe's treasures were hidden, the tyrant had allowed the suffering inhabitants to continue to cultivate their oasis on condition that they gave him half of all their harvests. This inhumane servitude was called *dhimma*, and the unfortunates enduring it took the name of *dhimmi*, a term that became generalized to designate all non-Moslems in Islamic lands who had to pay, and still to this day must pay, a racketeering tax in exchange for "protection".

In his role as underworld godfather, Mohammed had also taken particular interest in ordering the killing of anyone who got in his way, had "taken out a contract" on them, to use the mafia phrase. Later on, the sect known as Hashshashin had made a

specialty of this, and a death fatwa was the modern version of the same. Just as in the mafia no-one leaves organization without being “iced”, getting rid of anyone who knew too much, any apostates renouncing Islam were considered as traitors and had to be killed.

That was the rotten system that humankind had inherited from the desert gangster.

Yet that was not all.

Just as mafia organizations had their own system of charity, Mohammed’s syndicate had put in place a charity tax, the *zakat*, a pillar of Islam. This financed not just solidarity among members, but also any expenses needed for violent actions.

Just as mafia outfits presented a “straight” commercial face to the societies they were plundering, Mohammed’s set-up had an acceptable face for the world in the shape of a religion. Appropriately tweaked propaganda presented this as tolerant and pacific.

In the same way that mafia gangs had branches in jails to organize and discipline relations between the inmates, Mohammed’s bunch was very active among prisoners. The aim was to find new fanatical recruits who hated everyone.

Tom sighed.

The aim of any criminal organization was naturally to conquer and exploit the biggest amount of territory possible. That was equally true of what Mohammed had set up. He had given his followers a tool for the conquest and running of Arabia under a totalitarian system, mafia-like in nature and religious in appearance. This had permitted the later conquest of an empire, but at the terrible price of wiping out noble civilizations, fallen victims to Jihad. Like a desert storm, this “holy war” had swept aside arts, science, education, progress and the well-being of the populations conquered.

Nowadays the Moslem world was the poorest, most violent and most backward part of the planet. A civilization cannot be built and run on mafia lines.

Islam had been built on crime, violence, fear and oppression. Its political aims, with their unhealthy ideology, were hidebound, criminal and outdated.

Whenever anything went wrong, from a robe that was too short all the way to an earthquake, true believers were sure that Allah was asking for more Islam. They were convinced that a world one hundred percent Moslem would bring happiness to the whole planet under the benignity of the Merciful One.

Would peace really reign at last if Islam succeeded in imposing itself on the whole world?

No, far from it.

What would be brought about would be what Islam had always led to: obscurantism, the collapse of economies, famine, terror and above all incessant sectarian wars, as atrocious and barbarous as those fought between Sunni and Shiite.

Who wanted to be part of a world-wide mafia tearing itself apart in gang warfare?

Not Tom in any case.

He no longer wanted to live in this world contaminated by the God Virus. It was time to let others try to control that madness, to leave it for future generations to confront that ideological inheritance that was the most serious peril that humankind had ever known.

Tom undid the belt of his bathrobe and stripped. He let the garment fall onto the tiled floor and then he dove head first and totally nude into the swimming pool. With one hand he grabbed the gun from where it lay next to the Koran, then headed back up to the surface.

Dripping water, he climbed out of the pool and went into the house. At each step he took, his bare feet left wet marks on the wooden flooring of the long corridor lit up by wall-mounted spotlights. At the end of that never-ending passageway, his bedroom awaited and would be his last stop on Earth. This time he would not play Russian roulette, but would put six shells in the cylinder and make sure of ending it all.

In less than one minute, everything would be over.

With the revolver hanging at the end of his swinging arm, Tom walked on, calm and determined. The adrenaline produced by his body when he had woken up in “Hell” had reduced the effects of the alcohol in his bloodstream, and he felt an enjoyable calm.

He was just a few steps from the threshold of the bedroom when he suddenly stopped, as if struck by lightning.

To his left, barely a yard away, the creaking of wood had echoed in the stairwell, piercing the silence of the night. Tom’s attention immediately focused on the darkened stairs that went down to the garage.

His every sense was sharpened, as if tenfold. The slightest sound reached him with an incredible intensity. He had the impression that every drop of water trickling off his naked body was falling on the wooden planks with the same impact as a billiard ball. His eyes had become like two beams of radar sweeping every last corner of the darkness.

Then, as if in slow motion, he saw the barrel of an assault rifle come into view.

Tom instinctively threw himself on the man carrying the weapon.

As he grabbed the rifle with both hands, Tom dropped his own gun, which clattered down the spiral staircase. Tom tugged with all his might, trying to wrench the deadly device away from the huge dark silhouette. It spat out two shrieking balls of fire that disappeared into the ceiling.

Tom realized it was impossible to get the weapon away from the giant who had appeared out of the depths, because it was solidly attached to his body. So, taking advantage of being higher up than his attacker, Tom kned him explosively in the jaw, simultaneously letting go of the gun so as not to be dragged down in the man’s fall.

With a sound of shattered wood, metal and flesh, the man crashed down the steps with a hoarse cry, instantly cut short.

A voice echoed up the stair well.

“The target has spotted us. He’s on the bedroom level.”

For a fraction of a second, Tom stood as motionless as a marble statue.

The voice had spoken clearly in Arabic.

Tom's brain began functioning as fast as light: he needed a weapon. His only revolver was out of reach, so he would have to fall back on cold steel.

Dashing along the corridor, Tom hurried into the kitchen and in the near darkness grabbed a large ceramic cooking knife from the worktop.

Tom turned back towards the door through which he had just come, grasping the handle of the knife firmly in his hand. Nevertheless, he did not see the Arab killers arriving, but rather the red dot of a laser beam moving swiftly across the white wall from right to left and then disappearing suddenly from his field of vision.

To one side, a collapsible baton was being used to smash through the glass door that gave onto the terrace. Like the shining fangs of a cobra, two barbs sank into Tom's back and released their electric venom.

Tom screamed with a mixture of surprise and pain. He fell head first, crashing into the edge of the crockery dresser. Stunned and half-conscious he lay on the floor, feeling as if people were pounding on his back with baseball bats. The five seconds that the Taser discharge lasted seemed to be endless minutes.

Once the devilish copper wires linking the electric pistol to his suffering body stopped crackling with energy, Tom painfully raised his head.

Everything was whirling around him.

In the doorway to the kitchen, he saw a man in a black jumpsuit, hooded and with a small camera on a headband. He crept closer with care, leaned over and grabbed the ceramic knife that Tom had dropped as he fell.

Tom's survival instinct made him want to get up off the ground.

Nevertheless, a quiet voice echoed in his head, draining his will-power, soothing him with reassuring words. It told him to stop struggling, to let himself go, that everything would be fine and

that everything would be over soon. It told him that it was stupid to try to fight to live, when he had been striving with his whole being to achieve nothing else but sublime death. It mattered little which way he was carried off into the delightful ocean of oblivion.

So, with the image of the knife in the killer's gloved hand before him, Tom closed his eyes.

Nothingness arrived at last.

\*  
\*   \*  
\*   \*

Ali's characteristic steps rang out in the extensive house that was in semi-darkness. Limping along, the old man still managed to climb up the beautiful marble stairs with surprising agility.

When he reached the second floor, his strong hand moved first the door handle and then a switch on the wall. A halogen floor lamp lit up his craggy silhouette as he went into the work room.

He was wearing a long white tunic. His face was almost completely hidden by his bulky gray beard, by a pair of eyeglasses with tinted lenses and by a traditional black and red Arab headscarf that covered his long dull-looking hair.

With his halting step, Ali went and sat on the comfortable corner sofa and rested his legs, tired after a day of walking, on a small mahogany pedestal table. His eye glanced suspiciously all around the room, as if looking for a potential spy camera placed there in his absence. Everything seemed to be in order, though. His functional office desk and super-powered computer, his overstuffed black leather easy chair and its two twins reserved for possible guests, the old master paintings on the cream-painted walls, nothing had been moved, not even an inch.

Ali took his smartphone out of the inner pocket of his tunic. Swipes from his index finger scrolled through the files seeking the video recording he wanted to watch. Once he had found it he projected it onto the giant television screen set into the wall opposite.

From shadows to light, from shots to cries, Ali viewed the film of events with a degree of very professional detachment. Nonetheless, his body leaned almost imperceptibly forwards when the screen displayed the shining blade of a knife slashing through a defenseless throat, with a jet of blood shooting out and splattering the camera lens.

Ali's smartphone emitted a gently melody with Oriental overtones, and the television picture froze.

His right hand turned on the earbud hidden under his hair.

"I'm listening", he said in Arabic in his deep voice.

The caller spoke at length, giving him a detailed report on the situation.

"He's definitely dead, you can confirm that?" Ali asked, frowning. "You know what you'll have to do with the body now. Also, clean Anderson's house up so that it looks spick and span from the outside."

Ali had no desire for a neighbor to report the sudden disappearance of Thomas Anderson, or for police crime scene investigators to find bullet holes or traces of blood in his house. He did not want newspaper headlines about the matter.

"Tell me what you've done when you finish."

Ali hung up.

As he was lost in thought, his vacant look seemed to be hypnotized by the still of the bloody image shown by the television. Hordes of questions raced through his mind.

Was the Thomas Anderson card the right one to play? Ali was now very doubtful about it. Nonetheless, it was surely too late to turn back.

Ali dreamily slipped off his left sock, took out the inch-high plastic wedge that he deliberately used to fake a limp, and replaced his footwear.

He stood up and with his normal predatory step headed for his office desk. He put down on it his eyeglasses and the red and black headscarf. Then he carefully unglued his false gray beard and his wig, stowing them away in a drawer.

He turned off the television and the floor lamp and left the now darkened room.

Silence reigned.

\*  
\*   \*   \*

The afterworld was absolute nothingness.

Everything there was dark and silent.

Was he really in Hell this time? Condemned for all eternity to a totally empty universe because of his crimes on Earth, or damned for simply having tried to denounce centuries-old lies?

Sailing across an ocean of incomprehension, Tom's emerging thoughts had just managed to break out of the prison of his mind in order to attempt to decipher the signals that his senses were transmitting to him. For a second time, Tom was waking up in the world of the dead. All the same, this time he was not burning. He had no real sensation other than that of floating in space noticing a pleasant light breeze.

He tried to move.

Nevertheless, his whole being was immobilized by invisible forces.

Remembering his fall in the kitchen, he wondered if it could have left him tetraplegic. He was immediately reassured: he could move his hands and feet.

So he gradually worked out that he was probably strapped to a stretcher, blindfolded and with noise-cancelling headphones preventing him from hearing what was in his immediate surroundings. The faint rocking movement that affected his body doubtless came from the vibrations of a vehicle rolling in a one-way journey to Hell.

Tom thought that he would have been better off dead. His kidnappers would interrogate him, torture him at length and put him through Hell on Earth before sending him off on that one-way journey.

Who had ordered this?

The hooded men had spoken in Arabic. Were they working for a terrorist State? Were they the Special Forces of some Arab country? Above all, why had they kidnapped him?

Tom immediately thought of his novel *The Sage of Mecca*.

If the person who had ordered him captured was indeed an Arab Moslem that had had access to one of the digital copies of the novel sent to various publishers, the reason was clear. Blasphemy and a death fatwa were implicit in every chapter that Tom had inscribed in digital stone.

In his bullshit-free direct style, Tom had revealed all the hidden truths about Mohammed that could infuriate even the most tolerant of Moslems.

Tolerance.

Whenever a Jihadi perpetrated the most abominable atrocities in the Western world, slaughtering innocents, there would immediately appear on television news programs some representative of the Moslem cult, a media imam, to distance the group from the “madman”. This washed Islam’s hands of the crime by stating that this sect, far from being a religion of hatred, was one of love and tolerance. As a proof of this tolerance, the media imam who was on duty would invariably quote one and the same verse from the Koran.

*There is no compulsion in religion. The right direction is henceforth distinct from error. And he who rejecteth false deities and believeth in Allah hath grasped a firm handhold which will never break.*

This verse might reassure the ignorant Westerners by hiding the real danger presented by the religious book of the Oriental mafias.

Nevertheless, the verse had been taken out of its historical context. In fact, it was a clear proof of the total intolerance of Islam.

In Medina in July of 625, Mohammed had decided to have the Jewish tribe of the Nadir deported, because in the name of Allah the All-Powerful Thief he felt he should be rightful owner of everything they possessed. He cunningly accused the Jews of planning to kill him by throwing a stone off a roof, then gave them an ultimatum demanding that they depart from the city. The Jews refused and hunkered down in their fort. Mohammed had their palm-trees cut down and burned, and after some days of being besieged, the Nadir surrendered, with no stomach for further

combat. Their lands were stolen, and all the Jewish families forced to leave.

To legitimize these barbarous acts, Mohammed made up the chapter numbered 59. In it he justified the plundering and deportation of the Jews.

However, to his consternation, a number of Arab families were in an uproar. Among the Nadir there were pure-bred Arab children who had been converted to the religion of Moses. In fact, in pre-Islamic times it sometimes happened that an Arab mother would convert a child to the Jewish religion in an attempt to ward off the misfortune of other children of hers who had died as babies.

Mohammed calmed these Arab families by thinking up this famous verse claiming that there was no compulsion in religion. With these words, the Prophet was purely and simply annulling the conversion of the Arab children concerned, thus sparing them and exile: the right direction, Islam, was set apart from error, Judaism.

In contrast, there was something that media imams never said. That was that the opposite was impossible: any apostate leaving Islam for another religion must be put to death.

Any T.V. imam deliberately and knowingly concealed all the countless verses ordering the slaughtering of all those who were not Moslems or had ceased to be such. He would have the brazen-faced gall to say the contrary, claiming that the Koran prohibited the killing of a human being, quoting a verse carefully edited and taken from the chapter "The Table Spread".

*Whosoever killeth a human being, it shall be as if he had killed all mankind.*

Yet the true verse in question, in its official version, said that whoever killed a man for other than manslaughter or *corruption* on Earth would have done as if he killed all men.

Implicitly, this *corruption* which gave the right to murder as legitimately as if the person involved was guilty of homicide could take many shapes in the view of Allah's madmen. It might involve being a homosexual, not believing in God, or just eating pork, for instance.

Anyone who was not Moslem was potentially a *corruption* and could be killed.

Tom sighed inwardly.

As a mock Moses, presenting himself to the Jews and their prophet's worthy inheritor, Mohammed had swept aside the Tables of the Law and God's instruction "Thou shalt not kill."

Of the ten noble commandments graven in stone, of this humane construction with ten universal pillars, just five truncated pillars remained in the Moslem world. These were the five pillars of Islam that all believers must at all costs put into practice.

The first of these pillars, as in the times of Nazi, Communist, or Fascist dictatorships, was a personality cult. This cult had been given a name: *Shahada*.

Just like the *Führer*, the *Father of Nations* or the *Duce*, the *Patriarchal Guide* and *Chief* of Medina saw as his due from all Moslems absolute obedience and limitless veneration. This was a close parallel to how the unaware peoples of Europe had behaved toward Hitler, Stalin, or Mussolini, before discovering the true evil natures they had camouflaged with sly and devious propaganda. Unfortunately for the human race, Koranic propaganda had not been overturned on the death of the Despot of Arabia as had happened with other, defeated, dictatorships. Only the winners got to re-write history, and Islam had won its world war, unlike Nazism or Fascism.

In the eyes of the conquered world, Mohammed thus retained for ever a mild and chivalrous mask that hid his monstrous nature. People still adored him in a cult of a personality that did not even have a face. This was because it was forbidden to have any image of the tyrant who still had influence in the shadow of the multitude of the faithful, like an elusive faceless mafia godfather pulling the strings of the puppets in his criminal religious organization.

Tom recited a phrase in Arabic in his head.

*There is no god but Allah and Mohammed is his Prophet.*

That was the slogan of the Islamic personality cult, called the *Shahada*, the first pillar of Islam, a slogan that had to be repeated tirelessly, at the slightest opportunity, an endless loop triggered by an incurable mental bug.

During their bloodthirsty exactions, Mohammed's thugs had been told to spare any victims who recited the Shahada, because that implied acceptance of submission to the authority of the dictator. It was expressed by bowing down toward his heavenly double, Allah, and took shape as the second pillar of Islam, prayer.

Through five prayers every twenty-four hours, said by day and by night, Mohammed had imposed the adoration of his heavenly doppelganger, thus reminding everyone that it was to the latter's earthly incarnation that absolute obedience was due. Through this endless cycle of prayers intended to purify the mind, but tantamount to brain-washing, the Messenger of Allah had retained his iron grip over his victims, hijacking their consciences, which were conditioned into no longer thinking, just blindly believing. Every new prayer brought echoes of the chants of the tempting virgins in Paradise into the ears of those navigating the waves of the Koran, avoiding the reefs in the shape of the hand of friendship offered by unbelievers, and moving hour by hour further away from the lands of men into the ocean of withdrawal where they would finally drown.

Like a desert hawk, Mohammed had lifted his prey above their level of understanding and reason to the horizon of prayer. With his divine claws ripping into their subjugated intellects, he had spread his wings like an angel of death, with its threatening shadow hovering continuously in a sky devoid of any intelligence.

Through these prayers, requiring a humiliating posture hinting at the sexual act, Mohammed had set up a brutish domination, based not on the mind but on physical force, of males over females, masters over slaves, of Allah the Dominator over docile Moslems or of the sadistic All-Powerful over masochistic believers. In one verse, the Prophet had even pushed this vice to the extent of ordering his followers to make bruises on their foreheads during their prostrations by hitting their heads against the ground, in order to show the marks of their "sanctifying" sufferings.

This masochism, with mental and physical submissiveness, led to fatalism, denial of responsibility and the renouncing of all

well-being. Another pillar of Islam came to flesh this out: *Ramadan*.

Thanks to this month of extreme fasting, from sunrise to sunset, the masochistic devout could prove to all their total submission. Every mouthful of bread that they did not eat, every drop of water that they did not swallow, were pleasurable lashes of the whip they willingly inflicted on their suffering bodies. Thanks to the severe dehydration this often brought, hallucinations could occur, triggering experiences they felt were mystical, reinforcing their mistaken self-delusion about the existence of God.

The neocortex, the so-called intelligent brain, no longer had the energy needed to operate. The human part of the brain thus handed over the controls to the reptilian part, the ancient section of the brain concerned with the most basic operations, changing people into living dead able to perform only primary actions, turning them into fanatical zombies no longer loving life, only death and the promises that Mohammed had made to them in the Koran.

That is what the Arabian wizard had made out of his victims. They were dupes who religiously paid the mafia extortion money demanded by another pillar of Islam: *Zakat*.

With the pretext of aiding the neediest, Mohammed had blackmailed his victims just as sects and mafias do in the modern world, guaranteeing the physical and mental security of the unfortunates who fall into their clutches in exchange for heavy payments. It was true that in our day, part of this ransom money was still used to finance terrorist activity, just as in the times of the Murder of Medina. As a lesser evil, though, most of the cash raised went into the coffers of the community of followers of the Sage of Mecca.

It was specifically in Mecca that the last pillar of Islam was to be found. Mohammed had successfully attained his ultimate objective: to make Mecca the New Jerusalem, and simultaneously to guarantee his own fortune, thanks to the continual flow of believers obliged by their dogmas to make a pilgrimage to the Holy City of Saudi Arabia.

A question popped into Tom's mind.

It was precisely Saudi Arabia where his friend Patrick had been when he had phoned him to talk about the myth of Mohammed.

Was that the reason he had been kidnapped?

Many other questions jostled in his head.

He did not know what sort of proof Patrick had been chasing. All that he knew was that Patrick had been in Saudi Arabia. Nonetheless, he would never give that information to his torturers. All he could hope for was that they would quickly tire of torturing him so he could finally die in peace.

On the other hand, did he still want to die? In any case, he did not want to die that way, filmed by a camera, his throat slit like a hog's so that he could become part of a macabre Islamic propaganda broadcast through social networks. He did not want the blood pouring from his slit throat or his decapitated head exhibited as a war trophy to make him into a symbol of the terror awaiting men and women who continued to struggle to cast the light of truth on the real nature of Mohammed and his religion.

Tom retched.

They had just hit an air pocket.

Tom realized he was not in a vehicle, but on board an airplane. As if to confirm his discovery, the characteristic vibrations of an undercarriage being lowered ran through the plane.

After a short descent, the wheels hit the runway tarmac and the airplane finally rolled to a stop.

The litter where Tom lay was lifted. Floating in a world without senses or feelings, he was jerkily moved towards some unknown destination.

Tom felt surprisingly well. He felt no pain, even though logically he should have had a headache. His captors had probably injected him with painkillers. Why should they take such good care of him after trying to kill him? He did not like the implications of that: they wanted him to have all his wits about him so that he could answer the questions they were going to put to him.

Despite the noise-cancelling headphones, the wail of a siren reached his ears.

This penetrated every fiber of his body, and Tom gathered that he was being transported in an ambulance.

The journey seemed to last a lifetime, with the hooting of the warning signal sweeping everything out of its way. The noise also swept every last thought out of Tom's mind, leaving him incapable of putting together the slightest coherent idea in that surrounding hullabaloo.

Then silence came once more.

The vehicle ran over gravel, then a clumsy foot on the brake pedal stopped it instantly. Tom tried to focus his attention on the voices of the people carrying him. It was no use, though, they were almost inaudible. Without being sure, he got the impression that they were going down stairs, that a door had been pushed open and that the litter he was strapped to had been put down on the ground. The fresh air brought back his sense of smell, but there was no particular odor that might indicate to him where he was now being held prisoner.

Even the room temperature told him nothing about where he was. His nude body was covered by an old blanket that prickled his skin.

Tom was in the fuzziest of states, but he knew he had to be ready for the worst.

In the hope of breaking them, he suddenly pulled on his shackles, but the leather straps barely squeaked.

A hand immediately removed the noise-cancelling headphones from Tom's ears.

"Come clean!" a powerful voice said in English.

Tom was ready for this.

At once, with the hope of upsetting one of his captors and being put out of his misery by an angry shot, Tom spat out a sentence in Arabic.

"Allah doesn't exist and Mohammed is a hopeless compulsive liar."

No reaction.

The noise of calm and co-ordinated steps going around the room was heard.

The dreadful torture took shape: a towel was slapped onto Tom's face and the stretcher was tilted so that his head was lower than his feet. Water poured down on him in crushing torrents.

Tom knew the technique. He knew that in the hands of competent operators drowning was unlikely, since his lungs lay higher than his mouth. So, the torture could go on indefinitely, with a constant anguish about the risk of immediate death by asphyxia.

Nevertheless, Tom was not going to die yet, just to suffer.

Inevitably, his suffocation reflexes were activated. Tom strove with all his might to prevent the panic fear of drowning that was beginning to overcome him from leading him into throwing in the sponge.

He must not crack. Above all, he must not plead with his torturers.

Normal time moved into another dimension, the interminable seconds dragged out into minutes of torment, and minutes into imminent death.

When the hellish flood ceased, Tom was wracked with coughing but spat out the liquid poison that burned in him.

“Confess!” the voice insisted in English.

Before his agony began again, Tom had time to feel it was odd that he was being told to answer when he had not yet been asked any question. He took in a gulp of fresh air, and a strange current flowed through his synapses, stirring neurons out of their twilight of lowered consciousness, awaking a memory that was dormant in some hidden corner.

Then, in the darkness where his whole being was plunged, a light illuminated his thoughts.

Coming from deep inside him, pouring out like molten lava, laughs exploded out of his throat in shuddering bursts.

It was not laughter intended to unnerve his enemies. It was sincere laughter, crazy laughter, uncontrollable and unstoppable.

A madman's laugh.

## 4

### **Tenth Commandment: Thou Shalt Understand the Myth of Moses**

**This may make some ignorant folk laugh. It will arouse incomprehension in every Moslem. It will seem totally logical, though, to those who think, rather than naively believing. Moses is not a historical figure.**

**He is not real like you or me.**

**The heroic figure of Moses was made up from scratch by Josias. This Jewish king had almost all of the Old Testament composed around 600 B.C., with the aim of encouraging his troops and of uniting and establishing the great kingdom of Israel. Under the aegis of Josias, his scribes poured out into hearts and minds the fable of the liberator Moses and his Promised Land. They produced a title deed to legitimize in the eyes of all, but especially in the eyes of the Hebrew people who had become “Chosen”, their “divine” right to demand the land of Israel and their duty to fight the Egyptian enemy that at the time was aiming to annex Jewish territory.**

**The hieroglyphs which can be read thanks to Champollion have spoken, bringing back to life the witnesses from the Egyptian administration who noted down absolutely everything, from great events to the smallest actions of day-to-day management. In all these centuries of archives, there is not one monumental inscription on the walls of temples, not a single funerary inscription, not one solitary papyrus, not a single word**

mentioning the presence of Israelites in Egypt, even though they are supposed to have remained there for four hundred thirty years, according to the Bible. Archeological evidence confirms that the Old Testament tells lies. The supposed 600,000 Jewish families claimed to have fled Egypt under Moses' leadership have left no trace, not the least fragment of pottery, nor one solitary tomb, when they are affirmed to have lived for decades in an oasis in the Sinai desert.

How can Mohammed, and above all Allah, have made such a tremendous mistake in the Koran when he recognized the historical reality of the mythical Moses?

You have guessed correctly: Mohammed was in no way the Messenger of God. He was an illiterate, uneducated man having the same adulatory attitude towards the written word as the unlettered peasants of the Middle Ages: if it is written it must be true.

Believing he has the true history, Mohammed quotes Moses more than one hundred times in the Koran, convinced as he was that he was a man of flesh and blood who had really fought Pharaoh. In fact, the supposed liberator of Egypt is no more than a fantasy hero dreamed up by the imagination of Josias. In his lifetime Mohammed put into his Koran all the children's fables contained in the Old Testament. He blindly gave credit to Josias's lies in confirming as true the ridiculous jokes of Noah's Ark and the flood, of Jonah swallowed by a great fish, or of Adam driven out of Eden.

When Mohammed differentiated himself from the Jews in order to make the Arabs into the new Chosen People, he highlighted the imaginary story of Abraham, claimed to be his noble ancestor.

Nevertheless, Abraham is also a myth that modern archeology has been able to debunk.

According to the chronology in the *Book of the Jews*, Abraham started out with his herd of camels for the land of Canaan, the future Israel, around 1,800 before Christ. Unfortunately, camels had not been domesticated at that period. There is no trace of their bones, no drawing of them on a vase or other pottery, nor on monuments. Camels were not tamed and used in this region until a thousand years later.

The ignorant Mohammed constructed his lies on the foundation of an earlier literary lie. When the wind of knowledge, the breath of future generations, sweeps aside the mythical pyramid of King Josias onto which Islam has climbed, nothing will remain of the Koran, except childish amusement and laughter.

*Extract from the novel "The Sage of Mecca" by Thomas Anderson.*



## 5

### The Ascent

Under a burning midday sun, a dark shape was following Mohammed.

A yard after him, it stuck to him like a shadow.

With a slight delay in its reaction, it stopped whenever he did and set off again when he resumed his walk.

A faint giggle emerged from within the garment as black as a moonless night that covered his guest from head to toe. Under the veil which reduced its ability to see clearly, the little silhouette attempted to avoid bumping into Mohammed, who was walking alongside his Uncle Abu Talib. In front of them, the market place was swarming with people. There were Meccans, Arab Bedouins and foreigners, men with skin colors ranging from yellowish to glossy black. They were all there on business. All of them were chattering loudly. There was an incessant exchange of money with the highest bidder or the most cunning trader getting the bargain.

Mohammed had difficulty making his way through this constantly bustling crowd, but most of those along his path stood aside open-mouthed, stopping to stare at the strange faceless creature that was walking along after the two men. Taking no notice of these startled looks, Abu Talib pointed with his finger at a shady corner near the Zamzam well: under an awning, Abu Lahab, another uncle of Mohammed's, had set up his caravan trader's stall.

Dressed in a fine brown tunic, the wiry, old, white-bearded merchant looked in surprise as his nephew and Abu Talib arrived, along with the mysterious person hidden under a full veil.

“Who is this, pray?” asked the oldster by way of a greeting.

With a vague gesture, Abu Talib dodged the question.

“Mohammed will be telling us. He must speak to the people here, because he has a revelation to make to us.”

Abu Lahab nodded gravely, staring at his nephew. The latter seemed different somehow, as if haunted by some evil spirit, his complexion waxy and his eyes dull. He looked exhausted and Abu Lahab wondered what particular ailment had gotten him into this woeful state. The old caravan trader thoughtfully took the horn that he wore hanging from his neck and blew it forcefully. The long note that ensued gradually suppressed the cries, laughter and conversations of the crowd. The people closest to him turned round and fell silent, then those more and more distant, with silence spreading across the market place like ripples on a pond. The whole crowd had soon halted its activities and no more than one or two bewildered mutterings were still to be heard.

“My friends!” shouted Abu Lahab in a vigorous voice, “My nephew Mohammed, the Trustworthy, has something important to tell you. Hark to him!”

With a helping hand from Abu Talib, Mohammed climbed painfully onto a chair so all could see him.

The previous night, a particularly violent fit had shaken him and left his whole body in discomfort. The crisis had then passed and Gabriel had once more appeared to him. Before leaving as suddenly as he had arrived, he had given a final order with great clarity: “Go forth into the market place and speak to your people!”

For Mohammed, time had seemed to disappear with the angel of revelation’s visit. Memories buried deep inside him had burst out into his consciousness, recalling events long forgotten by him. When he was just a young boy entrusted to the Bedouin family, he had been playing with other youngsters of his age and the angel Gabriel had appeared before him, taking Mohammed’s heart out of his chest and removing from it a black ball, the part of the Devil that was within him. Gabriel had then washed the heart with water from the Well of Zamzam, before restoring it to its

place. The other children had run away screaming, thinking that Mohammed had just been murdered, but when help came at their calling, he was standing there alone, terrified and with a bloodless face. Only a scar remained to testify to what had happened.

Mohammed had always thought that the scar on his chest had been caused by some fall in the mountains.

He had been mistaken.

At dawn, with Khadijah helping him along, he had gone to find his Uncle Abu Talib and tell him about this new memory that had been living deep within him like a hidden treasure. Now it had come back to him after being forgotten for decades.

“I think it is time that I told you a secret,” said Abu Talib to him in his soft voice. “I never said anything to you in order to keep you safe, Mohammed. You need to know that you were not circumcised when you were a baby. You were, indeed, born already circumcised!”

Khadijah had started in surprise.

“There is the final proof that you were born to be a prophet!” cried out the woman. “It is a sign of glory to God!”

“That is correct,” concurred Abu Talib, stroking his white beard, “Moreover, for that reason you were given a name meaning admirable or glorious.”

After a pause during which his blue eyes remained steadily fixed on Mohammed, Abu Talib had continued.

“I remember the year that you were born. It was the year when a powerful foreign army came with a troop of elephants to demolish the sanctuary in Mecca. God intervened to defend us, and with my own eyes I saw the miracle of birds countering the attack by dropping burning stones on our enemies. I realized that that year of the elephant would be a year full of miracles, and God’s other miracle is standing here in front of me. It is you, Mohammed.”

Not knowing what to say, Mohammed had humbly lowered his eyes. It was then that he became fully aware of being protected from vice thanks to his heart being washed by Gabriel. That act had filled him with faith and piety. He had realized that it was the reason that he had been overcome by an inexplicable sleepiness

every time he had wanted to go to a party. It was also the cause of his vision becoming blurred as if by a black veil when he was in the presence of young women whose beauty was like that of the virgins in Paradise.

The evil spell within him was quite the opposite of evil. It was a blessing from God that kept him free from any immorality. Gabriel had made Mohammed understand this fact, and according to the orders of the angel of revelation, the time had now come to speak out and communicate God's word to his people, and reveal the truth to them.

Standing on the chair, Mohammed began by asking the crowd gathered before him:

“Brothers and sisters, have I ever deceived you?”

“No,” answered an elderly man. “You are a sincere man, truthful and reliable. We have never heard a lie from your lips!”

Heads nodded in agreement. The blood flowed back into Mohammed's cheeks and his face took on its usual fiery hue.

“Thus, you must learn that I am God's Messenger sent to you. Worship God alone, and forsake your idols, otherwise a terrible punishment will come down from Heaven upon you and you will be destroyed!”

A question rang out over the agitated murmurings.

“Why do you say that?”

Giving full details, Mohammed told them about the night of revelation and his meeting with the angel Gabriel. He told them about the Book of God kept in Heaven and about the Truth written in letters of gold. Then he explained his relations with the angel of revelation.

In the crowd there was total consternation. They were all hanging on the words of this man whose stature, once more, suggested some uncommon power

Some were whispering that Mohammed was no story-teller, so that he could not have made up such a tale from scratch. If that was so, he could not play-act and deceive his wife, the upright Khadijah, because she knew him too well, as they had been living together for so many long years. She would quickly deny any tale of this supposed meeting, unless it was true.

Besides, where was she?

“Where is Khadijah?” a woman’s voice was bold enough to ask.

Mohammed’s shadow raised her hand.

“Here I am!” exclaimed Khadijah, waving her arm above the black robe veiling her.

General stupefaction.

Was she ill? Why was she hiding under that strange costume?

Mohammed’s dark eyes looked at the Meccans.

*Should I tell them everything?*

To avoid any visual discomfort for Mohammed resulting from the washing of his heart by Gabriel, God had ordered through the latter that women should be veiled. Above all, though, Mohammed knew that this veil would allow women to be protected from the vice of men who always had the Devil within them.

“Women must draw a veil over themselves. That is the mark of their virtue and a restraint on men’s intentions. They will be better recognized for it and so will avoid being offended. This is the will of God who is indulgent and merciful.”

“Why don’t you wear a veil yourself, Mohammed!” shouted a mocking voice.

Laughter was heard, loud guffaws or nervous giggles. Some people put on forced smiles to hide their worries.

Mohammed tried to disregard these men and women who objected that female beauty should be left free.

“If you are truly the Messenger of God, why did you wait so long a time before telling us?” asked one suspicious person.

“God felt that it was not the right moment,” replied Mohammed. “However, now I have to tell you that there is no other god but God, and I am his Messenger. For your own salvation, you must listen to me.”

For long minute after long minute, Mohammed plunged ahead in a monologue denouncing the senseless folly of idolatry when there were the marvelous laws of the day and the night, of life and death, of growth and decay, all signs of God’s power

attesting to his uniqueness. The All-Seeing decried the rich and mighty, as also the Meccan merchants, idolators, arrogant and greedy for wealth. God called upon them to submit themselves to Him, to follow his Prophet and to donate money to the needy. If they disobeyed the will of God, they would be punished. At this time, though, the worst of sins and the greatest of crimes lay in associating some other god with the Absolute Being, with the One True God.

A feeling of unease grew among the crowd. People were looking at one another, muttering under their breath, unsure whether they should take these words seriously or not.

“You are people who are close to me,” continued Mohammed, “You should believe that God asked me to warn you! I cannot promise you anything good on Earth or in Heaven if you do not clear all of the idols from the Kaaba.”

Abu Lahab had stayed at some distance from his nephew till then. He now intervened, raising his skinny arms above his head. For the old merchant, getting rid of the idols that brought wealth to the city thanks to the arrivals of pilgrims, would be as bad as cutting down every palm-tree in an oasis: it would be death by starvation for everyone.

“Do not listen to my nephew,” exclaimed Abu Lahab. “He is tipsy! He is not accustomed to alcohol.”

“Mohammed is not drunk!” cut in Abu Talib with his powerful voice.

“In that case, he must have become demented!” shouted Abu Lahab.

The two uncles confronted each other. Abu Talib’s blue eyes stared Abu Lahab down. For a moment, people thought they were going to come to blows.

God seemed to decide otherwise, though.

“Mohammed has really seen the angel Gabriel,” growled Abu Talib. “That is the angel of revelation.”

As if these last words had been enough to open the doors of the skies, the angel Gabriel took possession of Mohammed’s body. He fell off the chair into the arms of his two uncles, who caught

him before he hit the ground. They propped him up in a sitting position on the chair.

Then, as the crowd looked on dumbfounded, the man who could not read began his public recitation.

In a weird, almost babyish, voice, Mohammed started declaiming rhyming prose of an absolute and hypnotic beauty, never heard by any man before that day. His eyes shut tight, as if asleep, Mohammed recited the words of God that Gabriel murmured into his mind. For many long minutes, his lips moved rapidly. They were reading out the pages of the divine book which lay in Heaven and which had been engraved in the depths of the Messenger's heart.

Then, as suddenly as he had come, the angel of revelation went.

Among the bemused crowd, some started crying out that it was sorcery or trickery. Others retorted that it was a miracle from God, and that Mohammed was truly his Prophet: they had just had proof of it. Disputes flared up. Abu Lahab brought the hubbub to a close by blowing his horn energetically. He requested people to go home, ordering them to depart because the market was now closed.

Before himself leaving, Abu Lahab looked his nephew up and down. He was still sitting there motionless, his face red. He was sweating heavily and was breathing with difficulty. Despite his immobility and his downcast eyes, he seemed to have regained consciousness at least in part.

“Mohammed, you are trying to make us adopt a different religion. I curse you and your wretched religion.”

With these last words, the old merchant disappeared into the crowd.

After he had gone, a few spectators came over discreetly to join Mohammed and to convert to the true will of the One Being and obey the pages of his Book.

“Submission” to God was the new religion, so the believers called themselves the “Submitters”.

At first, the Meccans were disdainful of this tiny group, seeing Mohammed as just a sad case of self-delusion, meriting

nothing from them but ironical smiles and occasional mockery. However, as months went by they came to realize that what he preached was attracting more and more faithful among the poor and needy. It represented a real menace to their religion and the prosperity of their city. The rich traders likewise did not appreciate at all the threats Mohammed made to them of terrible punishments from God. So, they took action to blacken the name of the Submitters and their Prophet. Tension increased progressively, as Mohammed's spiritual influence grew, an influence which ended by disturbing the power of these local notables by spreading division and discord within their own families.

Thus they used their tyrannical force to counter spirituality with brutality. Their hope was to nip in the bud this dangerous idea of getting rid of deities sculptured in stone, a demented action which must surely spur the anger of the gods.

For the nobler members of the Submitters, insults, spitting and stone-throwing greeted them on a daily basis. As for the poorer among them and the social outcasts, persecutions soon took a much more dramatic turn.

This was the case for a black slave, Bilal. He was tied up naked under a burning sun. His tormenters put a huge rock on his chest. If he wanted the tortures to stop, they said, he must turn away from Mohammed and abjure Submission. However, Bilal preferred to die rather than deny his faith.

“God is one!” Bilal shouted at them in his powerful voice. “God is one!”

The Supreme Being watched over this man, tall and thin with a face like a crow's beneath his gray hair. Abu Bakr, one of the Submitted of high status, was led to Bilal and put an end to his torments by purchasing the slave from his masters for an exorbitant amount.

Nonetheless, not everyone could be saved by the hand of God. Sumayyah, the mother of a family of children, was tortured to death and thus was to become the first martyr among the Submitters.

Faced with this constant oppression, Mohammed had no other choice but to suggest to those of his faithful followers that

had the means to do so that they should take refuge temporarily in Abyssinia. In this nearby country where a Christian king reigned, the Submitters would find safety. Those believers who stayed in Mecca had no such luck, and continued to suffer the attacks of their opponents, egged on by the various clans in the city.

Among these, one of the fiercest was called Omar.

A renowned wrestler who was a master of martial arts, intelligent and charismatic, but with little gift for trade, Omar was a giant with colossal strength. This man in his thirties was in the grip of pitiless rage, and spread fear, pain and death among Mohammed's disciples. Continually thirsty for wine and for the tears of the Submitters, he took a bestial pleasure in torturing them into leaving the way of Submission.

When Omar learned that the Prophet had given orders to the Submitters to flee to Abyssinia, he went into a black fury. He accused him of separating fathers from sons, and brothers from brothers. To listen to him, Mohammed was the sole person responsible for all the ills that beset Mecca.

Omar decided to end his ascendancy by murdering him.

From the start of his preaching, the Prophet had been spared any attacks on his person because he was of noble family and because of the protection his uncle Abu Talib gave him. Omar cared nothing about the possible revenge or clan wars that Mohammed's death might trigger, though, as hatred for him colored his view of the future.

So finally, there came a day when, fueled by alcohol, he made the resolution to put his macabre project into force, and he wandered off into the town in search of the Prophet.

However, God put in his way his best friend Nu'aym who had secretly become converted to Submission. Omar confided his intentions to him openly.

"You want to kill Mohammed?" asked his friend, aghast.

Nu'aym chose his words carefully, trying to find some way of diverting Omar temporarily from his aim, while he could go and warn Abu Talib about the threat of death hanging over his nephew. Not really knowing what to say, under the effects of fear the truth came tumbling involuntarily out of Nu'aym's mouth:

“You are aiming to kill Mohammed, when even in your own family there are people who support his teachings!”

With a furious hand, Omar seized his friend by the throat.

“What in damnation do you mean?” roared the huge man.

“Your sister has renounced your religion,” admitted Nu’aym in a choking voice.

Crazy with rage, Omar turned on his heel and headed straight for his sister Fatima’s house. From outside the house he heard a man reading out one of the Prophet’s recitations dictated by the angel Gabriel that had been noted down in writing. Omar knocked on the door, shouting. Fatima hurriedly hid the document under her clothing and let her brother in. He started questioning Fatima and her husband, who was also present. Suddenly, no longer able to control himself, he rushed at his brother-in-law, but Fatima put herself between them and admitted that they had been converted. Omar drew his dagger and hit his sister on the face with its handle.

Blood flowed in abundance from her nose.

“Yes, I am a Submitter,” sobbed Fatima. “Do whatever you will.”

Omar noticed the document sticking out from her clothing. Fearing he might rip it up, Fatima refused to give it to him, arguing that Omar was not worthy of touching it, because he was in an impure state. Keeping his sister under his eye, Omar calmly set about a ritual washing, which he completed meticulously. Fatima no longer had any choice but to show him the document.

As he read God’s words, Omar seemed to be overcome by a sudden transformation.

It was as if he had become someone else.

At that point he recited the profession of faith.

“I bear witness that there is no god but God,” exclaimed Omar with great emotion. “And that Mohammed is the one sent by God!”

Faced with this miracle, Fatima and her husband were dumbfounded. They explained which house the Prophet was using. With joyous hearts, they invited Omar to go see Mohammed, and tell him of his conversion to Submission.

When Omar knocked on the door of the Prophet's residence, his close companions were frightened and did not want to open up. Mohammed allowed Omar to come in, though. The enemy of yesterday confessed the murderous designs he had had than day, but described what had happened at his sister Fatima's house, especially his miraculous conversion.

"God is great!" cried out everyone present in surprise at this. "God is great!"

They were shouting so loudly that all the inhabitants of Mecca must have heard the sound.

His eyes humbly lower, Omar asked Mohammed:

"Messenger of God, are we on the way of Truth?"

"Of course," answered Mohammed.

"Then why should be hide it?"

Led by Omar, the Submitters present went out in two groups and headed for the Kaaba, where they had previously been denied access. When the guardians of the shrine saw the Submitters with Omar at their head, they did not dare oppose them and allowed them to go into the enclosure. From then on, Submitters were able to pray there undisturbed, under the fierce protection of Omar.

Through the conversion of this man, one of the most prominent in the city, the balance of alliances finally was shaken. So, in order not to see their authority disappear, various tribal chiefs proved to be pragmatic. If they had been unsuccessful in stopping the spread of Submission, if they could do nothing against Mohammed's infectious smile and great charisma, able to inspire loyalty and affection, if they could not beat him, they might as well join him and be on the winning side.

They proposed a compromise to the Prophet. They would accept his religion on condition that he made a few changes in it, in order to include in it their deities who could intercede with God. In exchange, Mohammed could become their king.

The proposers of this deal were certain that Mohammed would accept their offer. They were all the surer because for a while in his public recitations Mohammed himself had recognized that the three favorite goddesses of the Meccans had the power to

intercede with God. However, that recitation had been inspired by Satan, and God had later corrected it.

Gabriel appeared to Mohammed and ordered him to refuse categorically and such recognition of idolatry.

“Even if they put the Sun in my right hand and the Moon in my left, I shall not give up my mission.”

That was the Prophet’s untiring response.

The most virulent enemies of the Submitters were then able to impose their authority and demand the putting in practice of their view of what should happen. Mohammed and his followers should be expelled.

By force of arms, they chased them out of Mecca. They likewise drew up an official document forbidding any trade with Mohammed’s clan, just so long as he had not been banished by his family. No-one was to have the right to marry one of their women or to give a daughter in marriage to one of their men.

For a period that seemed never-ending, Mohammed and his followers suffered this exile in the desert, furnace-hot by day, freezing cold by night. They put up with hunger and thirst, holed up in a property situated in one of the mountain gorges that ran down towards Mecca.

Some kindly folk among the Meccans were not happy at this exclusion of their former friends and neighbors. They lobbied for a revision of the official document that had been posted inside the Kaaba. When the inhabitants of the city found it almost entirely eaten by white ants, all but the words “In Thy Name, Oh God”, they were terrified. Fearing the wrath of the gods, the more superstitious among them pressed the tribal chiefs to revoke Mohammed’s expulsion, and he was authorized to return to the city.

However, from then on the Prophet was even more alone than during his forced isolation. His much loved wife, Khadijah, had passed away, and Abu Talib had also left this world some time before.

Oddly, Mohammed had several times invited Abu Talib to embrace Submission while the old man lay on his death-bed, but

he had obstinately refused. He preferred to die in the religion of his ancestors, even if God was fighting against them.

The strength and loyalty of this uncle, together with the love and compassion of Khadijah, had helped Mohammed remain firm in adversity and to press on with his transmission of God's message. With the demise of these two much loved people, the Prophet felt lost, stricken with grief, and all the more so because Gabriel had also left him. From the time of Abu Talib's decease, the angel of revelation had not appeared to him even once.

Sadness settled firmly in Mohammed's mind, and Satan sometimes whispered the idea of suicide in his ear. His memory of Hell dissuaded him from any irresponsible act that might have led him towards eternal tortures, far from his wife and Paradise where she was waiting for him.

To comfort himself, Mohammed went over in his mind his last meeting with Gabriel. As always, the angel had appeared to him in the form of a child whose face almost never had the same features. A mischievous smile on his lips, Gabriel amused himself with his power of transforming as he wished, granted by the grace of God.

With his reedy voice, the angel had announced that when people truly submitted to God, the pains and sorrows of life served to test their faith. All the same, such tests were always followed by some form of consolation.

Nonetheless, for Mohammed no such compensation had come and Gabriel seemed to have abandoned him for good.

In fact, the Prophet was mistaken.

Gabriel had not left him at all. He had kept in reserve for him the greatest of consolations: a meeting with God in the Seventh Heaven.

This heavenly meeting took place one starry night.

After an exhausting day, Mohammed had come to take his rest in the house of one of the sisters of Ali, the son of his late Uncle Abu Talib. Half-way from waking into sleep, the Prophet was lying on a mattress when the ceiling of the room split into two, allowing a myriad twinkling stars to become visible above his head. For a short while, he thought he must be dreaming.

*Where am I?*

For a brief moment he imagined he had magically returned to his own home. His mind was befuddled as he saw three shining beings emerge before his surprised eyes. Glittering wings beat the air, blowing a breath of fresh air into the room. Mohammed could not put a description on these visitors who approached him. Their appearance seemed inconstant and perpetually changing.

The Prophet was in no way frightened by these intruders. He knew that Gabriel must be among them.

With total detachment, Mohammed watched the angel approach him and open up his chest, his throat and his lower belly. Gabriel took out the heart and placed it in a golden container where he washed it with water from the Zamzam well. The angel then replaced the heart.

“Stand up,” said Gabriel’s voice in a new tone.

The Prophet obeyed and the angel led into the open patio of the house. With clumsy step, Mohammed bumped into a vase containing water for ritual washing. He put out his hand to prevent it from tipping over, but in a second he found himself on the esplanade of the Kaaba.

Gabriel came towards him, pulling on the bridle of a strange horse, black with a silvery tinge in its coloring. It was bigger than a donkey but smaller than a mule, and had wings of a brilliant white hue.

“This animal is a mare,” announced the angel of revelation. “Her name is *Buraq* because she is as swift as *lightning*.”

Mohammed looked at Buraq’s head with its long ears, and saw in her fine features a hint of a woman with the gift of speech. The animal suddenly reared and Gabriel rebuked her. Shamed, Buraq started sweating abundantly, so much as to become soaking wet.

*Buraq.*

With a surprised but amused look, the Prophet wondered whether the name might really mean *sweat* instead of *lightning*. Besides, Mohammed himself was sweating heavily despite the coolness of the night.

“Mount,” ordered Gabriel.

The mare was awkward, so the angel turned her round by pulling on her ear. He helped Mohammed to hoist himself up into the saddle on her back.

With a flap of her wings, Buraq shot into the air, Gabriel matching her maneuver.

“Where are we going?” shouted Mohammed.

“To Jerusalem!” replied the angel.

Leaning over the neck of his steed with a smile on his lips, Mohammed found a point of stable balance and then felt perfectly safe. In an instant, Mecca was no more than a dark blob that they had left behind them. Nearly a thousand feet above the ground, they headed west until they reached the sea, then northward, all at a speed so fast that none but beings of heavenly origin could have attained it. That was what Mohammed thought as he saw pass before his wondering eyes hills and plains, rivers and lakes, towns and villages in the Moon’s light.

In this night-time journey, human eye would have been hard put to it to follow Buraq’s speedy flight. Very soon they were over Jerusalem. The picture of the city sunk into Mohammed’s mind as an unforgettable image. The Prophet had never visited the holy city of Jews and Christians, but he immediately understood, thanks to a small voice inside him, that the place where Buraq was now landing was none other than the esplanade of the former temple destroyed long ago by the Romans.

Tying his mount by the bridle to a ring set in a wall, Mohammed allowed Gabriel to guide him into the place of worship. There Mohammed found waiting for him Abraham, Moses and Jesus, accompanied by others of God’s prophets. With swelling emotions, he led the prayers before all these Messengers, gathered in his honor. When he came out, Gabriel was waiting for him with two cups in his hands. One contained wine, the other milk.

Mohammed took the cup of milk and drank it down in one gulp, such was his thirst.

“You have chosen the true religion!” said the angel approvingly, beating his sparkling wings.

Suddenly trumpets sounded, shattering the quiet of the night. The sound came from above. Angels appeared on either side of a stairway that shone like diamonds in a beam of heavenly light. When silence returned once more, Gabriel encouraged the Prophet with a gesture of his hand.

Mohammed dashed forwards with a step so vigorous that it left a mark on the rocky ground. He had just gone up the first few steps when he was surrounded by threatening black demons under the orders of Satan. Angels armed with burning swords immediately drove them aside and escorted the man as he went upwards.

There were thousands and thousands of steps to ascend. Nonetheless, Mohammed climbed them without any effort, in a few brief instants, as if the laws of nature had ceased to apply. In a moment of time, he had seen the seven Heavens. In the lowest Heaven he met Adam, in the next highest, Jesus and John the Baptist. On the third level he saw Joseph the son of Jacob, on the fourth Enoch. On the fifth he met with Aaron and on the sixth he encountered Moses.

In the Seventh Heaven he found Abraham waiting, along with Gabriel, who had led him to the pinnacle of the Heavens.

The angel of revelation remained to one side.

“We are in the ultimate Heaven,” said he. “I cannot go any further with you.”

Mohammed agreed, but the thought struck him that since the start of his adventure there had been so many episodes pouring over him that his memory would not succeed in recalling them all. He felt as if they were falling out of his recollection as new impressions succeeded them. Gabriel noticed the Prophet’s anxiety and reassured him, promising him that his memories would be restored in full and unimpaired when he returned. He would remember even the slightest details that his mind was not noticing at the moment.

“I have been waiting for this for so long,” added Gabriel. “Ever since I was created I have been looking forward to this night. This night-time journey was already written in the Book. Everything is written down in advance, for instance the fact that Ali will one day be your successor. That is written. God knows

the future that he has created. He is the master of time. He speeds up or stops its flow just as he pleases. Now, it is time for you to meet him!”

In front of Mohammed there were the two leaves of a vast door made of diamonds. The leaves opened, and light of extreme intensity streamed through. The Prophet was dazzled at first, but then his eyes became used to the brilliance. The noise of the pens writing down destinies came to his ears. It was then that he saw the throne of Heaven, and on this throne there was someone sitting. His silhouette was huge and majestic. His clothing was white as snow.

*God.*

Some strange phenomenon allowed Mohammed to see his face, but not to memorize what he looked like. If he had been asked to describe it, he would have been unable.

It was then that God spoke to him.

His speech was not made up of Arabic words, nor of some other language. It simply echoed within Mohammed’s heart. He grasped the will of the Creator which was that five prayers daily should be prescribed for the faithful.

God next invited the Prophet to read the whole of the Book which lay on a rest to the right of his throne, with the aim that his Messenger could recite it on Earth. Although he did not know how to read, Mohammed did as he was told. He read the Book rapidly, because the text seemed to unfold itself and penetrate into his head, with the pages turning themselves.

When the reading came to an end, Mohammed miraculously found himself sitting on Buraq, who was still tied to the wall. Gabriel was no longer there to guide him, but his winged mount knew the route.

As he clung to his steed, Mohammed realized that he had already forgotten the pages of the Book. His memory was playing tricks on him again. Nonetheless, he knew that the angel of revelation would come back to dictate God’s recitation to him.

The return journey began.

As the flight continued, Mohammed was stricken by a terrible thirst. Buraq must have sensed the man’s need, and the

mare landed near a caravan composed of dromedaries that was also heading for Mecca.

By the light of a smiling moon, the head of the caravan saw the winged creature and its rider coming out of the sky. The horseman asked him for water. Not knowing whether he was facing a man or a demon, and somewhat scared, the merchant provided some, explaining to Mohammed that all his companions had headed off to look for a lost camel. His thirst quenched, the Prophet noticed there was a fine white mare among the caravan's animal.

*Oh! How I would love to own that horse!*

Buraq flapped his wings, and Mohammed reached Mecca at lightning speed. The sun had not yet risen, but the horizon was already turning red, making the city visible. Before disappearing into the sky, the heavenly creature left his rider in the open courtyard of the house. Mohammed had barely arrived when he instinctively stretched out his hand to stop the jar of water for ritual washing from tipping over, the very same container which he had bumped into hours earlier when Gabriel had come and woken him in his room.

*It was a miracle! Time is not what it seems in God's universe.*

That morning Mohammed enthusiastically gathered his followers around him. He told them of his night-time journey, and of his ascension up to the throne of God. Apart from Abu Bakr, they heard his tale with skepticism, and his friends urged him not to spread this incredible story around. Mohammed rejected this advice, and he spoke freely before the Submitters, and all the other inhabitants of the city as well. Thinking that he was lying, some of his disciples renounced Submission, and the prophet was met with a barrage of scornful comments from the Meccans.

Those who had been to Jerusalem questioned him. To their great astonishment they realized he was telling the truth, because Mohammed was able to give a precise description of the holy city over which he had flown.

Some folk were more suspicious than others and asked him for a proof they could check. Mohammed told them about his meeting with the caravan leader, how his fellow travelers had been

away looking for a lost camel and how there had been a white mare among the horses.

When at the end of that day the very same caravan arrived in Mecca, there at its head was the white mare. People hastened to ask the caravan leader questions. He confirmed that he had spoken with Mohammed during the previous night and that he had even seen him riding a winged beast, which greatly troubled hearts and minds throughout the city.



## 6

### Fatima

On the esplanade, the child's hands opened the cage and the dove flew off.

Flapping her wings energetically, she left behind her little iron-barred prison to the accompaniment of cheers mingled with angry shouts.

The infinite blue of the sky sucked her up on its rising currents, lifting her above the strange impassioned tumults and away from the wingless creatures, whether friendly or violent. The dove flew over the rounded roof of the dome, whose gold glittered like a fallen star. Moved by invisible instincts, she headed for the heat of the sun which two hours earlier had risen, casting warm light into every last one of the night's gloomy shadows.

The white bird would have liked to fly on indefinitely, heading for that paradise of warmth, and strove mightily in a whirl of moving air that for the moment took her higher into the sky. However, her strength progressively waned, and she was inexorably drawn back down toward the land of men.

So the dove sadly glided down the air that had promised happiness and dropped toward the city of Jerusalem. With a last flap of her wings, she landed on the railings of a balcony.

At the other end of the guard rail, a tall and motionless figure broke into movement, turning his head to observe the newcomer. Wearing black pants and a jacket of the same color, with a white bandage covering the whole of the top of his head and

two others wrapped around his hands, Thomas Anderson wondered where this dove, the symbol of peace, could have come from.

This was not her place.

How could it be otherwise when in that country two different books of God were in conflict? How could it be otherwise when in the Promised Land two “chosen” peoples both lay claim to one and the same divine kingdom?

Jews and Moslems alike were convinced they had an alliance, an exclusive pact with God and both believed they were the Almighty’s chosen folk. So, brandishing the Torah or the Koran, they claimed to be the legitimate inheritors of that city where they tussled, especially for the site where the Dome of the Rock stood. Mohammed had arrived there from Mecca when he traveled by night mounted on his steed Buraq and had ascended into Paradise from there, Abraham had been willing to offer his son as a sacrifice to God at that same place and Solomon had built the ancient Temple of Jerusalem on the very same spot.

In that holy city, the children of the Eternal, the irascible and capricious God dreamed up by King Josias, still confronted those faithful to Allah, Mohammed’s creation.

Following the law of an eye for an eye that they had raised to the status of a divine commandment, the Jews unfailingly responded to every deed committed by the modern, criminal heirs of the Prophet. An endless flow of blood turned the mill-wheel of lost lives.

For Moslems, these lives were not lost. They were no more than the accomplishment of the destiny of Submission, the inevitable carrying out of the divine will which would lead them for sure to the gates of Paradise.

They were convinced that Mohammed had been entrusted with the last revelation by God to humanity. This revelation would be valid to the end of time and was conveyed in a book.

For them, the Koran was the infallible revealed word of God, valid for all times and for all places. What it contained was absolutely true and eternal, and could never be criticized. Wondering about its contents came down to putting God’s very words in doubt and constituted blasphemy. The duty of Moslems was to believe and obey the commandments that God had sent

directly to Mohammed on Earth, through the messenger, the angel Gabriel. Gabriel had dictated revelations to the Prophet, who had repeated what he had learned and then had proclaimed it to all the world. These were revelations that had been preserved exactly as they had been communicated to Mohammed, without the slightest modification, addition or alteration.

For Moslems, the Koran was a book that had not been created, but had come down from Heaven just as it was. Its original, the Mother of Books, was lying on a guarded table up in the starry sky.

Tom shook his head.

He knew that the Koran had never descended from Heaven just as it was, quite the contrary.

Mohammed had been impressed by the knowledge of Holy Scripture that scholarly Jews possessed. They knew their Book as well as they knew their own children. To emulate them, Mohammed had wanted to give a book in Arabic to his followers, so that they could learn it in the same way and with the same spirit.

If he had had the time, Mohammed would himself have supervised the making up of a definitive Koran, just as King Josias had had the Torah composed.

However, time had been wanting: he died suddenly before being able to compile his book. If he had been victorious, he might have matured, suppressing the warlike verses from Medina days to leave only the preaching of the Sage of Mecca in his Koran. Nonetheless, that would have been quite unlikely. The opposite would have been more logical. The Murderer of Medina, after conquering Mecca, had his heart set on the conquest, first of Jerusalem, then of the whole world, a project that his successors strove vigorously to accomplish.

According to tradition, it was one of those who succeeded him, the third Caliph Othman, who had drawn up the Koran twenty years after the Prophet's death. To do this, Othman had brought together all the texts held by the Moslems, writing on materials as varied as pieces of papyrus, flat stones, palm-tree leaves, shoulder-blades and ribs of animals, scraps of leather and wooden boards, and had also called into play the memories of those companions of Mohammed who were still alive. Then, when the dictated words

had all been copied onto fine, consecrated paper, Othman ordered the destruction of all the originals.

So the Koran was born, not descending from Heaven from the hand of Allah, but from the pens of the scribes working for Othman the Almighty, the All-Wise, the Writer of All.

In his compilation, Othman piously conserved all the texts, whether from the period of the Sage of Mecca or from that of the Murderer of Medina. He left in the crass errors about the tale of Moses arising from the books of children's fables, not realizing that these mistakes showed up Mohammed's total ignorance.

Othman was satisfied with the work achieved.

All the same, one detail bothered him.

How could Allah, who was supposed to be speaking in the first person through the mouth of Mohammed, ask himself to curse the enemies of the Prophet? How could he say in one verse *the curse of Allah rests on them* and in another *my curse is on thee*?

The answer was simple. In his rush to carry out the imposture, Mohammed frequently forgot that he was supposed to be reciting the words of God, and to be simply the human mouth that spoke in the place of the All-Highest, so that the whole Koran was supposedly Allah's expressions in the first person. Often enough, Mohammed mixed up the pronouns he used, merging his alter ego with Allah, Allah who was in fact nothing more than Mohammed himself.

The Koran was not the word of God. There were numerous passages in it where it was impossible to say whether it was God or Mohammed that was supposed to be speaking.

Of course, Moslems might respond that Mohammed was just a Messenger, reciting with assiduity what the angel Gabriel had told him as he slept or had visions. Mohammed did his best, but he might sometimes make a mistake, being only human and as prone to errors as anyone else. However, when he was wrong about this, about the mythical Moses or about the satanic verses, in the end what was left of the intrinsically divine value of the Koran? As Mohammed had gone astray on all these points, where else might he have been mistaken?

To nip any potential arguments in the bud, Othman found a solution. Whenever the verse required this he added the word “say”, to make it look as if they were an order given to Mohammed to speak in the first person. This allowed the problem of pronouns to be sidestepped.

Just one small word, just like one small tree that could hide a forest of lies.

Tom leaned on the balustrade. Startled, the dove flapped its wings vigorously and flew off toward other places, other skies, in search of the unknown.

Tom dreamily watched the bird of peace flying away.

Moslems, too, had headed off in search of the unknown.

Where Christians had gone on the quest for the Holy Grail, Moslems had gone in search of their past, or more precisely of lost times. They wished to know more about the life of their Prophet, filling in the gaps in history and leaving no unknowns in their memories. They had questioned the various witnesses of the period, asking those companions of Mohammed who were still alive about the marvelous details of his life, what he had said and what he had done, apart from revealing God’s divine words, as set down in his Koran.

Moslems had given a name to this quest.

“The hadiths,” Tom muttered.

The Christians that had gone off looking for the Holy Grail had all returned empty-handed, with their eyes lowered and their pockets empty.

Not the Moslems.

They managed to find no fewer than 700,000 hadiths, statements and actions certified to be by Mohammed or his companions.

What was worse was that all the companions the Prophet had had in his lifetime were long since dead. In fact, the quest for hadiths had not taken off until seventy-five years after the Prophet died, while these collections of words and deeds of Mohammed had not been written down until two hundred years later.

Luckily for the mythical history of Islam, scuttlebutt had functioned perfectly. Testimonies had poured in from the desert,

from the very mouth of a man who had met a man, who had met a man, who had met a man who had met the Prophet.

Tom chuckled.

As highly thought of as the Koran itself, hadiths were nothing more than a huge historical confidence trick.

Some few hadiths might well go back all the way to the Prophet's day, through more or less reliable oral transmission. Most, though, were tales of a thousand and one nights. Many were the product of professional story-tellers who had spotted a good thing when they saw it and had made a living by inventing lively stories about Mohammed and his companions, tales that the crowds had swallowed hook, line and sinker. To attract an audience, the story-tellers had not balked at any exaggeration, and the transmission of hadiths had rapidly become a real industry providing rich pickings for these history tricksters who had passed themselves off as reliable sources.

The disciples of the Sage of Mecca had not been backward in coming forward and had tried to cover up the Murderer of Medina, refusing to acknowledge this blood-thirsty founding father. They had made up hadiths describing their Prophet as a saint under all circumstances, even though the Koran said quite the opposite. They had turned him into a humane person, a model to be followed and not sanguinary tyrant to be feared.

Other dynasties, political enemies, everyone who wanted to become Caliph in place of the Caliph, had done the same and paid handsomely to have hadiths made up, with the express intention of proving the legitimacy of their clan's claims as against whoever happened to be in power. They had had the Prophet ostensibly state that his Uncle Abu Talib, Ali's father, was in the profoundest depths of Hell, in order to discredit the dynasty Ali had founded. Naturally, Ali's descendants had for their part made up hadiths to glorify Abu Talib, all of these being claimed to be the certified words of Mohammed himself.

By fabricating lying texts that contradicted each other in their fictional contents, while believing that God's word was contained in hadiths just as it was in the Koran, Moslems had inevitably found themselves at daggers drawn. These false books with their contradictions arising from hearsay traditions had served

as the basis for Islamic laws, creating opposing trends and triggering violent conflicts between the branches of the sect, like Shiites and Sunnis who could find no agreement over their differing collections.

How could it be otherwise, when hadiths had been made up by opponents for personal and political reasons, by dissidents thirsty to seize power, or by story-tellers keen to earn some money?

*Knock, knock. ...*

There was someone at the door.

“Come in!” Tom said loudly, not even turning around.

The door opened and closed quickly, and a large shadowy figure slipped across to the balcony and leaned on its railing. Outside, the sun’s rays were playing on the branches of the tall verdant trees that surrounded the building with its high gray walls.

“Sleep well?” the newcomer asked in a serious tone.

Tom turned and looked at his friend.

Since their last meeting in Jerusalem, Alan had changed physically. The Mossad agent still had the same crew-cut coarse white hair, but his square face was no longer crossed by a lengthy scar running from his chin to his forehead, running over the socket of his missing right eye. Plastic surgery had done wonders, and the hideous disfigurement had gone leaving barely a trace. Even the lost blue eye had reappeared, but it was an eye with no soul, cold and hard.

A glass eye.

“You torture me and then you ask if I’ve slept well?” Tom spat out.

Alan calmly took a metal box out of an internal pocket of his dark suit, selected a cheroot and lit it. Curls of aromatic smoke rose over his tall frame.

“I wanted to find out if you still had a zest for living in you,” Alan said. “I had to discover if you preferred to live or to die. In the end, though, the charade didn’t last long, as you guessed I was there. By the way, how did you work that out?”

“Your cheroot – I remembered you smoked those firecrackers when we were both a lot younger. I got a whiff and it all came together in my mind. You’ve given up cigarettes?”

Alan nodded in silence, then after a moment he said, “I needed to talk to you. I rang, but you never answered.”

“You could have left a message,” Tom protested.

“I did better, I sent a messenger. He saw you playing at Russian roulette. So I ordered his team into your house.”

Tom sighed.

“Couldn’t they just have knocked at the door like everyone else?”

“Would you have opened up?” Alan asked. “I doubt it. You seemed so determined. Are you really suffering so much you want to kill yourself?”

Tom smiled wryly.

That was the sort of ready-made phrase that negotiators used to open up a dialogue with someone suicidal.

Tom dodged the question and changed the subject.

“By the way, I hope your fellow who fell down my stairs is getting on all right.”

“Not really. To tell you the truth, he’s dead. He broke his neck,” Alan said in a completely detached tone, as if he was commenting on the day’s weather forecast.

“*Scheiße!*” Tom exclaimed. “I’m so sorry, it was an accident.”

“I know. We’re at war and every day Jews die round the world. I lose soldiers and brothers. That’s how it is, and nothing can be done about it. His body was brought home in the plane that carried you here. He’ll get full military honors.”

The automatic gate of the house opened. A black car with tinted windows rolled slowly over the white gravel and parked just under the window where the two friends were talking.

A man dressed in a long fawn jellaba got out of the vehicle. As he saw Alan leaning on the railing, he spoke to him in Arabic.

“*Salam alaikum*, Ali. Everything went as planned.”

Alan waved to him in friendly fashion and the man walked away.

“Ali?” Tom chortled.

“Yes, it’s my Arab character, the part I play,” Alan answered. “And if you hear me always talking in Arabic to my men, that’s logical, because it allows us to stay immersed in the language. You know it’s essential in infiltration missions to think in Arabic and not in Hebrew, so we’re not spotted by the Moslems.”

Alan drew a mouthful of smoke from his cheroot. He thought for a moment, then with the slightest of grimaces he asked, “What do you think of Mohammed?”

Below the bandage wrapped round the top of his head, a frown formed on Tom’s forehead. He wondered where his friend wanted to get with that question. After a couple of seconds of thought, he finally answered, “I think Mohammed was a swindler who used to the limits the old trick of calling on gods. Allah became the ruse that allowed Mohammed to present his Koran as a divine revelation, but Allah was just Mohammed himself. And that’s why he’s always praising himself right throughout the Koran. Mohammed put himself forward as the only one able to interpret the divine, which boils down to saying the only one who is able to speak out and impose his own opinions. He presents himself as the model of morality and good conduct, to be imitated by all the faithful. But nowadays this fine model for conduct would be brought before the court in The Hague accused of crimes against humanity, because Mohammed and his Koran are the worst enemies of civilization, liberty and truth the world has ever known.”

Out of the corner of his eye, Tom was observing his friend’s reactions.

“I’m talking, but you’re not listening any more. You are blinking rapidly, a sign of intensive thinking going on in your brain. You’re thinking about something else and your mind is on other things. You’re paying me no attention, so why did you ask me what I thought about Mohammed?”

Alan smiled.

“From what I can see, you’re as quick as always at detecting lies in unspoken body language. I was just having you on about Mohammed; I know exactly what you think about him, because I’ve read a copy of your novel, “The Sage of Mecca”.”

As if recalling a good joke, Alan started laughing.

“A clinic where martyrs can get a fix?” he said, giggling. “You can’t be serious?”

In his novel, with a touch of black humor, Tom had proposed the setting up of a clinic for martyrs. Just like the clinics where drug addicts could get a clean fix in the form of injections administered by health professionals, it would be possible to set up a dying room reserved for Islamic suicide bombers wanting to blow themselves up in the midst of the unbelievers, in order to go directly to the Paradise promised to them.

To fight evil with evil, it would be enough to fit them with an explosive belt and isolate them in a room surrounded with armored windows back of which non-Moslems could stand, Jewish doctors, Christians or faithless atheists. The suicide bombers could press the detonator in total calm, as they would die as martyrs in the way of Allah.

Tom agreed.

“Yes, it was totally serious. Moreover, it’s even more the case because it’s the only way to get directly to Allah’s Paradise without passing through Hell.”

“I don’t get it, what are you on about?” Alan asked.

Tom smiled enigmatically.

“What I mean is that all Moslems go to Hell.”

“To Hell?” Alan’s surprised response came.

Tom thought over his wording before replying.

“When you sign a contract binding for a number of years, for instance with a bank, there’s always a phrase in the document that seems of no importance, after which there is, however, an asterisk. That asterisk points to a paragraph at the end of a page in very small print, a crucial paragraph you don’t ever bother reading, but which binds you to some aspect of the contract which is a heavy obligation that the person drawing up the contract clearly had no desire to put in too large a script.

Tom fell silent for an instant before continuing, “In the Koran, in the chapter entitled “Mary” there is the equivalent of an asterisk in the Koran, a verse stipulating that all Moslems will be flung into Hell when they die, before God’s judgement, which may assign them a place in one of the seven Heavens. Moslems wittingly or unwittingly hide this. It’s a horrendous mechanism for making suicidal fanatics, because they escape any time in Hell thanks to the details of another verse. Martyrs are even entitled to priority access to the highest of Heavens, the Seventh Heaven of Paradise, alongside God. Some few Moslems may believe that suicide bombers go to Hell because of the atrocities they commit, but the contrary is true. When they are kind, Moslems go to Hell, while the worst of murderers have a special pass. To get directly to Paradise without going through the sufferings of Hell, true believers have no other choice but to die with their weapons in their hands, on the way of God. To escape Hell, believers must become combatants and murderers. That’s the Koranic asterisk of the contract to which they are obliged to submit. So, the creation of clinics for martyrs in the end isn’t such a dreadful idea for insuring everyone’s safety.”

Alan remained thoughtfully silent for a few seconds. Finally he turned toward Tom, staring at him with his single eye.

“You know, if books like yours had been available in the Arab world, there would never have been any Arab Spring nor any Islamic revolutions in such war-torn lands.”

Tom was touched by this compliment, even though he knew that Alan never said a word without having some hidden agenda. He doubtless wanted something or was simply aiming at some kind of guarantee of personal fame. Certainly he was looking for something, or otherwise was just trying to enhance his personal self-esteem after his attempted suicide.

“Get down to facts. Why did you want to see me?” Tom asked.

Alan’s only response was to take his smartphone out of the pocket of his jacket. He grasped his cheroot between the index and middle fingers of his left hand, and took the device in the hollow of his palm, holding it with the thumb and the other two free fingers. His right hand swept swiftly across the screen, seeking a file.

“Do you recognize this man?” Alan asked.

Tom looked at the photo he was being shown by his friend. It depicted a smiling man some thirty years old, having an oval face with small and perfectly symmetrical ears, sparkling green eyes, a thin straight nose, attractive, pearly-white teeth and a broad, intelligent forehead that a fringe of short brown hair finished off, giving him the handsomeness of an Apollo. Tom recognized this man with his green eyes, just like Camilla’s.

“Yes, it’s Charlie. It’s Camilla’s twin brother.”

Alan nodded.

“What do you know about him?” the Israeli asked.

“Not much. I’ve met him just the once. I know he’s an officer in the American army. Why do you ask?”

Alan’s lips spread in a grimace.

“He disappeared a few months ago on a mission in Afghanistan. There were suspicions he’d been kidnaped, but there was no demand for a ransom or specific concessions. About ten days back, a reliable report arrived. Charlie’d been located and the Americans sent an assault group to set him free.”

Alan went into the room where Tom had slept. On the wall opposite the rumpled bed, a giant television screen was mounted. Alan turned it on and used his smartphone to start a video recording.

“Come here,” Alan said. “I’m going to show you a video clip. It’s the signals sent direct from the helmet camera of the leader of the assault group.”

Tom went toward the television.

Watching attentively, he saw the Special Forces soldiers moving forward in a column, going from the darkness of night into a well-lit building. A pump shotgun blew open the lock of a door, burst of firing and shouts were heard. Backed by his wing man, the group leader made for the entryway to a room that was closed off by a black sheet. Dressed in a long white tunic, like a clean-shaven angel, Charlie was in this brightly illuminated room, lying on his back on an old mattress laid on the floor. He was gagged and his hands were tied in front of him. Charlie’s look seemed to ask the two men from the commando to come and set him free.

When the first soldier leaned forward, the shining blade of a knife appeared as if by magic in Charlie's hand, and he slashed open the throat exposed to him, producing a spurt of blood that splattered over the lens of the camera.

"There you are," Alan said as he stopped the clip. Not one of the men from the assault group got back alive. They were all killed. They fell into a trap. Most of them had their throats cut by the hostage they'd been sent to set free."

His face grim, Tom thought matters over. A thousand questions were jostling in his mind. Finally he made a query aloud. "Who gave you the details allowing you to locate Charlie?"

Alan came closer to Tom and showed him a new photo on his smartphone.

"A C.I.A. spy managed to infiltrate the terrorist group holding Charlie. She's called Fatima."

Tom silently stared at the smiling face of the dark-eyed woman.

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Fatima thought that she was no more than a ghost.

No-one saw her, no-one noticed the shadowy figure with dark eyes that wandered through the huge palace that seemed straight out of a thousand and one nights.

At the very least, the armed guards on duty behaved as if they could not see her. They were under orders not to look at any of the women from the harem.

So, dressed in a black niqab that gave no more than a glimpse of her eyes, dark as the nights in Africa, as invisible as the air, Fatima could move around freely in Sultan's residence.

She had found it easy to get herself into the wolf's lair, because Sultan was constantly on the lookout for new "lambs" to quench his sickly sexual thirsts. Using a website apparently advertising for models, lucky Sultan invited candidates from every corner of the Earth to live a romantic love story with him in his harem.

He got them to sign a one-year contract for a tempting sum of money. It was a renewable lease that gave him unlimited and exclusive rights to the frail bodies of these greedy girls.

Of course, it was nothing other than prostitution. Nevertheless, Fatima had had no choice. To achieve her objectives, she had had to slip into Sultan's bed.

He had been quite sweet, attentive and by no means the animal that she had feared when the time came for their first night together. Sultan never struck his sex slaves if they were docile and obedient. His harem was made up of around a hundred women, from teenagers through to mature and experienced, their skins of every color, a foretaste of the Paradise where Sultan aimed to go when he died. Like a drug addict unable to go without heroin, Sultan could not bear to be away from his sex toys. He kept them close at all times, and even chartered a special plane for them when he had to travel abroad.

The freedom of these sexy willing captives was limited to what Sultan chose to allow them. He kept them shut up in his immense palace. Fatima could happily put up with this open prison, because Charlie lived there too.

It was for him that she was strolling along these vast corridors of white marble, where silver columns held up vaulted gold ceilings set with a thousand emeralds.

Her light slippers made whispering noises as they slid over the magnificent floor tiles. Fatima went on with a stride that she hoped was less feline than usual, then suddenly she stopped still.

Up ahead, she could hear voices coming closer. She could recognize Sultan's sharp tones and the softer speech of Charlie.

So as to arouse no suspicions, she began walking again. Where two corridors crossed, the two bearded men appeared wearing their long white robes and their Arab headcloths. They fell silent as they saw the small figure walking toward them.

When Charlie's questioning green eyes met those of the female spy, Fatima's heart began beating fast. Nevertheless, the two men paid scant attention to the dark-eyed shadowy figure, passing her by without a word and resuming their conversation a little further along.

Fatima speeded up her pace.

She knew the place like the back of her hand. If she turned into the corridor to her left, she would meet the men face-to-face once more.

She walked on for another thirty yards and reached the door of the ladies' restrooms. She hid back of the solid oak door, leaving it very slightly ajar.

She was in time.

The two men had just come into Fatima's field of vision.

Charlie was speaking in English.

"If Allah wills it, we'll revenge the children of the Prophet, *salla Allah 'alayhi wa salam.*"

Sultan nodded while stroking his lengthy black beard which his thin hollow-cheeked face made appear even longer.

"Yes, the Great Satan must pay for what's done to our brothers. Have you set an exact date?"

"Yes," Charlie answered after a moment's pause for thought. "They'll forever remember the day when the flames of Hell fall on their accursed cities, they'll never be able to forget the new nine eleven."

The two men were moving away and their conversation faded into an indistinct murmur.

Fatima's hand readjusted the veil that hid her terrified face. After a wait of a few minutes, her shadowy figure slipped silently out into the corridor.

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Leaning thoughtfully on the balustrade, the two friends gazed at the motionless shadows of the tall green trees that surrounded the residence without really seeing them.

Tom finally spoke.

"Who is Sultan?"

Alan grimaced.

“He’s a really wealthy Saudi, the pampered son of a father awash with crude oil. Above all, though, he is the head of an Islamic terrorist network, and he hates Uncle Sam. Fatima has confirmed he envisions staging an attack like September eleven 2001, but bigger than ever. For that, he has the help of Charlie.”

“What’s wrong with Charlie?” Tom asked in puzzlement.

Before replying, Alan lit up another cheroot. Curls of aromatic smoke rose into the air.

“Charlie seems to have a classic Stockholm syndrome. You could even say an Islamic Stockholm syndrome, if you see what I mean.”

Tom nodded in silence.

He understood perfectly what Alan meant. In his novel *The Sage of Mecca*, Tom had written at length about that weird psychological reaction.

It had been first noted in 1973 in the city of Stockholm, when an escaped prisoner had tried to hold up a bank and had barricaded himself in, together with four employees he took hostage. After six days of negotiation, the criminal finally released his hostages. Strangely, they had intervened between the police and their captor so as to protect him. Later on, they had refused to testify against him, even contributing money for his defense and visiting him in prison. An incomprehensible love story had even taken place between the hoodlum and a female hostage.

Stockholm syndrome had made its first appearance in the eye of a startled public.

It had existed since the beginning of time, all the same.

Instead of having feelings in tune with the crisis, that is, legitimate hatred toward the aggressor, victims were so relieved not to be killed that they developed a deep sense of gratitude, which mingled in confusion with fear in their brains. This left them unable to have negative thoughts about their abductors.

Since the desire to survive was stronger than the impulse to hate the person that had triggered the problem, their brains put in play weird strategies so as to stay alive at any cost. They developed feelings of confidence, or even sympathy, mingled with fear, toward the aggressors, trying to satisfy their every desire.

This denial of reality went so far that they even adopted their abusers' point of view.

Helpless in the hands of a devilish nanny from who they could not escape, and who ordered them when and what to eat telling them where and when they could relieve themselves, hostages went back to a primary state. They returned to the earliest childhood, with total physical dependence and no initiative, unable to act or even to take decisions.

Through childish gratitude for the satisfaction of their basic needs, through thankfulness at still being alive, their brains focused on any signs of benevolence and swept out of their memories the brutal acts of the nanny. The hypocritical kindnesses of the latter cured the traumas imposed.

Obsessed with surviving, unable to react normally to the inhuman treatment meted out to them, victims ended by seeing their captors as omnipotent beings that they should love.

The same happened to men and women converted by force to Islam.

In a macabre prefiguring, Mohammed had used the same sort of aggression as the Stockholm thug. He had confronted his victims with the choice of Submission or death.

His contemporaries had been faced with a fear that was multiplied by the blurring of distinction between Mohammed and Allah, the Prophet's cruel heavenly double. Terror of dying had been combined with panic at the thought of spending eternity in Hell, a Hell they could not escape.

Mohammed and Allah had coalesced as a single spiritual entity that threatened the worst punishments for all those who failed to listen, both in the here and now, and in the hereafter. Mohammed's preaching had been extremely simple and primitive. If you listened, you would go to Paradise; if you disobeyed, you would go to Hell.

A glance at the Koran was enough to show how many violent threats Mohammed had launched at humankind. Hundreds of verses were aimed at terrifying people or at anesthetizing their minds with treacherous kindly promises of Paradise. The outcome was extreme fear of God and his Hell, combined with immediate

fright at the Prophet's saber that had executed all those who disobeyed, accused of treason.

Mohammed's victims had found themselves in the same state of psychological distress as the Stockholm hostages. They had suffered from exactly the same symptoms and the same absurd strategies for survival. They felt absolute confidence in the Prophet, combined with fear and gratitude, obeying his slightest commands and blindly accepting his view of the world.

One of the conditions necessary for triggering the syndrome was indeed a world view. The aggressor had to be able to impose an ideological viewpoint to justify acts of terror toward the victims. Just like the Stockholm hoodlum who had gotten his ideas accepted as the only possible outlook, Mohammed had distorted Judeo-Christian concepts to build up a view of the world that was the only one Moslems could conceive of as correct, with their status of submissive hostages.

By preaching his ideology to all humankind without distinction of race or color, Mohammed had carefully avoided any opposition on ethnic grounds that might have been an obstacle to Submission to his heavenly double. He had taken on the role of that devilish nanny, reducing to infants the dependents with their bowed heads, unable to act, to decide or to think outside the Koran's tenets. Lacking any initiative and trusting unhealthily in fatality, these childish prisoners of their own minds had obeyed the nanny. She had ordered them when and what to eat, imposing food prohibitions like the ban on pork, or eating times during Ramadan.

That was the Islamic Stockholm syndrome that had emerged out of the Arabian Desert.

It might have disappeared as quickly as it had appeared, swept away by the winds of reason.

Nevertheless, their unconditional love for their torturer had allowed this highly infectious virus to be communicated by the very people who were sick with it. The first victims had become the allies of their abductor, using the same blackmail on any who were still free, spreading fear of Hell and lying promises about Paradise so as to subjugate others in exactly the same way as they themselves had become Submitters.

They had also had to submit with regard to friendships, as Mohammed had forbidden them to have a *kafir* as a friend. They had had to submit with regard to love, since Allah did not allow marriage to a non-Submitter. They had had Submitter children who in their turn had perpetuated Submission, passing it on to succeeding generations.

Islam could be summed up as one simple commandment: “Make your neighbors submit just like you.”

That was the main reason why that religion had sustained itself and continued to exist. It maintained an endless spiral of Islamic Stockholm syndrome so that Islam was just one gigantic hostage taking.

Tom sighed inwardly.

Before discovering Mohammed’s true nature, Tom had always been astonished at the strange susceptibility of Moslems and the disproportionate violence they brought to bear at the slightest criticism of Islam.

Such sensitivity was always suspect, because it betrayed intellectual doubts which were uneasy bedfellows with any claim of holding the ultimate truth, written down and sent from Heaven. When someone was sure of something, such irritability was unthinkable. On the contrary, there should be indifference or even considerable compassion toward any who were not illuminated by the same divine lights. So why were Moslems so tetchy? They were supposed to be certain that anyone but their own would go to Hell, then why did they react so violently at the least ironic comment on Islam or to “attacks” that were no more serious than cartoons of the Prophet?

The reaction of Moslems to criticism seemed disproportionate only if it was not taken into account that the slightest critical comment could undermine the authority of Mohammed, the hostage taker. No opinion, no contradictory viewpoint or differing view of the world could be allowed to appear in the captive minds, since the essential condition to create and sustain either a classic, or an Islamic, Stockholm syndrome was specifically the absence of any perspective differing from that of the hostage taker.

The consequence was the virtually total forbidding of any attempt at evangelizing by other religions on the soil of Moslem countries, the prohibition on reading the Bible or being with non-Moslems. The whole aim was to preserve a single view of the world, Mohammed's view, and one single conception of divinity, Allah.

Any hostage challenging the authority or views of a captor was systematically eliminated from among the prisoners. The same was true for any Islamic apostate, who must at once be killed, for fear that lack of submission might spread like a burning train of gunpowder through imitation, for fear of casting doubt on the beliefs of the captive sheep dutifully bleating out the Koran in parrot fashion.

Just as the Stockholm hostages had defended their abductor against the police and had shown hostility toward the rescuers sent to save them, Islam's hostages fought tooth and nail to defend the honor of the Wild Beast of Medina. They were against any kind of saving knowledge that might intrude and set them free from the talons of Mohammed, who had stolen their minds, to their delight.

Nevertheless, just knowing about the Stockholm syndrome was enough to be immunized against it, and the same could be true of its Islamic derivative. Sadly, ignorance of this evil continued. Every day in their thousands new customers came into the deceptive bank of the Koran, and fell hostage to a tyrant from another age, a tyrant that had destroyed freedom and smashed open humankind's safe.

Anger welled up in Tom.

More than anger, he was gripped by deep hatred for Mohammed.

That was absolutely legitimate.

The healthy attitude to take when faced with a hostage taker was exactly what all the defenders of Islam condemned: hatred. It was perfectly normal to feel a strong disliking of whatever constituted a menace to oneself. Feeling hatred for Mohammed and his primitive ideology, which simultaneously threatened all those who did not submit with the fires of Hell and fire from terrorists, that was the healthiest possible reaction.

Failing to act against such an explicit danger was what was foolish.

Tom was in no way ashamed of his hatred of Mohammed. On the contrary, it was believers that should blush at their love affair with him, it was hostages that should go red with shame at their cowardice.

The Islamic Stockholm syndrome to which they had succumbed was just another name for cowardice. That was because it emerged when the desire for survival on the part of victims was stronger than their natural tendency to hate the person that had caused their problems.

Instead of standing strong and firm against their Islamic foe, Submitter hostages had bowed before the one who did them harm.

Simply putting these truths forward in public would be enough to trigger outraged defensiveness from all Moslem groupings. There would be an outcry about Islamophobic extremism.

Nevertheless, an accusation of Islamophobia was only the first step toward the establishing a submissive and irrational hostage mentality in victims of the Islamic Stockholm syndrome. The aim was simultaneously to make people afraid of Islam and to forbid them from fearing it. These were contradictory demands, aimed at paralyzing any loathing in the face of the Koranic menace, and at nipping in the bud any resistance to enslaving aggression.

The Age of Illumination had stood up to Catholic obscurantism and saved humanity from it. Nonetheless, Islamic obscurantism continued thanks to the sword of accusations of Islamophobia. This specter was systematically trotted out in defense of the Slaughterer. Denying the uncertainty inwardly tormenting them, the captive minds refused to accept that free men could live unaffected by the Islamic blackmail that they called their faith. They were outraged to see the unfazed liberty of humans in no way frightened by their childish fear of Hell.

“You look thoughtful,” Alan said, interrupting Tom’s train of thought. “What’s on your mind?”

As if returning from afar, Tom finally answered, “Nothing special, but what were you thinking of when you had me brought here?”

Alan smiled enigmatically.

“I need you because of Charlie.”

“What do you mean?”

Alan drew hard on his cheroot.

“I’m not yet sure what exact role Sultan is going to get Charlie to play. If we’re going to foil his terrorist attack plot, we need all the information we can get. That’s where you come in. He knows you and will be less distrustful of you. Besides, you’re an expert in psychological manipulation. Like me, you studied in the best school there is. I know you can do it, you’re good at it, very gifted; in fact you’re one of the best I’ve ever known.”

Tom smiled wryly. Alan was so accustomed to manipulating people that he no longer noticed that he was using positive labeling with his own friend. He was describing him in flattering terms so as to win his consent, in accordance with the characteristic features of the subject being approached.

“And how do you propose to get Charlie and me face to face?” Tom asked.

“I have a plan,” Alan said. “It’s quite simple. Listen.”

For ten minutes or so, the Mossad agent laid out in detail his whole plan before ending by saying, “Of course, to get all the way to Charlie, you’ll have some dirty work to do. I ask you, though, what are a few lives lost if we can save thousands?”

Tom was thoughtful, but he did not have in mind the thousands of lives to be saved. He was thinking only of Charlie’s life.

Camilla really loved Charlie, speaking about her twin brother as if he was her own child who she would cheerfully give her life for, if it was needed. Tom felt he had a moral obligation to do the same.

Tom had not been able to save his soul mate, failing to aid Camilla, but he could still save her male counterpart. He could help Charlie get away from Sultan’s evil clutches, and at the same time stop the future terrorist attempt at blood-letting.

The project seemed to soothe Tom's bruised heart.

"I'll take the mission," he said to his friend.

As if to thank him, Alan rested his powerful hand on Tom's shoulder. Then he delved into an inner pocket of his dark suit and pulled out a small book with green designs on the cover.

It was a copy of the Koran.

"I think you'll have great need of this in your mission," said Alan.

Taking the book in his two white-bandaged hands, Tom nodded in silence.



## 7

### **Ninth Commandment: Thou Shalt Read the Koran**

When Caliph Othman, the sole true creator of the Koran, finished setting down the very first compilation of the verses bequeathed by the Prophet, he found himself confronted by an incomprehensible book.

In a fully logical way, Othman had classified the various verses he had found chronologically, from oldest to most recent. They were in the exact order in which they had been revealed to Mohammed over the course of his life.

Nevertheless, in that order of reading, contradictions in the divine words appeared all too clearly. Allah had commanded one thing, while in later chapters Allah had taken it all back and even said the opposite of what he had ordered at first.

**A distressing aberration.**

This first attempt of Othman's at compiling a Koran sounded like the private diary of a lunatic swinging from one contradiction to another, progressively falling into paranoia and schizophrenia.

It showed the unstable character of Allah, or rather of Mohammed, who had imposed his will on those around him for more than twenty years in accordance with his mood of the moment. This was a groping, uncertain will.

So, Othman decided to mix up all the texts he had in his possession. He put them in order of decreasing length, a trick

that allowed him to tone down somewhat the incomprehensibility emerging from contradictory verses.

**The Koran was born.**

To muddy the waters a little more around this literary poison, and to fool history, Othman also mingled episodes from Mohammed's life with others in verses historically distant from them. He mixed the Sage of Mecca together with the Murderer of Medina, going from cock to bull in just a few lines.

**Do not copy this asinine behavior!**

**Read the Koran to grasp the full extent of Othman's trickery and that of his guru Mohammed.**

Doing that, you will grasp how men and women, normal human beings like you and like me, can turn into inhuman monsters, suicide bombers loving death more than life through their sick love for their Prophet, just as the S.S. did for Hitler.

If Europeans had taken the trouble to read *Mein Kampf*, instead of listening to Nazi propaganda claiming the Führer did not want war, Hitler would never have been able to exterminate the Jews by invading democratic nations. They would have mobilized to neutralize the German eagle before it took flight and put into action the murderous aims divulged in the book.

Similarly, rather than listen to Islamic propaganda claiming that Mohammed was a peaceful Prophet of a religion of peace, if people even glimpsed into the Koran, they would have never allowed this warmongering sect to sneak into their democratic lives under the pretext of freedom of religion.

Humankind had not wished to see the truth written in letters of blood in these two literary toxins revealing their murderous futures.

In cowardly fashion, people allowed the Germans to sell their souls to Satan. Now history was repeating itself and they were letting Moslems sell their souls to a heavenly Allah, but really to an earthly murderer called Mohammed, who was nothing else but the Devil.

Of the two peoples that fell into the clutches of ideological obscurantism, one had woken with a start to find a gun in its hand as it stood on blood-soaked ground. The other

**was continuing to live a religious nightmare that may well lead all of us not to Paradise, but toward an awful doom.**

**The end of humanity.**

*Extract from the novel “The Sage of Mecca” by Thomas Anderson.*



## 8

### Peace

Death was there, very close.

In the mildness of the night, Mohammed could smell its odor. More exactly, its odors: the nauseous sweat of the killers who were hidden in the corner of the room reached the Prophet's nostrils.

He dared not move, his back pressed against the wall of his house. He did not know if he should run or just turn back in the alleyway, at the risk of coming face to face with other armed men.

*Oh God! What should I do?*

The enemies of God had decided to murder His Messenger while he slept. The death of his Uncle Abu Talib had deprived Mohammed of his main protector among men. Held back until then by the fear of tribal vengeance, the notables in Mecca had finally decided to get rid of a man that they saw as a danger to the prosperity of their city. To put their plot into practice, they had thought up a very simple plan. Various young Meccans chosen from among the different tribes would simultaneously strike mortal blows, so that the blood of the Prophet would fall on all of them. In that way, Mohammed's clan could not ask for the blood price from all of the clans at the same time.

The assassins would remain unpunished for all their days.

However, God saw and understood everything.

Through the actions of the angel of revelation, God had warned Mohammed.

### *Gabriel.*

Ever since Abu Talib had died, the angel had never appeared in human shape. At night, he simply came to visit Mohammed as he slept, and only his mild voice was heard. It was as if Gabriel's body no longer existed, as if his earthly container had passed away.

No longer meeting him in the form of a child was surprising. Had he committed some sin in God's eyes so that some part of his powers of incarnation had been taken away?

Mohammed did not know, but he made no complaints.

Inwardly, the Prophet detested it when the angel took possession of his body. The physical discomfort was sometimes accompanied by a sort of bell tolling that rang out like the very end of a waking nightmare. The sensation of no longer being in control of himself was particularly painful. For that reason, Mohammed was happy for Gabriel now to reveal God's will merely by muttering into his ear while he slept.

Coming out of nowhere, a hand touched the Prophet's shoulder.

His heart seemed to stop beating for a fraction of a second. Slowly, holding his breath, he turned his head.

The moon's thin crescent was reflected in a menacing saber blade pointing toward the starry sky. The Messenger of God closed his eyes and prepared to die at the hands of this frightful apparition.

"It is I," muttered a voice. "It is Abu Bakr."

Mohammed opened his eyes and with a sigh of relief looked at this man with a thin face hidden by a voluminous black turban that covered all but his burning eyes. Weapon in hand, Abu Bakr brought his muffled mouth up to the Prophet's ear.

"Where is Ali?" asked the newcomer.

A few minutes earlier, to let him play the part of the Prophet for the time needed for Mohammed's flight, he had given his mantle to Ali and gotten him to lie down on his bed. When the killers went into the room, Ali would be at no risk. No-one would dare to do the least harm to the son of his late uncle Abu Talib.

“All is well,” replied Mohammed. “Ali has taken my place.”

Abu Bakr agreed in silence. With a gesture of his hand, he invited the Prophet to follow him into the dark alleyways. His saber still in his hand, he led him to his own house. They picked up some food and a large leather bottle full of green tea. Then they slipped discreetly out of the city.

Their walk brought them to a cavern set in a deserted mountain. They remained hidden there for the rest of the night, then all the following day.

When their escape was discovered, the enemies of the Prophet sent men to seek him out. They carefully combed the immediate environs of Mecca. One group went by above the fugitives, barely a score of feet from the entrance to their hiding place, and the conversation of the men trying to track him down came all the way to Mohammed’s ears.

Abu Bakr risked a furtive glance outside. Then he drew close to the Prophet and whispered in his ear, “If any of them look down, they will see us.”

Mohammed nodded then muttered, “What do you think of two people whose third companion is God? Fear nothing, for God is with us!”

As if doubting the Prophet’s words, Abu Bakr drew his saber from its sheath. He prepared to leap forward and counter the threat.

Surprised by his friend’s reaction, Mohammed put the tips of his fingers on his weapon-carrying arm.

“Violence never solves anything,” said the Messenger to him. “God alone will protect us.”

Indeed, God sent an invisible army of angels, who took care to turn aside the steps of his enemies.

When the danger was past, Mohammed sat calmly on the ground.

With one hand, he groped for a few dates in Abu Bakr’s haversack. He pulled out a thick book, very old and bound in leather.

“What may this be?” asked Mohammed.

His eyes still glancing at the entrance to the cave, Abu Bakr turned briefly toward his companion.

“It is nothing!” exclaimed the other in a sharp voice, approaching the Prophet. “Nothing important.”

He grabbed the book and put it back in his haversack. Then he unwound his turban from his face and sat opposite Mohammed. The latter remained silent for a few seconds, then hinted, “That old book seems dear to your heart.”

Abu Bakr’s burning eyes fell on the haversack.

“It was a present from your uncle Abu Talib. A keepsake which he gave me before he died. I am really fond of it.”

Mohammed gave him a friendly smile.

“In what language is written?”

“It is in Latin.”

“Who wrote it?”

Abu Bakr’s mind seemed to fly back toward a long-lost past.

“A great man like you,” came his murmur finally. “A very long time ago.”

“Would you read some of it to me?” inquired Mohammed.

“Of course! With great pleasure. For the moment, though, it would be better to stay quiet. Voices carry a long way, and our enemies are not so far away from us.”

Mohammed agreed. He thoughtfully started reflecting about his future.

The situation in Mecca was no longer tenable, with the townsfolk wanting to bring about their ruin. God had ordered the Prophet to emigrate with his disciples. In small groups, they had already begun to slip away and head for Yathrib. A secret pact had been agreed with that city so that it would take in all the Submitters. As for that, the Prophet’s companions believed he had negotiated this treaty, but in fact it had been Abu Bakr’s work. He had put in a good deal of goodwill and effort to reach an accord between the citizens of Yathrib and the Submitters, laying down each person’s role, and especially the pride of place allotted to the Prophet.

Acting in the name of God, Abu Bakr had not wished the glory of the pact to be assigned to him, so he had humbly claimed it was all the Prophet's own doing. Appreciating this great modesty, Mohammed had let his statements stand, even though somewhat taken aback by the war clause that had been added to the alliance between the various communities. This clause stipulated that the inhabitants of Yathrib must defend the Prophet, by force of arms if needful, in the case of any attack from without against him or against his faithful followers.

This war pledge would never be brought into force. Abu Bakr had added it through excessive zeal, fearing for the Messenger's life. It was totally useless, because no Arab city would ever attack another. Brother would never kill brother, even for hidden reasons. Besides, there was no cause to want to make war on a group that preached nothing but love and mutual aid between all.

It was true that there were a few assassins who wanted to get rid of the Prophet. However, God was watching over him and the future of his community. God would do away with criminal tendencies thanks to the departure of the Submitters, an exodus that was the first-fruits of a glorious peace to come.

In this emigration willed by God, like the one imposed on Moses in the past, Mohammed could count on four faithful companions in facing adversity.

*Abu Bakr.*

Mohammed felt true affection for this long-standing friend who had not hesitated for one moment to become the first free man to embrace Submission. His fiery gaze, smoldering in his deep eye sockets, contrasted with Othman's, which was calmer, almost timid when in the Prophet's presence. From the same generation as Abu Bakr and Mohammed, Othman was also a friend that had won the favor of his heart. Making a loyal pair who God's Messenger could depend on at all times, Omar had rounded out the Prophet's tranquility.

After his conversion to Submission, Omar, the very same man that had wanted to kill the Prophet, had become the most passionate of all the Submitters. Through God's grace, this giant with his colossal strength was no longer the fierce enemy of former

days. Quite the contrary, he had come to complete the small circle of friends that the Prophet could count on the fingers of one hand.

*My four friends.*

Young Ali had been the last to join this faithful foursome who Mohammed, with God's blessing, could rely on blindly. The Prophet considered his Uncle Abu Talib's son as if he had been one of his own. Moreover, he had brought him up and had an intense love for him that mingled with a feeling of absolute trust.

Before leaving the city, it had been Ali that Mohammed had given the task of handing back to its rightful owners all the property that had been entrusted to him. Even if the Meccans were accusing him of sorcery and imposture, the Prophet was the one truly honest man in Mecca, one you could hand over with a tranquil mind entire fortunes to for safekeeping.

In fact, Mohammed had no interest in earthly riches, since only heavenly wealth had any value. Worldly goods brought nothing but perdition for men, and the Prophet now no longer hoped to save the Meccans from themselves, but rather to bring salvation to the inhabitants of Yathrib.

So, striving at this noble task, after staying hidden for some time longer in the cavern, Mohammed was finally able to set out for this oasis, which was feverishly awaiting his arrival.

Riding a she-camel and acclaimed with cheers, Mohammed made a triumphal entry into Yathrib. The sun was still high in the sky. As if obeying an instruction, almost all of the inhabitants had gathered on the great central square, surrounded by houses, all bathed in light. Arabs were in the majority, but there were clearly a good few Jews. Mohammed felt ineffable exaltation welling up in him. Without a doubt, this was a high point in his life.

Years of humiliation, of persecutions and of meager success were now all behind him. If Mecca had turned away from God, Yathrib was receiving His Messenger with kindness, in a spirit of brotherliness and liberty. Until then, Mohammed had been no more than a preacher. From now on, he would be considered like a new king, a humble mediator bringing peace and love, with the prerogatives of a head of state, but also of a noble-hearted arbitrator, who could guarantee true justice. As his only

baggage, a pledge for the future, Mohammed was bringing a promise of contentment for all.

The inhabitants of the city had never known any happier day than that. There was music and dancing.

When the rejoicing came to an end, the Prophet's first decision was to build a place of prostration where Submitters could honor God. Having been till then an individual act carried out in private, prayer should now be performed openly and so become the symbol of the society of Submitters. The time when Submission had been oppressed and crushed was now over. Henceforth, the call to prayer would be chanted out aloud and it would echo through every home, so as to recall to all that they should respect their obligations toward their Creator.

This place of prostration would also be a school where Submitters could learn the various elements of their religion. It would be a meeting place to resolve any differences, and in it all the facets of daily life would be managed.

When this House of God, built of palm-tree trunks and branches, was finished, Mohammed constructed dwellings on either side for his family.

Having a forceful character linked to extraordinary talents as a diplomat, the Prophet also strove to reconcile the various warring factions in Yathrib. Through great efforts he achieved a resounding success at this.

With the arrival of new emigrants, it became equally essential to set up a support network for them. So they would integrate more easily, Mohammed thought up a system of twinning in which every believer in the city was to take a Submitter from Mecca as a brother. These brothers were to be treated just like real brothers under all circumstances, right down to bequeathing them the same inheritances as any other members of the family. Apart from a few, the emigrants had lost everything and were totally dependent upon their new brothers. Some of the townsfolk even went so far as to give them half of all they owned in terms of houses, belongings, lands and palm groves. In almost all cases, everyone strove to give the emigrants a fair share of their property. By God's grace, this brotherly spirit worked miraculously well, strength of belief opening the hearts of the faithful.

Once the community of Submitters was fully established, the inhabitants of the city of Yathrib renamed their town in honor of their new leader. Henceforth, it would be known as “The City of the Prophet”.

Mohammed was particularly proud of what he had accomplished. Yet God did not allow him to rest on his laurels, for all that. A new mission fell to God’s Messenger. He was to convert the Jews of the City of the Prophet to Submission.

To this end, God had given his chosen people the honor of being mentioned in the Mother of Books kept up in Heaven. Through Mohammed’s mouth, He spoke to them of their history, their Covenant and their ancient prophets. Inspired by Gabriel, day after day, week after week, month after month, the Prophet recited the divine words that presented him as the last of the Messengers of God.

Strangely, despite all the truths recited by Mohammed, the Jews seemed to be hesitant. To his face, they told him they would convert to Submission, and that they recognized him as one of God’s prophets. However, as soon as Mohammed turned his back they made grimaces, shrugged their shoulders, or even laughed at him.

At least, that is what some of the Submitters had reported to him.

The Jews were acting as if they were dealing with a drunken man that you had to say you agreed with, so as to keep him calm. They were treating him like a madman that you had to nod to, if you wished to avoid suffering his anger.

Everyone knew that the Jews were awaiting the arrival of a prophet. Everyone knew this had to be Mohammed, since the miraculous nature of his recitation was clear proof. So why were the Jews mocking the Prophet? Why were they refusing to join in Submission?

When Mohammed finally discovered the reason, he felt as if thunderstruck. It was as if the hand of God Himself had stabbed him in the back.

For days, he had no idea what to do, to say or to think. Totally at a loss, seized by terrible doubts, he decided to open up his stricken heart to his four friends.

Toward the end of one afternoon, he invited them to join him in a palm grove a little way outside the city. Under the peaceful shade of the tall palm-trees, the five men sat in a circle, all dressed in white robes and turbans.

Mohammed took out of his haversack a rectangular object wrapped in green cloth.

“What is that?” asked Abu Bakr, stroking his thin face where a sparse pepper-and-salt beard sprouted.

To answer him, Mohammed carefully unfolded the green cloth and took out a book bound in leather.

“Look at this book. Everything that Gabriel had me recite about the Jews, their history and their prophets, is all here in this book.”

“Well of course!” exclaimed young Ali in his sing-song voice. “That is the Book of the Jews. Why are you bothering with it?”

Even if Ali’s large dark eyes lacked the blue aura of his dead father’s, they were no less hypnotic as they gazed at Mohammed.

The Prophet’s eyelids fluttered. He slowly lowered his eyes to the ground, looking away from the handsome face with tanned skin covered in a long black beard.

“No, Ali,” replied the Prophet, “this is not the Book of the Jews. This book you see before you is a collection of stories for parents to tell their children. It is not the Book of God’s Word that the Jews venerate.”

Omar’s eyes seemed to turn bloodshot and his thick and luxuriant mustache trembled up and down. The giant man’s enormous hands removed his turban and he energetically scratched some reddish spots on his bald head.

“What is the difference?” grumbled Omar. “A book is just a book, and they all tell the same story: the story of God!”

Mohammed shook his head like a horse trying to drive away flies nibbling at its mane.

“No, that is the problem, this children’s book does not tell the same story as the Book of the Jews. It differs at many points.

But this is book that God has made me recite to bring the Jews over to Submission.”

Keeping his eyes humbly downcast, just as he had been respectfully silent up till then, Othman ran his long fingers through his thick gray beard. He spoke in a hesitant tone.

“Messenger of God, how do you know that it is different? You cannot read.”

The Prophet pursed his lips.

“I may not know how to read, but I do know how to listen to someone who can. A Submitter well versed in reading came to see me. He had bought this book and the Book of the Jews for a tidy sum in gold. He read both to me. That is how I know that they are not the same.”

Mohammed pointed questioningly toward the sky.

“Why did Gabriel make me recite errors in place of the truth? Why does he get me to chant out a book that is not the word of God? This book was not made by God, it was made by men. Yes, this book is just the invention of some man or another.”

Seeing the consternation on the faces of his four friends, he felt he had to be specific.

“This book is false, do you understand? Yet God makes me recite it!”

The Prophet fell silent for an instant, then asked, “Is it perhaps Satan speaking through my mouth? Could I be being misled by the Devil?”

“No!” growled Omar. “God is the greatest! He cannot be letting you be tricked by Satan.”

“That is impossible!” Abu Bakr went even further. “You are no puppet in Satan’s hands.”

Othman interrupted, raising his hand to get in some wise words.

“Messenger of God! What matters it you have been mistaken? Do we not all make mistakes? Who can say that the book you have in your hand is not a work of God’s? What if this book, on the contrary, is the true original preserved by the grace of God? What if the Book of the Jews is the real forgery? What if it has been distorted and twisted by the Devil or by human greed?

What if the Jews keep their knowledge and access to the gates of Paradise for themselves by parading around false books?"

Ali nodded his agreement.

"By the grace of God, the book that you have in your hands is certainly the work of the Creator, and it has come down to you miraculously to show us the lies of the Jews! I have a proof: why would the Jews read out this book to their children if it is false? Is it not rather a key to secret knowledge that they keep for the salvation of their children? The chosen people are selfish folk, they have never wanted to share the wealth of their lands with us. Why would they share the riches of Heaven with us?"

The others agreed in turn. Seeing the accuracy of Ali's comments, Mohammed did the same.

*He may well be right.*

"There can be no doubt about it," said Abu Bakr, "the Jews are hypocrites, who hide the truth from others."

"Not they alone!" Omar cut in. "In the City of the Prophet, there are some Arabs that say yes to Submission when we are present, but in their heart of hearts the truth is quite different. They are hypocrites too!"

Ali agreed, then went on to a new point that seemed to trouble him.

"What about the Christians if the Jews are deceiving us? They also want us to go astray, just as they have themselves. They invent false stories about the prophet Jesus to whom God gave his book. The Christians state that Jesus is the son of God, when that cannot be true. It would be completely ridiculous: God has no sons, no more than he has daughters!"

Othman raised his hands and eyes toward the sky.

"Messenger of God! Remember that all these people of the Book are liars. Let Gabriel be my witness, I am fully convinced that God will not leave unpunished all these wicked folk who work against Him, against Submission and against his Messenger!"

Divinely inspired, these last words proved particularly accurate.

Without Mohammed suspecting it, the angel of revelation had secretly taken part in the meeting with the four friends. As if

God had woken up to the chicanery of Jews and Christians during this discussion, his wrath was unleashed through the mouth of his Prophet.

Night after night, in angry tones, Gabriel dictated to him a new recitation condemning to Hell all those who were hypocrites or had gone astray. There they would suffer eternal punishment from the Almighty.

In the Mother of Books, God had particularly dreadful words for the Jews, and his curse fell on those who had distorted Truth for their own gain. Rejecting the former Covenant, God designated the Submitters as his new chosen people, the finest among all peoples. In the near future, God would even end by turning his back completely on the Jews and on Jerusalem, changing the direction for ritual prayers to the benefit of the black stone in the Kaaba. This test from God would allow the true faithful to be separated from the unbelievers, setting apart hypocrites from those who really accepted Submission. The Jews would in vain openly criticize Mohammed by accusing him of being nothing but a charlatan constantly changing what he recited, as nothing could alter the will of God.

God knew what He was doing, the Jews did not.

For the moment, the latter did not take the divine curse seriously. They mocked both God and his Prophet.

“God is poor and we are rich.”

That was what the Jews now dared to say to make mock of Mohammed’s poverty.

Although he was as good as a king in his own city, Mohammed was nonetheless a man with no property, ever since he had fled from Mecca. Lack of everything had become his daily lot, as in the case of his main meal, composed of no more than gruel, dates and milk. He often went hungry, to the extent of tying a flat stone around his stomach to soothe the hunger pangs. Anyone who could spare something brought him food. However, it was rare for him to keep it long enough to enjoy eating it, because he always found someone who needed it even more than he did. In the same way, on the very same day when a Submitter woman gave him a cape that he desperately needed, he did not hesitate to give it to someone who asked him for it to make it into a shroud.

This wretched life did not seem so in Mohammed's eyes. For him, on the contrary, it was a life full of rich happiness as he worked for the salvation of humankind. In his role as Messenger of God, Mohammed was glad he had such a privilege, and he was well able to be humbly content with his modest daily portion.

However, God was not happy to see his Prophet in this state of total poverty. The Almighty thus rectified this injustice by giving Mohammed the wealth he deserved.

This first fortune came out of the desert in the shape of a caravan with various treasures.

It entered the City of the Prophet before the astonished eyes of the townsfolk. At its head, Ali was riding on a camel. Abu Talib's son, like the other twelve Submitters that were with him, had his head shaven completely bare. At the tail end of the caravan, their hands bound, two old men with terrified faces were tied by a long rope to the last camel.

Coming from Ali's own lips, the tale spread through a horrified city. During this sacred month, at God's command, the Submitters had shaved their heads so as to pass themselves off as pilgrims and so had been able to sneak up on a Meccan caravan and attack it. In the battle, they had killed one guard with an arrow-shot, another had managed to run away, and they had captured two traders.

All their precious merchandise henceforth belonged to the Submitters and their Prophet.

When he was told of what had happened, he went straight to the place, very disturbed.

*My God! Ali must have gone mad!*

As if unaware of the horror of his acts, Abu Talib's son was waiting for him with the stolen camels. He had a smile on his lips as the crowd swelled around him.

"Look!" cried he joyfully as the Prophet approached. "By God's grace, we were successful!"

"My boy!" growled Mohammed. "What have you done?"

Ali's smile vanished and gave way to a look of consternation.

"I did what you asked of me."

“I never asked you to attack a caravan!” exclaimed the Prophet. “Or to kill anyone!”

Ali stared at him, as if he was dealing with a man that just gone crazy.

“What sort of a joke is that? You came to see me the night before I set off.”

“You must have dreamed it!” cried Mohammed.

“No, it was no dream,” protested Ali. “It was definitely you. I saw you just as clearly as I see you now.”

For endless seconds, Ali’s dark eyes stared into the Prophet’s.

“Do you not remember what you said to me that night?” he finally asked. “Do you really not remember what God ordered us to do, through your mouth?”

Confused, Mohammed shook his head.

*Whom did he see? Was it truly I? Or could it have been the Devil that took possession of my body without me remembering?*

Dumbfounded, the Prophet no longer knew what to think. In any case, he had to cover up this affair as quickly as possible, even if he had to think up some other tale, and certainly not saying that Ali had had a hand in it. If the Meccans learned the truth, they would demand a blood price, and Mohammed did not want to lose this son he cherished so much.

In the Prophet’s heart, though, there was much more fear of God’s wrath than of the anger of the inhabitants of Mecca.

*Is Ali going to be condemned to Hell for having had a part in the death of that man?*

To the Prophet’s great surprise, when Gabriel came to seek him out that night, God praised Ali’s actions and the death of that unbeliever destined for Hell. It was indeed reprehensible to fight during a holy month, but, for the Creator, continued unbelief was a much more serious sin. In order to spread Submission everywhere, it was licit to make war on those who rejected God, his Prophet and the Submitters. The killing of infidels was excusable, as unbelief was worse than any slaughter of such sinners.

In Mohammed's mind, surprise gave way to total incomprehension when night after night, murmur after murmur, Gabriel let loose a war-waging frenzy. This would justify the massacres to come, beheadings and crucifixions.

Every new morning, as if gone astray, Mohammed's emerging conscience hesitated to report to the Submitters this murderous recital that blew away the mild words of the past, wiping away for ever the delightful words about peace for all. Aghast, the Prophet felt he was contradicting God in person when he ordered that thieves' hands should be cut off at the very same time that he was legalizing theft from the honest traders of Mecca by Submitters.

Was Gabriel truly making him learn the word of God? Could the angel of revelation have been corrupted by Satan? If that were in fact the case, how long ago had it happened? In the recitations Mohammed had passed on to the Submitters, what part was the work of God and what the work of the Devil? How could Satan have achieved his aims without God noticing?

All these questions made no sense, because God was the Almighty. He would have prevented any satanic recitation from continuing if it was not written in the Mother of Books. A pernicious doubt nonetheless wormed into Mohammed's mind, especially since Gabriel was ordering him to participate personally in attacking rich caravans.

Besides being the Messenger of a community with new murderous rights, had he become no more than a desert bandit chief, a brigand imposing truth at the point of a saber?

Horror, uncertainty and consternation made the Prophet's head spin in an endless circle. It was like a mad dance blunting his conscience and his senses.

Second after second, minute after minute, hour after hour, Mohammed felt a terrible secret was slipping past him, a secret of the God hidden in the highest of Heavens.



## 9

### Seventh Heaven

The angel floated above the tumult.

With his kindly manner, he looked at the land of men who were jostling, shouting or crying below his bare feet. Then he spread out even more his immense white wings that hissed through the air. His body began to glow and became brighter than a sun.

The heavenly creature plunged at the speed of light toward the dark planet lost in the firmament. In a headlong dive, he made for those wretched beings whose hands, stretched out in supplication, were imploring Heaven's aid.

One hand more sparkling than the others drew the angel toward it like a spiritual magnet. So he, corrected his course, flapping his wings so violently that they made the Earth judder.

The man felt nauseous.

Despite that, he clutched at the vision of a shining being zooming down at him. He desperately stretched out his arm to try to touch the glowing figure that he thought he could recognize, but no contact could be made. An invisible wall of incomprehension had sprung up between them, and that wall became more and more painful for the man, whose arm, nibbled at by thousands of ants, was sending distress signals to his sleeping consciousness.

Tom suddenly opened his eyes.

He took a few seconds to come fully round from his dream and wipe the luminous being out of his mind.

In the noisy half-darkness of the airplane, Tom rapidly moved the limb that had gone to sleep on him, flexing his forearm in different directions until the unpleasant pins and needles sensation had faded away. With one hand he scratched at his long beard, with the other he fumbled for his watch to see the time. He had snoozed for no more than a quarter of an hour. Ten minutes more and the plane would be over the jump zone.

In the narrow cabin with its hermetic port-holes, Tom glanced briefly at the narrow doorway into the cockpit where a single pilot was concentrating on maintaining course. Beyond the multiple luminous dials, the darkness of night could be seen progressively giving way to the brightness of a new day, which shone in, giving shape to shadows that had till then been hidden in the darkness.

Sitting to either side on uncomfortable foldaway seats, eleven men from American Special Forces were ready. Just like Tom, they were wearing black jumpsuits and helmets with clear-glass goggles. Their weapons were Kalashnikovs, stowed in the main compartment of the large sandy-colored sacks that rested on their thighs. All these troopers without exception had a beard, whether long or short. Glancing at the eyes of these parachute specialists, Tom read in them faultless professionalism. They were just waiting for the red light to stand up and leap out of the stale air of the plane into the much fresher air of the sky.

At her master's feet, Bella, the dog trained to detect explosives, was also on the alert. At the slightest jolt from the plane, her eyes showing her cunning, the German Shepherd raised her snout toward her master to smell out any whiff that might betray excitement at the great jump that was about to come.

Apparently noticing nothing of any interest, the animal turned her head toward Tom and sniffed curiously at his calves. He mechanically stroked her neck over and again.

Lost in thought, Tom went over again the plan that his friend Alan had concocted to reach Charlie, Camilla's twin brother.

It was quite simple.

For several months, Mossad computer experts had been building up a ghost identity on the Internet: a former soldier,

skilled in making explosives, a recent convert to Islam who was keen to wage Jihad. He had eventually attracted the attention of an Islamist recruiter in the pay of Sultan, called Jawad. This man had invited the ex-soldier to meet up with him in Afghanistan for Allah's cause. The fish had been hooked. All that remained was to find someone to play the role of the fake Jihadi. That was where Tom came in. Ostensibly, he was going to cross the Pakistani border on foot and meet Jawad in a small Afghan town with an unpronounceable name. In fact, Tom would be accompanied by a squad of seasoned troops. The region was swarming with highway robbers and bandits, and Tom was too valuable to be lost to a stray bullet. His escort would take him as far as an abandoned mountain village. From there, under the constantly vigilant eye of a satellite, Tom would have no more than a dozen miles to cover to get to the township where Jawad was waiting. The escort would wait for a few days in the abandoned village, in case of a retreat or the need for an urgent extraction.

Mossad, and above all Alan, would naturally have preferred to do their own thing without the Americans, but only they had the necessary technological and military means in that part of the world. Besides, Fatima the spy was working for the C.I.A., so it was impossible to do without them.

Bella's raspy tongue affectionately licked Tom's hand. He gave the dog a friendly pat.

Sitting opposite Tom, the officer leading the mission winked conspiratorially. Tom responded with a quick smile.

The previous day on the American base, Tom had had a long discussion with this thirty-something captain with his hazel eyes and narrow face topped with a head of curly, longish hair. His charming smile emerged from a recently grown black beard cultivated just for this mission, because his habit was to go clean-shaven. Tom had quickly gotten on well with this Moslem American of Afghan origin, who called himself Abdel.

Sitting alongside him was his second-in-command, Sergeant Smith. His beard was fair and curly, and this short forty-odd-year-old had a lived-in face, marked by the tough years he had gone through. The deep furrows on his narrow brow, the eyelids reddened by streams of tears and sheltering two green gems of

eyes with a bitter expression, all spoke of the conflicts he had borne, hinting sadly at the loss of comrades who had died in arms.

His gloved hand pulled out a thin gold chain that hung round his neck and carried a small Christian cross. He kissed this over and again before slipping it back inside his jumpsuit. Then he briefly closed his green eyes and crossed himself with a quick gesture of his hand.

Mulling over such a ridiculous practice that was supposed to drive away bad luck, Tom smiled sadly.

In the depths of time, superstitious people had invented the Goddess of Fate to explain accidents, and signs to ward them off. When someone died suddenly in an accident, they systematically interpreted it as divine will. In fact, accidents were simply absurd, unforeseeable, cruel events, that struck blindly, affecting villains and good, loved and respected fathers of families alike.

Using a similar mindset, religious liars had claimed that one occurrence or another was the will of the deity that they served, ultimate proof that the doctrine they put forward must be true. So, a victory was interpreted as the will of an imaginary God, while a defeat was presented as a trial or test sent by that same dreamed-up divine being.

Mohammed had done just this when he interpreted his first victory as affirming the signs of the divine will that he claimed to represent.

When defeats had come along, Mohammed had asserted that they were trials willed by God to test the faith of believers. The godfather of Medina hoodlums had also, and especially, brandished the bogeyman of the Devil, responsible for all misfortunes. In the Koran, this deity of evil, fighting against Allah the Beneficent, was designated by the name *taghut*.

Everything that upset Mohammed had been demonized under the term *taghut*; all those who had dared to oppose his desire for all power had suffered the same fate. A modern inheritance of this pathological demonization was that Islamists called America the great *taghut*, Europe the lesser *taghut*, while democracy was *taghut*, everything was more or less *taghut* in their intolerant eyes.

This crazy notion of *taghut* was testimony to Mohammed's mental imbalance. He saw demons everywhere around him, and

had spoken of them in numerous verses of the Koran, going so far as to give over a whole chapter to them, called “The Jinns”.

Created from pure and smokeless fire, according to the Koran’s lying fable, these Jinns were a mirror reflecting Mohammed’s schizophrenia. In a hadith, characteristic symptoms of this ailment had been confirmed by his last spouse, the child wife Aisha. The Prophet had been “bewitched” and suffered from such hallucinations that he thought he was doing what in reality he was definitely not.

This behavioral problem inherited from a bloodthirsty lunatic had been handed down from generation to generation. This psychosis had been set up as a dogma, a delirious, unspeakable and inerasable belief, making Islam into a huge brotherhood of loonies who imagined beings that had never existed.

Islam was nothing more than an immense, collective schizophrenia. The infected patients were frightened of imaginary demons, praised fictional angels, and prayed to a fantastical Allah that was nothing but the projection as a heavenly double of a man with a split personality.

Open denial of the visions of all these sick folk would lead to an even worse ailment: paranoia.

When schizophrenics hallucinated, in the grip of a waking dream of nightmarish visions, they saw imaginary beings that they took for real, who seemed to speak to them and often wished them ill. Their consciousness did not understand the reason why all the people around them could not also see these evil creatures. So as time went by, they ended up by concluding that the folk that laughed at their delirium were only pretending not to see these demons, and were plotting against them and thus in fact the accomplices of the devilish enemies who desired to bring them down.

So paranoia took over.

That had happened to Mohammed, who had developed a murderous paranoia. Anguished by the mockery of what he said and by imaginary plots against him that were recounted in the Koran, he had not hesitated to order the killing of all those who denied the reality of the Jinns that were a figment of his psychotic delirium.

When the Murderer of Medina had been unable to be physically rid of all those who had thoroughly understood that his behavior was sick or criminal, he had resorted to what he was best at: casting lots.

Childish Bedouins loved this kind of superstition. When they could not convince an adversary, they preferred a cursing duel to reasonable argumentation, especially when they were fresh out of arguments to win over onlookers.

In the Koran, as faithfully noted down by his scribes, Mohammed had boasted of winning by default one such duel against rabbis. In the challenge of sorcerers he had proposed to them, participants would have had to declare solemnly “By the God X or Y, may I die if I am lying!” or otherwise to make similar serious proclamations of the same nature, packed with terrifying curses including their families or their tribes, all this to be done in a consecrated place in the presence of witnesses and following a prescribed ritual.

However, victory had come easily for Mohammed. One of their ten commandments prohibits Jews to take the name of the Lord their God in vain, so the cunning Prophet had been able throughout his preaching to deny any truths he did not like by calling down the curse of Allah without any consequence.

In fact, the whole Koran is a criminal collection of threats, Arabian sorcery and curses. It culminates with the cursing of Uncle Abu Lahab, whose sole crime had been to say, not without some humor, that it did not seem decent to him to raise the buttocks higher than the head when prostrating oneself in prayer.

At the present day, this religious cursing was Moslems’ favorite defense.

At the slightest criticism, as soon as they lost valuable points when trading arguments with free thinker, Moslems did what Mohammed had ordered in his Koran. That is, they refused to discuss anything with those whose hearts Allah had supposedly hardened so that they would be blind to the truth. Then, just as their superstitious guru had been adept at doing, they launched curses as they ran away, saying that the free thinkers would end up in Hell.

Tom sighed.

There was no way of making believers who cursed you at the least difference of opinion see reason. They refused to listen to the truth, or when they did deign to consider the proofs which were after all clearly written down in the Koran, they rapidly got angry and saw red.

A red light that had just come on could be seen inside the plane's fuselage.

"Red," Abdel shouted so everyone could hear.

He stood up, as did all his men.

Tom too.

Like devils, their faces blood-red from the light, pairs of men hastened to check their parachutes and adjust their goggles. The dog-master slipped a muzzle onto his faithful beast and clutched her to his chest.

The rear hatch of the plane opened slowly, the noise barely audible above the roar of the engines. Icy cold swept in as a jump platform six foot square lowered and locked into place.

Tom checked the G.P.S. co-ordinates on the dial of his watch as Abdel made for the edge. On the horizon spangled with fading stars, a beam of light burst out. An ember-red sun was beginning to flood the immense plain with golden light that rolled across it from east to west. Under the brightening sky, the mountains at places resembled a desolate lunar landscape that the moon still hanging in the vault of Heaven stared at with impassive face.

Since it had taken off, the plane had been flying low, never more than fifteen hundred feet above the sleeping Earth. The pilot had pulled back on the stick to take his twin-engined craft up to double that height. Now above his objective, he throttled back so as to slow down, then flipped a switch on his control panel.

In the cabin, a green light took the place of the red.

"Okay! Ready! Set! Go!" Abdel chanted.

The first soldier out into nothingness was Sergeant Smith. He was quickly followed by two more soldiers at three-second intervals.

Tom went fourth.

With two strides, he plunged out into the invisible current of cool air. The deafening flow seized him brutally and spun him round, experienced parachutist though he was. Tom found himself facing the same way as the black-winged aircraft. The plane quickly shrank into the sky as if sucked up by one of the scattered high clouds.

Beneath him Tom saw the three blue chutes of the men who had gone before him. They were already navigating carefully one after another, their sand-colored sacks swinging between their legs.

Their elongated shadows on the ground seemed to rush up to meet them, drawing them on at breakneck speed. Tom had to make haste to deploy his parachute. He reached his hand out to the ripcord handle. Nonetheless, for a couple of seconds that felt interminable, his gloved hand seemed to hesitate.

The sight of the sun with its crimson rays playing over the surrounding mountains was hypnotic. The sensation of floating in the air was intoxicating, even heavenly.

All he had to do was to close his eyes and he would be there for ever. He just had to let himself go and in an instant everything would be over.

Death would enshroud him in eternal peace.

Tom forced himself back to reality.

He angrily snatched at the rip handle. A moment later a wall of silence brought his chute up short, barely nine hundred feet from the ground.

Sergeant Smith had just landed on the green plain. Using him as a target, Tom hauled on the left toggle and the parachute spiraled down. After one last turn, through good use of the controls, the cords spilled air out of the canopy so he could make a soft landing.

As soon as he hit the dirt, Tom gathered up the parachute canopy and clutched it in his arms.

Up in the sky, the drone of the plane as it headed back to base gave way to the muted sound of the last few parachutes flapping in the air and finally reaching the ground with a whoosh.

With his parachute in his arms, his helmet clamped down on his head and still wearing his goggles, Abdel came up to Tom.

“You opened low,” he said in English. “Any trouble?”

“No, no problems!” Tom replied with a sketchy smile he hoped would be reassuring. “Everything’s fine.”

“If all’s well, then let’s go!” the officer responded.

The twelve jumpers mustered, stripped off their black coveralls and slipped on the clothing they had in their big sand-colored sacks. With a Kalashnikov slung over their shoulders, they were now dressed like most of the people in the area. They had blue, white or fawn pants under a long matching tunic, a dark sleeveless coat and on their heads what looked like a badly made pancake, a flat hat of unbleached cloth, known as a pakol cap.

Tom’s shaven head contrasted with his long thick beard. He cautiously fitted the hat over his battered temples. On the side where the tear-gas round had exploded leaving a blackened depression, there was a scab spattered with yellowish iodine covering the burnt skin. Where the fragment of glass had cut deep into the flesh, Tom had needed several stitches. The palms of his wounded hands had also required some nursing care.

Once they had concealed the parachutes under a couple of big rocks, the men set off after the dog-master. They all called him by his nickname Winnie.

He must have been about thirty, athletic with a thin face framed by long brown hair and a light beard. His sharp white teeth, his narrow mouth and nose, his pinkish complexion, all gave him a girlish look, an air of sweet stubbornness, but the steely gaze of his gray eyes added flashes of wildness.

No longer constrained by her muzzle, her nose sniffing the air above the grass, the German Shepherd pulled on the lead that Winnie held firmly. In Indian file, the squad advanced toward the mountain track that ran off into the hills at the end of the plain.

At that point there began a steep rocky path, cut into the side of the first of the hills. A crystal-clear creek ran slowly down it, ending in a large still pool of pale blue water.

Along the edge of the bluish stream, tall majestic trees cast their troubling shadows over the water. To the carefree song of the birds, the twelve men walked cautiously onward.

Bella set their pace. With tongue hanging out, she was sniffing at air and ground, deciphering the various scents she could detect, stopping here and there to get a better appreciation of some particular animal trace or to enjoy the damp breath of the creek that murmured in its eternal course between dark rocks. From time to time, the dog-master urged her on, so she would not be distracted by all these unimportant scents, but focus on the only reason for having her there: detecting improvised mines that were likely scattered around the area.

Four hours of walking went by without the German Shepherd noticing anything abnormal.

As if bleached by the fiery sun, the yellow pathway was now sprinkled with white pebbles, the only crop that land seemed to bear at present. The creek had disappeared among the rocks, while the trees had thinned out and yielded pride of place to huge boulders between which at every step there were glimpses of the green valley. The vast, blue sky, upstream and down, had barely a few scraps of white cloud in it and the light coming from the midday sun fell mercilessly casting nary a shadow.

Dust stirred up by a light breeze mingled with the warm air and settled on damp, tense faces, spangling beards with golden pendants. Sweat flowed down the foreheads of the men who marched on with a mechanical step, not saying a word, constantly on the lookout.

As they went round a bend Bella suddenly stopped. She sat down quietly, tongue hanging out, and turned her crafty snout toward her master. Winnie immediately raised his fist in the air and the squad halted.

Sergeant Smith went cautiously forward to look for what the dog had signaled by her pose. He delicately brushed back the soil and finally found a copper wire hidden under half an inch of loose dirt.

Not wanting to take any risks, he signed for the men to turn back. They mustered fifty yards lower down and Winnie took advantage of the halt to give Bella the reward she deserved for her protective work.

The dog-master petted the animal and threw her the object of her desires. It was her motivation “sausage”, a long and thin

piece of jute fabric colored red and stuffed. While Bella enjoyed nipping at her toy, Abdel gave his orders and the formation worked round the danger point by leaving the track and going cross country for a hundred paces or so.

Another hour went by with no incidents.

The abandoned village finally appeared at the end of the route that cut through the heart of the mountains like a slash wound.

Perched on a steep rocky slope and half swallowed up by the green vegetation that was slowly taking back the land, a score of small square houses with flat roofs were piled one on another, level after level, like a dirty, yellow card castle. Lacking doors, windows or intact shutters, the openings in their walls gave testimony to the murderous exactions that had driven the owners to flee from their homes. The rock walls bore the impacts of bullets, bearing witness to the summary executions that had transformed this place of life into the abode of death.

The twelve strangers made themselves at home in the midst of this site of desolation. Abdel gathered his unit around him to pass on instructions as to how they would settle in.

Three hundred yards away, a flash in a clump of trees attracted Tom's attention while the captain was talking. For a moment, he thought it was a fragment of glass shining in the sun's rays.

When he realized his mistake, it was already too late.

The bullet whistled past his ears and finished its trajectory in Sergeant Smith's head. Like a stringless puppet, the soldier flopped to the ground, his green eyes staring lifeless at the sky, as if in a last supplication mingling surprise and disapproval.

Coming more slowly than the projectile, the crack of the sniper rifle rang out.

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Seemingly immobile above the sky, God contemplated the Earth.

In the infinite silence of space, he observed that small scrap of land where one of the twelve had just lost his life.

Was it his emissary? Was it Thomas Anderson? Who was the traitor that had killed him? He would not be long in seeing all that, as he always ended up by seeing everything.

His cold, soulless eye transmitted the scenes that it detected down to a large room of luminous whiteness sunk somewhere in the bowels of the Earth.

Sitting comfortably there, ten or so operators were busy with their computer monitors, deciphering and analyzing the images sent to their screens by the satellite. They had nicknamed it “God”, because it was all-present, all-seeing and even all-powerful when teamed with drones that could let loose divine wrath from the skies.

In theory, nothing could escape the lenses of the machine in geostationary orbit around the planet.

All the same, it had not detected the presence of the sniper, and that error had just cost one of the commando team’s members his life.

That’s what Alan was thinking at that moment, a helpless spectator watching the giant screen in the C.I.A. command center, where the Mossad agent had been invited as a consultant.

Standing beside him and giving orders was Mike. Shaven-headed, the regional director for the C.I.A. was a black American fifty-something. He was well over six feet tall, a thin figure in a dark suit that was buttoned up too tight.

From the start of the operation, thanks to the satellite, Mike had been following the plane from its departure through to the parachute jumps. He had carried on accompanying them with his dark eyes on the consoles, as the tiny shapes with microscopic faces had infiltrated into hostile territory as far as the abandoned village. Through “God’s” eye, he had observed them trudging on in the digital, two-dimensional universe of the flat monitor screens, always in a tall, broad view that covered several hundred yards of ground to insure enhanced security, so that the men looked like a shapeless group of Lilliputians.

Mike now needed a much more precise view, a much higher magnification.

“Give me a close-up of the body,” he ordered in his Texan accent.

On the giant screen, the image zoomed in rapidly. A wrinkled face with staring green eyes appeared in perfect focus.

“That’s Sergeant Smith,” one of the operators reported.

Inwardly, Alan sighed with relief. Tom was fine.

At least up to now.

The eleven men left in the squad had immediately taken cover in the village houses. For the moment, they were more or less safe from the sniper’s fire.

“Find me where the rifleman is,” Mike ordered. “Use the thermal imager.”

“Got him!” an operator exclaimed, his thick-lensed eyeglasses betrayed his short sight. “Look, sir, he’s running for it.”

On the main screen, a moped could be seen slowly leaving the village along its only road. The rider was wearing military khakis, had a sniper-scope rifle slung over his shoulder, and wore a short beard and a green bandana round his head. He suddenly accelerated and his long black hair streamed out on the wind.

“Don’t lose him! I want to know where he goes.”

The operator nodded and stabilized “God’s” eye on the fugitive.

The moped sped along for three miles.

“Fuck!” Mike cursed. “Where did they come from?”

Seven black pick-ups and two trucks with canvas covers had just appeared on the road. The backs of the four-by-fours were crammed with men armed with Kalashnikovs. The moped rider stopped, talked briefly to the driver of the first vehicle, then did a U-turn leading the way for his cronies toward the abandoned village.

“Where’s the fucking drone?” Mike asked.

Swiveling on his leather seat, the short-sighted operator turned away from his control screen and looked at his boss.

“It will be in position before the enemy reach the village, sir.”

Mike smiled wolfishly, revealing startlingly white teeth.

“Perfect!”

The operator entered the co-ordinates for the drone and connected it to the satellite. Then he selected all the targets to be destroyed.

In silence, Alan watched how each element of the enemy convoy was picked out with red markings on the giant screen. A three-minute countdown was displayed. The Mossad agent was inwardly jubilant as he saw the seconds ticking away like drops of blood trickling out of a dying body. They signified the total destruction of that band of Islamic terrorists.

However, something unusual happened: the convoy suddenly stopped.

The driver of the lead vehicle got out, a telephone in his hand. He looked at the sky, as if trying to spot something. He strode along rapidly toward the first truck shouting orders. The truck’s black tilt was quickly folded back and a ground-to-air missile came into view on the load bed.

“What the fuck!” Mike swore, his eyes wide open.

He helplessly watched the launch of the missile which within an instant brought the shattered drone falling from the air.

His face pale, Mike asked slowly, “Where are the other drones?”

“I’ll check, sir.”

“Okay, while you’re doing that, contact the Captain and tell him to make his way back to the drop zone with his men to ....”

“Sir!” another operator interrupted. “The enemy are also on the move on the mountain trail.”

On the main screen, a line of a dozen or so cross-country motorbikes came into view. They would not be long in reaching the edge of the village.

“Fuck it!” Mike cursed. “When will that fucking drone get there?”

“Sir, the other drones are not immediately available,” the answer came. “The closest can’t be in position for another thirty minutes at least.”

“Thirty minutes,” he muttered, as if speaking to himself. “In thirty minutes, it will be too late.”

In the command room, surprise gave way to fear: the squad was doomed. In half an hour, the drone would be useless. It would not be able to use its weapons against the enemy without risking hits on its own men, who were bound to be encircled within the next few minutes.

Only a miracle could save them.

But miracles only happened in films or in novels.

Alan was dumbfounded, too.

His brain was racing, ideas bubbling up in his head.

How had the terrorists gotten to know about the drone? Who could have given away that confidential information? Who knew about Thomas Anderson’s mission?

His accusatory thoughts went immediately to Fatima, the C.I.A. agent infiltrated into Sultan’s harem. Could he have turned that young woman? Had she become a double agent? Had she succumbed to the siren song of money?

That just did not seem logical.

An alarm bell rang in his head.

Alan got the impression that something was being hidden from him, that the Americans had not told him everything. He could feel it in his bones. When he had that sort of feeling, he was rarely if ever wrong.

So with doubt nagging at him he slipped quietly out of the bowels of “God”.

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As the sun declined, it seemed to roll down the roofs of the small square houses toward its fate back of the mountain. It was a spectacular sunset, a slow descent through the clouds that

transformed into a crimson trellis through whose gaps flowed streams of gold.

With nightfall, the moon would pour out a river of pale light and the attackers would make use of it to carry out their last charge.

That would be the end.

Sitting on the ground with his back to the wall, Tom looked around the L-shaped room where he and his comrades were holed up. Five hundred square feet of empty space, with a hundred or so spent Kalashnikov shells scattered over the dusty floor.

When the sniper had killed Sergeant Smith, Abdel had given the order to take cover in the dilapidated houses of the village. He had quickly sent off two groups of four soldiers to take over one of the abandoned buildings each. The Captain had kept Tom with him as well as Winnie and his dog. These three and Bella had taken up positions in one of the houses a little further back from the others.

Abdel had thought he could orchestrate defense from there, keeping radio contact with his men and the command center. However, an unforeseeable trap had quickly closed around them, as they had been encircled by an enemy ten times their strength.

In the first few minutes of combat, Tom had been able to block the entrance of their refuge with old planks and a rusty but heavy stove. For hours, Tom, Abdel and Winnie had exchange shots with their foes through the opening of a small window, without the rebels managing to get close enough to throw in a grenade that would have brought sudden death.

The other two groups had not been so lucky.

After several loud explosions, radio contact had been lost.

The threesome knew their comrades were all dead and that their turn would come soon. They were short of ammunition and could not drive back another attack.

It was already a miracle that the three men and the dog had survived this long. Enemy bullets had gone right through one part of the yellow wall, making it look like a huge lump of Swiss cheese.

Huddled in one corner of the room, Bella let Winnie stroke her gently. She was trying to overcome the new stress that had been transmitted to her by her master. His body was involuntarily releasing a strange scent of anxiety, the odor of an unknown fear that Bella had never smelled before.

That scent of fear was the sign of imminent death, inescapable death that could be read in Winnie's gray eyes.

Abdel's eyes were shining with a totally different emotion, one that at first glance might have been a surprise.

His hazel eyes were bright with absolute serenity in the face of approaching death. In his mind, such an end was in no way frightening, but on the contrary a cause to be happy. Abdel was not going to die, he was simply going to return to Allah's Paradise to be alongside God and remain for ever in the Seventh Heaven.

He was certain of that, totally convinced.

The previous night on the American base, over a couple of beers, Tom had struck up a friendship with Abdel. They had talked long and hard about the forthcoming mission, but in the course of the conversation, with the alcohol relaxing the atmosphere, Tom had also mentioned Islam.

Abdel normally said very little or nothing about his religion to any non-Moslems. The little cat of his mind had too often been scalded when the boiling water of factual criticisms was brought into play against Koranic learning, so it was now scared of even the icy cold liquid of objective free thinking.

All the same, like any good negotiator, Tom had known how to listen to him attentively, without confronting Abdel's Koranic dreams with the harsh truths of the real world. He had listened to him in the same way you listen to children dreaming about the toys they expect to get in December, children you cannot tell the true secret of Santa without inevitably smashing their cute innocence.

Tom had previously had a few rare friends that were Moslems like Abdel. He knew by heart the beliefs that throbbed in the depths of their minds.

Abdel was an archetypical Meccan, a perfect clone generations later of the disciples of the Sage of Mecca.

He was intelligent, had been to the best schools, liked girls, partying and even drinking alcohol. He had been brought up in a religion of love, solidarity and tolerance.

His childhood had been as happy as any, his parents attentive and highly educated Moslems. His mother had probably not worn an Islamic headscarf and his father, witty and fun-loving, seemed to have been the ideal dad that any kid would dream of having.

Abdel had also had a second father, a hero who came straight out of a magic book: Mohammed.

Children always imagine their parents are superheroes, and Abdel had been able to fantasize about this marvelous genie coming from the Koran, a virtuous being with divine powers, since God could speak through his mouth. His noble heart had not for one instant ever thought that the Prophet could be evil, because thanks to him the Covenant with God had been extended from just the Jewish people to the whole of humanity. He had opened the gates of Paradise to millions of people, with no distinction of race.

Abdel respected the Jewish and Christian religions that had given the Prophet a spiritual birth. He respected them in the same way children are fond of their grandparents. Nonetheless, he cherished above all else that father who had brought him salvation through his heavenly book, a work that he knew by heart.

In the ocean of barbarity that was the Koran, Abel had not seen the smallest drop of hatred. So, in full good faith he had tried to convert the people around him. He did this as an attempt to save the souls that crossed his path of compassion, for the salvation of all these careless folk, out of sincere liking, love or friendship.

Abdel had really believed he was coming to the aid of the unwitting, for their own good, as you would stretch your hand out to castaways lost on an infernal, hostile desert island, hauling them into your ship of beliefs so that they could sail toward Paradise, rather than leaving them to perish in the flames of Hell because of their metaphysical ignorance.

However, after being faced with incredulous grumblers that set about refuting his arguments from faith with arguments of reason, Abdel had turned in on himself like an oyster on the reef of the Koran. He kept for himself the shiny pearl of salvation that he

had wanted to offer to these lost souls as they drifted over their ocean of stupidity.

From then on, any who refused to apply the divine explanatory handbook that was the Koran could go to blazes! Abdel would not give them the benefit of his conversation any more than he would to a lunatic.

The trouble was that he was the crazy guy.

He existed outside reality, which is what defines madness. He lived at all times in childish imaginary world that he had built up from a shameless reinterpretation of the Koran.

When you see Islamic countries where Moslems devoutly punish homosexuals, religiously whip adulterous women, and wall up honest women alive in their houses, States where the murderous orders of the Prophet contained in the Koran are applied to the letter, you can justifiably be surprised that a religion of love and tolerance is supposed to emerge from a bandit's handbook, the work of a murdering schizophrenic. It is hard to see how disciples like Abdel had managed to twist Islam into a religion of peace like the Christian faith.

Of course, to make Islam out to be a doctrine of peace, they can support their claims with the preaching of the Sage of Mecca that Mohammed was at the very beginning. However, these preaching cannot conceal the more recent verses of the Murderer of Medina. Worse yet, the older chapters attributed to the Sage of Mecca had been revoked by the blood-thirsty revelations of the Medina period, ordering mutilations, beheadings and executions.

So, like children refusing to accept that their father is a murderer and his words deadly, not being able to remove them from their dream book, Abdel and his like had reinterpreted the Koran. They had reviewed and corrected it.

For a Meccan like Abdel, it was a need not to take the Messenger's sayings too literally and certainly not to the letter as was done by the Medina tendency. Yet these latter had fully understood the only true meaning of the Koran, its literal sense. Mohammed and his heavenly double had spoken directly to his hordes of mindless brutes, making them specific promises about gold, slaves and women to rape, as in the chapter with the title "The Spoils of War".

Nonetheless, the Meccans refused to admit that the Medina reading could be correct. They refused to call a spade a spade or a murderer a murderer. They had made themselves believe that God, Who had manifested Himself to humankind through his intermediary the Prophet, had doubtless had to use figurative mythical language. Thus, they had searched in the Koran for proof for such a bizarre belief and thanks to their biases they scanned it for just one indication to confirm their ideas, disregarding all the countless pointers that disproved them.

In one chapter, they had managed to find some evidence that God might have used symbolic language with a double meaning. As he was communicating in code with his bandits, Mohammed had said that there were some explicit verses and others with a hidden sense.

That was enough in the Meccans' eyes to let them believe that the Koran had a divine double meaning. They could hold the view that it was necessary to spend years studying religion and Arabic before you could even start to glimpse the full extent of the spiritual content of its pages.

They could have done just the same with whatever handbook they chose to consider. You always find what you want to find when you allow your imagination take over from reason by putting fancy interpretations on a text. The Koran, though, was still an elaborate handbook for bandits, an operations manual for brigands that should in no way be understood figuratively, but unfortunately in a fully literal way, as the Medina godfather had intended.

In scrabbling around for metaphysical double meanings where there were none, Meccans might just as well have found them in an angling handbook. Fish could be human souls, hooks could represent human sins and Allah could incarnate the Great Heavenly Fisherman with his Almighty Pole, flipping any unbelievers that he caught into Hell.

However, an angler's manual was still just a fisher's guide, and the Koran was still just a gangster's handbook. It showed how to pass off criminal actions as acts of piety.

Despite this evidence Meccans denied reality to reinterpret the Koran down to its last words.

So, according to them, you had to realize that the precise descriptions of Paradise in its chapters were only symbolic. You had to drop the silliness about a Heaven full of sexy houris, where rivers of wine and honey flowed. These were just poetic imaginings, chosen by Allah to appeal to what was valued by the Bedouins of Arabia.

Likewise, Jihad was not holy war in the name of Islam, but had originally been the struggle against oneself to improve morally and spiritually. Jihad was as much a part of Moslems' daily lives as being good to their parents. However, with the passage of time a gang of fanatics, desperate for power, had completely twisted the meaning of this beautiful concept to distort it into the barbarity known at the present day.

Faced with the contradictions and incoherences of the traditions, Meccans like Abdel laid the blame on Islamic fundamentalists that had deformed, corrupted and interpreted wrongly the teachings of the Koran. The chapters of the Medina period should not be explained or taken at their face value as extremists did, they should be understood with their symbolic meanings, full of metaphysical suggestions.

Alternatively, using a tortuous logic when faced by other violent chapters by the Murderer of Medina, Abdel took the line that the aggressiveness in God's words indicated threats, not the intention to put this into practice. They were like those of parents making threats to their children so as to teach them, without ever actually harming them.

As for the murderous chapters that could not be explained away in these manners, Abdel quoted "other times, other ways" to legitimize Mohammed's massacres, even though barbarity is barbarity, whatever the historical period it occurs in. He was sure that the verses inciting believers to kill the Prophet's enemies were valid only for the period when they were composed. That time when war was necessary to make God's word triumph had long since gone and they had become invalid centuries ago.

Abdel in no way denied certain facts. He simply denied their significance.

This applied to the Jews of Medina, who had opposed Mohammed's tyranny. As Abdel saw it, these Jews had rejected

Mohammed out of greed, because the idea Jews had about a prophet was that he had to be someone who would be sure to make them lord it over others. Besides, they wanted their prophet to be a Jew, not an Arab. Moreover, the Jews had profited greatly from the quarrels between Arab tribes and it was thanks to this instability in the region that they had sneaked their way to the top in the field of trade. So they had seen the peace that Mohammed had brought to the tribes of Medina as a menace, not good news, and they had sought out secret alliances with the Meccans to betray the townsfolk of Medina.

When the Prophet had ordered the getting rid of those Jews, who were plotting to kill him, it had obviously been in pure self-defense. Similarly, the concept of martyrdom could only be understood as in defending against unjust aggression, never in an attack, and it should always be remembered that enemies should be forgiven, as the Sage of Mecca had ordered in his preaching.

For every page of the Koran, Abdel could identify faulty interpretations and misreadings, especially when it came to the heavily criticized verses that authorized men to beat their wives, or said that women were inferior to the stronger sex. On the contrary, women were the equals of men: the first Moslem had been a woman, in the shape of Khadijah, the Prophet's wife. The Islamic veils that women were supposed to wear were in no way an obligation, but simply a recommendation which was not binding. Likewise, drinking alcohol was fine, since the verse, rather than a total prohibition, simply said it was not advisable. Abdel could rest with an easy conscience, Hell would not be waiting for him over minor misbehaviors.

Through this permanent denial of the Koran, what emerged was nothing less than a rewriting of its chapters, a reinterpretation of its verses and sweetening of its tyrannical words. In this way, Abdel and his Meccan brothers had made up a new religion the exact opposite of what had been bequeathed by Mohammed on his death. They had set up a brand-new cult of peace diametrically counter to the murderous madness intrinsic to Islam in its origins, definitively shedding the load imposed by the Murderer of Medina and his hateful dogmas. This had already been done long before

them by earlier Moslems through the creation of innumerable mythological hadiths.

Made up out of nothing decades and even centuries after the Arabian guru had passed away, these legends of the words and deeds of an idealized Prophet had replaced the lies of the Koran with even cruder lies. They depicted a Mohammed that was humble, mild and chivalrous, the total opposite of the true personality of the desert killer. These marvelous fables called hadiths had filled up the legal and historical gaps in the Koran. They had retold history so as turn it upside down and make the origins of their religion seem not to be a mafia war of succession, which is what had actually happened when the godfather of Islam had died.

Did Jesus's apostles fight bloodthirstily over his inheritance? Of course not, since Jesus, unlike Mohammed, had not bequeathed a mafia for faithful henchmen to run.

Islam in its origins had known nothing but wars of succession between mafia godfathers called Caliphs, slaughtering one another for power in the Koran mafia and absolute control over it. Everyone aspired to be Caliph in place of the Caliph, triggering assassinations of the first few Caliphs in settlings of scores as bad as in the worst criminal circles.

The disciples of the late Sage of Mecca had wanted to bring this period of troubles to an end and hadiths had seen the light of day for that reason. There was a need to wipe memories clean of the historical reality that Mohammed's legacy had degenerated into gang warfare.

As time went by, tirelessly repeated lies eventually erased this from people's minds. The original Islam had been able to give itself a fresh look, giving rise to a new-born, peaceful Meccan version, even though it had emerged from the destruction of liberty and from wombs conquered by force.

Reiterated a hundred times a day by media that presented fallacious hadiths and counterfeited Koranic texts, these lies led to dangerous ignorance on the part of Westerners about Islam in its origins and about its Prophet. Some naively ended up believing that there was no verse ordering the killing of people in the name

of God, no chapter mentioning the Paradise awaiting Moslem martyrs that died while slaughtering innocent folk.

Claiming that they were the only true representatives of Mohammed's religion, Abdel and Meccan intellectuals like him held absolute monopoly of access to such media, which spread only lying reports on their lines. They deliberately hid the Murderer of Medina by giving the right to speak only to well-behaved Meccan historians, who perpetuated a retelling of history, with the aim of getting an Islam of peace and love to triumph in the democratic countries.

But was this brand-new Islam compatible with modern democratic values?

Of course, it was clear that Islam as revised and corrected by people like Abdel could be reconcilable with democratic values, just as the Christian religion was. However, the mere fact it was compatible with democracy did not make Meccan Islam legitimate, because it was false and rested on the same sort of long-standing lies as Christianity did.

Western democracies respected religious maladies so much that they allowed Abdel's version to spread within them, rather than inoculating themselves against this ailment by simply making people aware of the true face of Mohammed. There were national vaccination campaigns against infectious diseases, and the same ought to have been done against the virus of Islam. A national campaign of information showing the hidden side of Mohammed would immunize folk against him for good. However, democracies with a Christian culture were gullible, imagining that all monotheistic cults worked for people's good, were tolerant and should be protected. So, their human rights included freedom of religion, guaranteeing a right to be infected by the God Virus, to be ill without any obligation to seek treatment. It was as if dangerous schizophrenics had the right to be sick without having to accept medication, and even the additional right to spread to others their crazed view of the world as a true pandemic, in a democratic asylum with an open sky.

Every day well people fell ill with this religious ailment, their butterfly minds burning themselves on that bright but illusory flame, and through an imitative herd instinct they converted to the

schizophrenic folly that was Islam. Unaware of the real foundations of their religion, and seeing people like Abdel as a model to be followed, these sheep, less intelligent and less well read than he was, believed that the model was true. However, Islam, whether the Mecca or the Medina version, was a form of mental alienation that could affect even the cleverest.

Abdel was no exception to this psychological rule. He was a Meccan sheep, a gullible lamb, one of God's flock who, unlike the barbarous and wolfish Medina bunch of criminals, was quite harmless.

While the Medina-style Islam of that gang was dangerous, Abdel's version was not so at all.

It was simply contagious.

The current of thoughts that flowed like a jerky waterfall through Tom's mind was interrupted by the sound of steps on broken glass. The noise cut sharply through the silent heart of the falling night.

Tom stood up in the shadows of the room, making no sudden movements. He glanced through the small window at the scene outside.

Three hundred feet away, another eye was watching, glued to the lens of the sniper rifle. When the shadow stood out against the window, a finger squeezed the trigger instinctively and the bolt slammed into the detonator of the shell, spewing hell into the long rifled barrel. The red-hot bullet parted company with the cartridge case, spinning on its axis as it sped out of the muzzle with a long explosive shriek as it flew on faster than sound.

An instant later, it gave a deadly kiss to the motionless head, shattering the skull with its metallic fury, freezing thoughts into nothingness, and reaching its mark sent treacherous dreams of life up to the heavens.

## 10

### **Eighth Commandment: Though Shalt Not Taste Watered-Down Evils**

Nowadays when an Islamic suicide-bomber blows himself up, killing innocent victims, disciples of the Sage of Mecca rage in the media against such an odious crime. They ask whether this God crazy had really read the Koran, which they claim forbids killing anyone.

Nevertheless, the question that these Meccan disciples ought to ask is different. Have they all read the same version of the Koran?

There have been numerous publications where all the violent terms have been omitted, where all the murderous verses have been censored, and translations revised and corrected to promote a religion of peace in the West. Virtually nothing has been left of the authentic Koran of the religion's origins as piously read by the disciples of the Murderer of Medina, not disguising one single word, unlike what Meccans do.

For instance, these people sugar the pill of the chapter "The Spoils of War", which has a verse reading, "Smite the necks and smite of them each finger". At first sight this might be believed to be a recommendation to punish a naughty child for some silly act by giving a friendly tap on the neck or to chastise a poor pupil by a whack on the fingers with a ruler.

Nevertheless, in the real version in Arabic, the undoctored meaning has to be taken as “Cut off the heads and chop off the fingers of unbelievers”.

In the substitutes for the real Koran spread about in the West, the distortions typically introduced by Meccans are without limits, and are perpetual rewritings to camouflage the truth.

Some day soon, yet another sugared version of the Koran will see the light of day. In it the verse ordering the beating of women will disappear, its place taken by an injunction for men to stay distant from them, because the Arabic word used in the passage can be understood as not meaning “scourge”, “beat” or “strike” but simply “separate”.

In the near future, Meccans will push this watering down of the Koran to its extreme. A bashful veil will be drawn over “slay the idolaters wherever ye find them”, which will not even be kept as “repel them firmly”, but end up as “embrace them tenderly”.

By denying the demonic personality that their guru turned into after the Hegira, refusing to acknowledge his criminal background and rejecting any thought that Allah could have ordered barbarities, Meccans can act calmly with the conviction that they have the truth.

They rectify the “errors” in the Koran by watering down the evil expressed in the words of the verses. If the cunning Medina gang do not complain at this literary treason, it is as a stratagem of war: Islam spreads in every land where it is in the minority.

Nevertheless, the mechanics of demography and gregariousness mean that a day will come when it is in the majority. Then there will be no more make-believe or false pretenses and like a phoenix arising from its ashes the authentic Medina Arabic Koran will return in full splendor, its tyrannical power sweeping away individual liberties and gagging Meccan Moslems and their watered-down Koran. The saber of Islam will bring down its cutting edge on the necks bent before it.

*Extract from the novel “The Sage of Mecca” by Thomas Anderson.*

## 11 War

The Meccan's head rolled along the ground, cut off cleanly.

For a second that seemed endless, Mohammed looked at the horrible face covered with black whiskers, with its long, animal-like white teeth. Yellowish flickers were reflected in the eye-sockets staring vacantly at the burning sun, while a fiery liquid trickled slowly out of the severed neck like a snake slithering away.

As if they were blinkers hiding an unendurable sight, Mohammed raised his open hands to the level of his temples, while raising his head toward the sky. That way he no longer had to see that creature in the pay of Satan.

He walked a few steps forward, then stopped next to his white mare. He spared not one more glance for this Meccan scout who had been captured, then beheaded on his orders.

Screwing up his eyes, the Prophet started to scan the horizon.

Far off, the Meccan army seemed to be protected by a cloud of sand stirred up by thousands of feet, apparently ready for combat. Among all those Meccans who had come to fight, Mohammed was aware that there were old friends of his and family members, youngsters he had known since they were born. He also was aware that he was going to have to run them through with the saber that hung from his belt.

Following the Prophet, around three hundred men were prepared to throw themselves into the coming battle. The

fratricidal conflict would see brothers, fathers and sons killing each other.

That was God's will.

*How had it come to this?*

To think that it had all begun with a simple rumor!

In the Submitters' impoverished households word went round that the townsfolk of Mecca had seized the property that they had left behind in the city when they emigrated to Yathrib, and had decided to go and sell the goods in the North. A caravan of a thousand camels had left Mecca bearing the riches stolen from the Submitters. His followers had asked the Prophet to intercept the caravan to recover their property. Mohammed had not backed this plan, not knowing if the rumor had any truth in it.

All the same, after a period of absence, God had finally dispatched the angel of revelation to give him the order to attack the caravan. Mohammed had hastened to raise a troop of three hundred men. They had been recruited too late: the thousand camels were already out of their reach. The Prophet had then decided to surprise the convoy as it made its way back toward Mecca. At the head of his troop and of seventy camels, Mohammed had ridden on his white mare to cut off the caravan, which was heading home laden with fabulous wealth, the proceeds of the sale of the plundered property.

However, cunning spies had warned the Meccans. The latter had seen their chance to fight the Prophet and his disciples openly. They had gathered an army three times his strength. A thousand men were on the point of attacking, and would probably swoop down on the City of the Prophet to take the lives, property and goods of the Submitters.

When his own spies had warned him of the imminent arrival of this military force, Mohammed had been in a quandary about what decision to take. Should he intercept the caravan as God had ordered or should he fight the Meccan army? He had held a consultation meeting to establish an action plan. He did not wish to influence the Submitters, and even less so the Ansars or Helpers who made up the greater part of his strength, because the latter were not bound by their war oath to combat outside their own

territory, or to take part in a battle with which they would not necessarily agree.

Nonetheless, they had all without hesitation decided to confront the terrible Meccan threat. That very same evening, after the meeting, the angel Gabriel had come in person to comfort Mohammed in this courageous choice.

The troop of Submitters and Helpers had thus headed quickly to face the foe. Three men took turns being carried by each of the seventy camels.

“The Meccans are there, as we thought!”

Ali’s sing-song voice rang out. The young man went along with Abu Bakr and Omar beside the Prophet. Dressed wholly in black, the three men had covered their faces with the tails of their turbans, so that only their eyes could be seen.

“By God’s grace,” added Ali laying his hand on the Prophet’s green cape, “the watering point tactics have worked perfectly!”

The plan had involved sending men to dig dry any wells where the enemy might have gotten water. This forced them to come to the location chosen for the coming battle: the Badr well, which was held by the Submitters.

“They are short of water,” said Ali. “They will be really thirsty and the ground is favorable to us.”

Omar shook his head and grumbled.

“What does it matter if they are thirsty? They are still better armed than we are. They all have chainmail armor and swords! Our people with that sort of equipment can be counted on the fingers of my hand.”

His huge hand pointed to the Meccan army.

“There are a thousand of them over there. The spies say they are all mounted: seven hundred camels and three hundred horses. We have just three horses.”

Ali gave him a friendly wink of complicity.

“But God is with us! Heaven will protect us.”

“What about the caravan?” growled out Omar’s voice. “Have you thought about that? They will join up with them for sure and bring water for them to drink.”

“No,” cut in Abu Bakr. “I have just been told the caravan has taken the seashore route. It will be no problem for us.”

The Prophet nodded thoughtfully.

*“Oh God! Should I give the order to attack now?”*

The effect of surprise was crucial.

To achieve it, he had decided on a trick, ignoring long-standing traditions. Whenever enemy tribes met on the field of battle, it was the custom for each of them to bring forward their best poets, who declaimed verses praising the bravery and nobility of their own people and scorning their ignoble opponent. For the Bedouins, words were as powerful as the sword. In such poetry they exalted courage and liberty, honored their friends and mocked their enemies. They heaped praise on the valor of the men of their tribe and the beauty of the women. They chanted their poems in the infinite expanse of the desert, beneath the vast blue sky, attesting to the grandeur of the minuscule human creatures that journeyed interminably over the desert zones of the Earth. Such word battles, ending in combats between rival champions, showed that it was more a question of an honorable duel than of war. Fighting was a matter of moments of tumult, boasting and above all of exhibitions of strength that caused far fewer victims than real wars. One of the two sides would end up on top, but victors never pushed their advantage too far, because that would run counter to the concept of honor that had to be respected. When one of the two groups recognized defeat, the dead on both sides were counted up and the winners even had to pay a blood price to the losers, so as to maintain some sort of balance of power between the forces of each tribe.

However, times had changed.

Truth must triumph at any cost. There was no longer any room for playing at honor when confronted by Satan’s henchmen.

It is true, that to content nostalgic hearts, the story-tellers could make up a tale of an attack by the Meccans that came after preliminary dueling in which several notable Meccans died. Enraged, the enemy supposedly attacked a Prophet humbly riding a she-camel and the Submitters who had maintained a position of strategic defense, which was to cause terrible losses among the Meccans.

*A nod to history.*

Through the surprise effect of a heroic charge, Submitters and Helpers absolutely had to massacre the greatest possible number of their enemies, so that they could strike a decisive blow and quickly gain the upper hand. Such an attack, running counter to the customs of war, would strike terror into the hearts of the Meccans, and God would grant final victory.

Mohammed raised his eyes and hands to the Heavens.

The night before the clash had already been spent on prayers and invocations. However, God had remained deaf to his supplications. The Prophet had to persist: he could not confront an army three times the size of his own without the support of the Almighty.

He inwardly began to pray to the Lord with all his might. He stretched his arms so high that his green cape slipped off his shoulders and fell to the ground.

*Oh God! I beg you in your mercy to grant victory over our enemies.*

In response, a clap of thunder echoed out over the plain. It was followed by a heavy silence in which the figures of Submitters and Helpers stood unmoving, as if converted into mute stone statues of soldiers. The sun itself halted in its course across the firmament. On high, dark and menacing clouds spread as fast as a horse can gallop from East to West, as if a huge carpet being unrolled by titanic hands.

To his astonishment, Mohammed realized that it was not rainclouds that were impeding his view as far as the horizon, but swarms of angels accompanied by the noise of beating wings.

*Angels*

These heavenly beings formed an immense army flying wing to wing. Their vast bodies covered the sky and hid the sun, which suddenly vanished from sight.

How could he vanquish a thousand men mounted on a thousand steeds face to face? God had just given him the answer: a thousand angels would combat the infidels in a heavenly charge down from the heights of the sky.

An intense, powerful, growling voice confirmed this truth to Mohammed.

The voice which resonated in the Prophet's mind was not Gabriel's. It was the voice of God himself, and was louder than a thousand thunderclaps.

"I shall succor you by sending a thousand angels, who will deploy one after the other."

Coming down from God's glorious throne, these comforting words rang out in the Prophet's head as a promise of victory. A broad smile on his lips, fortified by these words from God that would forever be engraved in his memory, Mohammed turned to his men.

"Victory awaits us!" cried the Prophet. "Is it not enough that God is sending three thousand angels to our aid?"

He rushed to his white mare.

Just before he mounted, it came into his mind to perform an act that might seem odd. He took a handful of sand and threw it in the direction of the enemy.

"May your faces be confounded!" rose a shriek from his mouth.

God commanded the wind to carry this sand into the eyes of the infidels. Mohammed saw in the distance a gigantic cloud of dust blinding the ranks of Meccans.

Delighted by this new miracle from God, the Prophet hoisted himself onto his steed. With the flat of the blade of the saber that he drew from its sheath, Mohammed tapped his mare's cruppers, and she leaped forward as fast as lightning.

This sudden departure of the Prophet somewhat surprised his troops. The seventy camel cavalry whipped up their mounts, which set off at a steady trot. They were immediately followed by the infantry, running as fast as they could so as not to be outdistanced. The Prophet was already a hundred yards ahead of them, and he was continuing to head straight for the enemy.

The wind was blowing strongly on Mohammed's face. Above him, the angels had taken the initiative. They would soon be bursting in on the Meccan front line. The latter had lost their

order, breaking formation in the greatest confusion. The enemy were abandoning the battlefield even before combat commenced.

On the back of his steed, Mohammed turned round.

Following him, Submitters and Helpers had formed in two attacking lines. Thanks to a miraculous optical illusion, surrounded as they were by a cloud of sand, Mohammed got the impression that they had increased tenfold. This immense phantom army, combined with the sight of the angels, had cast terror into the Meccans.

*I will throw fear into the hearts of those who disbelieve!*

The voice of God had thundered out in the sky. As the first angels were bursting in on the enemy forces, the Almighty gave them an order.

*Smite the necks and smite of them each finger!*

The angels obeyed God's command. Fifty yards off, Mohammed pulled up his mount with a jerk, fascinated by this miraculous reinforcement. The scene left him with no reaction. For a while, although it seemed an eternity, Mohammed became a motionless spectator, his eyes fixed on these heavenly beings that were everywhere pursuing the enemy, whose expressions were of total fear.

The angels held sticks in their hands and with them they beat the infidels who had fallen to the ground. Every blow an angel struck on a soldier seemed to break all his bones from head to toe, to burst his veins and crack his sinews. Men hit in this way jerked convulsively, though no wounds were visible on their bodies, and not a drop of blood flowed.

Such was the power of God.

*The hosts will all be routed and will turn and flee!*

The Almighty had once more growled in the heavens.

It was at that precise moment that the Prophet's cavalry caught up with him. At a trot, they pushed deep into the battle zone. They were particularly surprised to find bodies lying on the ground and to see Meccans who were fleeing on foot, on their camels or on horseback, swept along by the mad wind of panic. They nonetheless charged a large troop of enemy horsemen who were trying to regroup, and the frontal clash was very brutal.

The infantry of the Submitters and Helpers also arrived. They threw themselves at the victims stricken by the angels, going at it with a will to use clubs or knives to get the blood to flow from these weird bodies that had suffered the wrath of God, and were in their death throes without any apparent wound. All the same, some Meccans had broken necks, others had been decapitated, but it was not the work of Mohammed's men.

He began shouting out what God had just said inside his head.

*Ye slew them not but Allah slew them! Thou threwest not when thou didst throw but Allah threw!*

"Liar!" shrieked a voice.

As if he had sprung up from the desert sand, a Meccan soldier, sword in hand, threw himself at the Prophet, who was still sitting as motionless as a statue on his steed. The mare reared in fright and her unseated rider fell heavily backward. The Meccan, his face contorted with hatred, thought it would be easy for him to finish off a man on the ground. He leaped forward without seeing Omar's sword, which sliced right through his throat.

Blood jetted onto the Prophet's face and white tunic. He noted a dull ache in his back and slumped back onto the warm sand, closing his eyes. When Mohammed opened them again, it was to see Omar kneeling at his side and watching over him. The Prophet slowly got back onto his two feet with a grimace. The still invisible sun resumed its normal course in the firmament, following God's orders.

The faint cries of the wounded, almost musical, rose endlessly into the sky still full of angels. The death rattle also echoed in the throats of men with shattered jaws and mouths full of blood and smashed teeth. Broken hands, with fingers hanging by just a thread of skin, were lifted everywhere to implore the help of the living.

The Meccan camels and horses had also suffered the frontal impact of the attack, collateral victims of the furious clash of arms. The plain was littered with their prostrate bodies. Some lay in horrendous positions with their sides split open and their entrails pouring out. Some horses were on their backs with their four legs raised stiff into the air. Some had not yet breathed their last and

lifted their wounded heads at the slightest sound, swinging them left and right, then letting them drop back down. Others were motionless but over and over again released a loud whinny, the plaintive cry of a dying horse, so typical, so terribly painful, that the very air trembled.

At a slow pace the Prophet wandered among these heaps of animals, of good and evil men. His haggard gaze went from one soldier to another, from friend to foe, his eyes constantly blinking. Swarms of flies were already buzzing over the gaping flesh, returning over and over again in their hundreds to drink the fresh blood seeping from wounds.

Faced with this macabre spectacle of desolation, Mohammed was in no way distressed. On the contrary, he was happy for those Submitters who had gone off to stand beside God. Death was the greatest miracle that could befall a man, on condition, of course, that he died in a state of Submission.

*Thank you, God, for this victory.*

The sky split its shackles of cloud, letting through a thin ray of sunlight that descended on the corpse of a Submitter. Along this beam of dazzling light, two young women of irresistible beauty, totally nude, came gliding down.

*The virgins of Paradise.*

Mohammed modestly averted his eyes from these heavenly companions who had come to take care of the earthly body of their spouse. The Prophet's attention was drawn to two decapitated heads lying side by side, staring one at the other in a fixed grimace of incomprehension.

Mohammed immediately put a name to these two Meccan faces that he had known for years.

"Oh, Walid!" rang out his cry. "Oh, Amir! You should have listened to God and his Prophet. We have won what God promised us! Can you say the same?"

Omar, who was trailing a few steps after Mohammed, was surprised by these comments.

"You are talking to dead bodies!" exclaimed the giant.

The Messenger turned round. He stared into the eyes of his companion, who was so swathed in black that only his perplexed

eyes could be seen. Astonishment could also be read on the faces of the dozen Helpers and Submitters standing back of Omar.

“By the One Who holds my soul,” said the Prophet, “they hear me as well as you do.”

*And I can hear them, too!*

The mutterings of souls that had not yet finally left their mortal bodies came to Mohammed’s ears. He could hear them as well as see them, as he had glimpsed them well before the battle. The previous day the Prophet had come to reconnoiter the terrain and before his startled eyes God had shown him a vision of the following day, a glance at the positioning of the troops of Meccans that were doomed to die the next morning. With this vision of the future in his head, Mohammed had personally pointed out to Ali where a foe would be killed. This miraculous timeless image was proving precise. Wherever the Prophet had indicated a dead foe, as Ali could bear witness, exactly there lay a Meccan corpse.

Among all those bodies lying on the ground, Mohammed could now also see a good few Jinns.

*Jinns.*

Their faces were mostly a nameless horror, halfway between a man and an animal. Some had snouts like a dog’s, with long canine teeth, others looked more like monkeys or hogs covered in black hair. Their eyes were terrifyingly bright in the light of day, burning with a smokeless flame able to pierce to the heart any man with a simple glance, unless great care was taken.

In the City of the Prophet, when he first started seeing these diabolical beings among the inhabitants of the oasis, he had at first thought he was going mad. Then the thought that he had been bewitched had come to the fore. He had not dared to look at himself in his small mirror, for fear of seeing the Devil in person in his reflection and with his own features. To ward off the heavy shadow of these horrible creatures, present even in his own home, Mohammed had ordered that henceforth no fire should be kindled there. He preferred cold at night to visions of horror. During the daytime, he moved around with eyes downcast, adopting a sort of humble posture that permitted not to have to meet the gaze of these evil beings that surrounded him on all sides.

For day after day Mohammed had performed long prayers in the place of prostration, silently imploring Heaven to come to his aid. However, God had not brought the bewitching to an end.

Quite the contrary.

On evening, before the gathered Submitters, a demon had attempted to interrupt the Prophet's prayers. He had had to fight with this imperceptible creature that he alone could see, watched by astounded spectators. After a fierce struggle, he had gotten the better of the demon. He had wanted to tie it to one of the pillars of the place of prostration. On reflection, though, he had chosen to let it go away, humiliated.

Shortly after this incredible episode, Mohammed had been unable to sit down in an empty room, as all the seats had been taken by angels. During his prayers, the Prophet had bent down to try to pick up fruits from Paradise that had just appeared before him. So, after all these odd happenings, Submitters had taken to looking at him strangely, exchanging worried whispers behind his back.

*I am not mad and I am not bewitched.*

Mohammed knew this now, everything he had seen had no connection to madness or to evil spells. The Prophet had simply been given a gift from Heaven, the Eye of God.

This third, secret eye allowed him to see the world as it truly was. Gabriel had finally come to reassure Mohammed about this new ability to perceive his surroundings and given him precise explanations of this universe that remained invisible to men. While up in the firmament angels found themselves side by side with demons, on the Earth humans unwittingly lived alongside others of God's creatures every day.

*Jinns.*

When God had made man out of clay that rang like pottery, He had also created Jinns from the flame of a smokeless fire. Generally invisible, Jinns could take on different shapes: animal, like the serpent, or human. When they took the form of a man, these beings of fire were able to eat, drink, breed and die, submitting to future salvation or damnation. Having supernatural powers, they could influence humans spiritually and mentally, and even take physical possession of them.

A patch of exposed skin was enough for them to get inside any human body.

Aware of this threat, Mohammed understood better God's order to oblige women to go fully veiled. As his friend Othman had told him, the weaker sex was an easy prey for evil Jinns, and the Devil through them.

*To think that Othman is a Jinn.*

Othman had a powerful memory. He was of medium height had a thick gray beard, broad shoulders, and long arms covered in hair. His handsome face, white but with reddish cheeks, showed the scars that were the outcome of a childhood illness. The Jinn inside him had likely gotten into his body at that time.

When Mohammed had discovered that his friend was a monster incarnate, his first thought was to kill him. However, his murderous intent had not been carried out. A saber to his throat, Othman had managed to convince the Prophet with his explanations about the intrinsic nature of those of his kind.

Not all Jinns were evil beings. Some were good, like Othman, and venerated God. For fear of humans' reactions if they showed their true face, they remained hidden under a human appearance. Like men, Jinns were God's creation; like men, Jinns could disobey God and commit sins; like any man, a Jinn might turn away from the Creator and serve the aims of the Devil.

Othman had explained to Mohammed that the presence on Earth of evil Jinns of that kind was the reason that not all men had become converts to Submission, despite the miracle of his recitation. At the beckoning of the Devil, evil Jinns had influenced men, turning them away from God, from his Prophet and from Submission.

No-one could have any suspicion of the actions of these shadowy enemies as they worked for evil. That was because no human was capable of seeing them, apart from Mohammed with his Eye of God.

His hands clasped in supplication, Othman had begged Mohammed to accept his excuses for not having told him the truth earlier. He had beseeched him never to reveal his secret, and the Prophet had agreed, confirming his silence with a pact: Othman

would be the one who would denounce evil Jinns, the man who would point out which people were under their influence. In the ranks of Submitters and Helpers, Othman had been able to reassure Mohammed that only good Jinns were present, working wholeheartedly for Submission. However, all that was God's secret that men should not learn, lest they were driven to kill these good Jinns by a fear of such different beings. The presence of so many Jinns among the Submitters was due to the Prophet's own deeds, since he had converted a large number of them without realizing it. These strange conversions, along with all the other facts that Othman had revealed, had been confirmed out of the very mouth of the angel Gabriel a few nights later.

As a proof of his sincerity, Othman had not been sparing of details. He had explained how some Jinns had been living for such a long time in a person's body that they even forgot their own true nature, convinced that they were human. He had also given the Prophet protective spells allowing Jinns to be warded off. Henceforward, Mohammed would have available a range of charms that were particularly efficacious.

Nonetheless, the Prophet had pledged never to reveal even the smallest part of his anatomy to Othman. Of course, he had confidence in him, but prudence was mother to safety. He had no desire for Othman, confused through some underhand trick by the Devil, to take over his body. Out of precaution, the Prophet had likewise requested him not to take part in the battle of Badr. Othman's confessions were recent and Mohammed wanted him to prove himself first, before bringing him back as a close companion deserving a place at his side. Mohammed had excused him before the troops ready for combat, saying he had a family problem.

Omar laid his huge hand on the Prophet's shoulder, bringing him back to the realities of the battlefield.

"How do you feel?" growled out the stentorian voice.

Looking anxious, Omar was worried for the Prophet, whose beard and white tunic were splattered with enemy blood. His saber quivered in his hand as he seemed prepared to strike anyone who got too close to him.

"I am well," answered Mohammed.

The Prophet's eyes focused on the bodies of the Jinns.

In past times, men had believed they saw in them demigods with extraordinary powers. They had even raised some of them to divinity, worshipping them like gods, when Jinns were just another work of God, as were humans.

*They will all pay for their blasphemies!*

On the Earth, free will protected men and Jinns from death. It was this faculty of having a choice that had made it possible for Satan, not to mention Adam and Eve, to disobey God. God now had need of the sabers of the Submitters to send to Hell all those who broke His commandments. There, the Almighty could punish them eternally in vengeful fires.

For more than a decade, the oppressed Submitters had been pure pacifists. They had suffered insults, threats and persecutions, without ever raising a finger in opposition. That period was now at an end. God had given the order for self-defense, protecting the faithful from the assaults of all those, whether evil Jinns or men that were their accomplices, who were surreptitiously aiding the machinations of the Devil. Truly, there were times for peace, with its portion of patience and indulgence, but there were also times for a just war against Satan and his henchmen. If Submission was to survive in this world and until the end of days, peace was no longer possible. Sooner or later the Devil would end up by enslaving humankind with his legions of evil Jinns.

The battle of Badr was just a culminating point in that ancestral struggle, the fight between good and evil, between God and Satan. Through the victory won through the grace of the Almighty, Mohammed had proved to all the truthfulness of his prophetic mission, the legitimacy of his deeds and of his words, and the authenticity of his recitation.

This day was a new day, a day when Truth had shone out before the world, a day for distinguishing light from dark, true from false. News of this day when an army of angels had stricken down the Meccan troops would spread from mouth to mouth, from startled mind to mind. Success would inevitably engender success, and the Arab tribes would quickly grasp which side God was on, and would come in hordes to join Submission.

On his glorious throne, God sat, satisfied with this day of decisive combat. His pens would write lines about it in the Mother

of Books. To commemorate its date, lest it ever be forgotten, God would soon instate a rigorous fast lasting a whole lunar month. It would be henceforth forbidden to eat or to drink for that period, from dawn to dusk. Those who were obedient to this rule would be rewarded by having their sins washed away, a sure promise of Paradise.

Like all Submitters, Mohammed would conform humbly to this divine will reported by Gabriel. During this month of drastic abstinence, under the light of the moon looking down on him, the Prophet would finally find that his Eye of God had unexpectedly disappeared, leaving him no access to perception of the invisible world, and wiping away for ever his visions of Jinns, whether good or evil.



## 12

### Quisling

In the half-light of the falling night, the bullet whistled in the air for fraction of a second. The sound of the shot followed an instant later, covering the noise of the fall of a lifeless body.

Tom turned with lightning speed.

Abdel's corpse lay in the middle of the dark, dusty room. He had been unwise, moving forward into the frame of the small window, and his error had been fatal.

However, was it really imprudence? Had Abdel perhaps tempted fate so as to bring things to a rapid end? Had he succumbed to the siren songs of Allah's Paradise? Had he allowed himself to be distracted by the whisperings of the houris so as to die a martyr in their eyes?

Abdel now lay on a puddle of blood, his life at an end. His dreams of happiness had accompanied him into nothingness.

For a long minute, Tom's brain boiled.

He, Winnie and his dog Bella were doomed in the near future if they did nothing. They had to gain time, hoping in prompt help rather than accepting the imminence of an unavoidable end.

Just one solution was on offer. They had to surrender to the enemy.

Rapidly thinking out a plan in his mind, Tom went up to Winnie and muttered instructions into his ear. After a slight hesitation, mechanically stroking his dog, which was huddled

between his legs, Winnie's narrow face gave a silent nod. With the sad smile he made, his thin mouth revealed his sharp white teeth.

Tom moved cautiously toward the rusty stove and old planks that blocked entry to their refuge. One knee to the ground, he folded the metal butt of his Kalashnikov, disassembling the weapon that he knew by heart, and hiding the various parts in the oven compartment of the stove. He carefully closed the blackened glass door that gave a faint creak in protest.

No visible proof revealing that he belonged to the American forces could be allowed to remain.

Directly opposite the entrance, Tom lay down next to the wall, gagging himself with a black handkerchief. Winnie tied his legs and hands behind his back using plastic cuffs.

Winnie put his Kalashnikov down on the ground, took his knife out of his pocket and cut a long strip of white cloth out of his shirt. Then, holding Bella's collar with one hand, he went cautiously to the window.

"I surrender," he shouted out in English, "Don't shoot! I'm alone. I have your man here with me."

He waved the piece of white cloth.

"Don't shoot," he repeated, "I surrender!"

Outside, incomprehensible voices echoed out in the cool of the evening.

Everything speeded up: the sound of steps and shouts, and blinding lights.

With sudden fury, the attackers smashed the old planks that obstructed the entrance. With a kick, one shadowy figure sent the rusty stove rolling over the floor, and the side with the glass door ended up facing the wall.

Confronted with this noisy intrusion, and facing dazzling flashlights, the German Shepherd showed her fangs. She leaped forward, and Winnie was unable to hold her back by her collar.

Bullets cut through Bella's body.

She started yapping with pain in the face of this noisy avalanche of fire, turned round and went to take shelter against Winnie's legs. Surrounded by dancing lights, feeling her carefree life seeping out of her body, Bella sought out the gentle, saving

hands of her master. She lifted her snout questioningly toward him, as if seeking an answer to that fatal unknown that was already calling her away. With a last fateful kiss, uniting her two her kneeling love, her long raspy tongue affectionately licked the light beard and pink forehead covered by long brown hair.

Death took her.

Winnie's mild face grew angry and uncontrollable rage brought savagery to the gray sparkle of his steely eyes. He rapidly pulled out his pocket knife. The short blade snapped out as he fell prey to an unquenchable thirst for blood.

A burst of fire stopped Winnie short on the spot. He dropped his knife and collapsed onto the dusty floor, emitting a short cry of pain. Two bullets had hit him, one just above his knee, the other into his belly. Three shadowy figures leaped on him, kicking and punching his head viciously. Under this wave of violence, nose and teeth broken, Winnie lost consciousness. As he lay on the ground, he was solidly tied up with metal wire.

Flashlights played over the room, and their beams suddenly concentrated on Tom. In the flurry of action, the attackers had not immediately noticed this motionless body.

A man in his forties with a long tawny beard came up to Tom, crouched and shone a blinding light over his gagged face. Astonishment could be heard in his voice when he spoke to his followers.

Tom could not understand their language, but he could guess at the gist of what they were saying. Who was this American? Why had he been tied up by the other Americans?

The man stood up, took a cell phone out of the pocket of his jacket and punched in a number. He spoke with person at the other end for a minute or less.

It was clear that he had been told to do nothing and to wait for further orders. So, he left Tom exactly as he was, went out of the room with his men, then returned alone with a propane lantern that he put down in the middle of the room. The cold, steady light lit up the darkness with the faintest of snake-like hisses. With his Kalashnikov resting on his knees, the fellow squatted against the wall, keeping a suspicious eye on the two foreign prisoners.

Redbeard, as Tom labeled him mentally, showed no willingness to be cajoled by this mysterious American prisoner that was glancing pleadingly at him and trying to speak distinctly through the gag.

But there was nothing for it, Redbeard could have been made of stone.

Tom gave up any hope of dialogue with his captor. Worry had hold of his mind and a thousand questions jostled in his head. Was Winnie all right? Were his wounds mortal? Was he bleeding to death to the total indifference of Redbeard?

A newcomer entered the building.

This Jihadi looked like an Arab. He seemed barely twenty years old and was wearing military khaki fatigues. A green bandana was bound round his head, holding back long, curly black hair that reached down to a short beard. He had a sniper rifle slung over his shoulder, and a pistol and a machete hanging from his belt. He stopped in the center of the room.

For a few seconds, his light brown eyes looked at the two corpses: Abdel and Bella. He kneeled next to the German Shepherd and with a touch of sadness stroked the blood-soaked pelt.

Alongside the dog, an object attracted his attention. He leaned forward, supporting his weight on one hand, and grasped Winnie's knife with the other. The mirror-like surface of the dark carbon fiber blade reflected only nothingness, and that vision seemed to be particularly pleasing to him.

With the tip of his fingers, as the slightest of smiles played over his lips, he tested the razor-sharp blade, cautiously touching the steely serrations of the lower side.

As if he had suddenly remembered the reason for his presence in the place, he stood up quickly. He slipped the closed knife into his pocket and went to Abdel's corpse, gazing at it with a satisfied air. He kneeled and stuck his pinky into the forehead of his target, where the bullet had blasted a hole in its deadly passing.

Then in a totally detached way he pulled the machete out of its sheath.

Next, with a violence that was as volcanic as if it had shot unforeseen out of a sleeping crater, he hacked Abdel's head off with three blows.

Smiling, he carefully wiped his blade on the headless body and tucked it back into his belt. He grabbed his victim's head by the hair, stood up and pulled a white iPhone out of the pocket of his fatigues. With skilled thumb-strokes, he turned on the phone's camera and stretched out his arm in front of him to record a video selfie.

"*Salam alaikum*. This is Rashid," he said in French with a cheerful tone and a strong working-class accent. "Look, brother! Look at the doom that was the destiny of this American unbeliever! Come and wage Jihad in the name of the Prophet, *salla Allah 'alayhi wa salam*."

Rashid halted the recording and dropped Abdel's head, going to sit to the right of Redbeard. He watched the short video. With a smile on his lips, he seemed delighted with the macabre production.

As he lay tied up on the dusty floor, Tom held back a shout. He would have loved to scream out his disgust and rage at this gratuitous inhumane bestiality. However, to guarantee his survival and Winnie's, he had to keep control of himself.

Relaxing his muscles that had involuntarily contracted, he concentrated on his breathing, trying to get oxygen to every part of his body. His aim was to calm himself and mitigate the effects of the adrenaline that had surged vigorously through him, like hits of a drug, under the influence of the stress of combat.

Tom closed his eyes for a few seconds. It was crucial to show no sign of rejection, conscious or otherwise, of his captors, no trace of disapproval in his look.

His body language and the message on his face had to be in perfect harmony with his invented character. This would be especially so when he had to explain his reasons for being in that place.

If he wanted to survive, he had to be convincing, putting into practice all his years of experience in the field of gaining a hold over other people and dominating them.

Tom reopened his eyes. He scrutinized Redbeard and Rashid minutely.

In the art of negotiation and manipulation, the first operational phase was to find out who you were dealing with by rapidly drawing up a psychological profile, particularly whether they were neurotic or psychotic. The same approach would not be taken with a paranoid, who was rational, but systematically interpreted facts with a bias imposed by persecution mania, as with an irrational schizophrenic, who imagined all sorts of fantastic threatening beings that were the direct product of a sick mind.

Tom had trained in the best spy schools and with various foreign intervention teams. He had become an expert at profiling, knowing how to observe the least signals given by body language, how to interpret them at a glance, and how to work out the psychological profile of an individual.

Redbeard, with his chin slightly raised and the haughty way he held his head, combined with his permanent frown, was a paranoid personality. In Europe, that sort of distrustful individual was typically a member of some sort of grouping, political, trades union or even religious, which supported a cause. There had absolutely to be some evil person to combat, a conspiratorial Jew or an exploiting boss, a specific diabolical enemy to let loose sick aggressiveness against. You only attacked other people if you felt you yourself were under attack. Redbeard felt he was constantly the victim of aggression, even when not the least danger could be seen on the horizon by his always suspicious gaze.

In Europe, such cold, touchy megalomaniacs, sarcastic and scornful, keen on firearms, would betray their personality by driving powerful vehicles. They loved black four-by-fours, like survivalists, who saw autos of that kind as allowing them to run easily away from hordes of zombies sent to catch them. Of course, that did not mean that every driver of a black four-by-four had to be a paranoid. It just meant that almost all paranoids drove dark-colored all-terrain vehicles, or BMWs and Mercedes.

With this sort of rigid, combative character, hardened by the passage of time, with a one-track mind and assumptions that were never reconsidered, a belief in always being right and leaving no room for error, bluffing had to be avoided and no slips could be

made. Otherwise, you were very quickly classed as being part of the conspiracy. If that happened, you would face violent anger.

Faced with someone like that, the best thing was to stay calm, not letting yourself be overborne by the scary, restless eyes, and managing the fear that was generated inside you. Nonetheless, that fear was as nothing in comparison with the terror schizophrenics could arouse with their piercing look, making your blood run cold in an instant.

With their twisted views, they observed you with the eyes of a mad dog itching to bite, not listening to a word said to them. They paid attention only to the non-verbal language emerging through body postures, believing they could detect in it a hidden demon, or the arm of an alien that could shoot out of your belly at any moment.

Paranoids could sometimes be convincing with their conspiracy theories, because they used specific facts, but reinterpreting their meaning. Schizophrenics, on the other hand, never said anything credible. They constantly referred to God, or to extraterrestrials that communicated with them inside their heads.

When they sat listening to a radio or watching television, they had the impression that broadcasters were speaking directly to them only. They were convinced that the news coming over the air was addressed to them personally. In their craziness, often no longer bothering to wash, speaking or laughing to themselves, they hid themselves away to listen to music, so as to drown out the often threatening voices that echoed in their heads or, worse still, in their ears.

When their families or doctors told them they were in the grip of a waking nightmare and that their visions were just non-existent mental imaginings, schizophrenics could not get their heads around the idea that what they could see in perfect detail or hear fully distinctly had no existence in reality. They always in the end fell into a state of paranoia, convinced that the people trying to help them were plotting against them, attempting to turn them against the voice of God or their friendship with extraterrestrials.

Any rational dialogue with them became impossible. Just as it did with a religious fundamentalist.

Tom looked at Rashid.

He was not schizophrenic or psychotic. He was a psychopath.

With that sort of neurotic personality, you had to take care to flatter egos and never cause any loss of face. As there was no innate need for reciprocity in such types, you had to establish a relationship of all giving on your part, all taking on theirs. If necessary you could play with your cards on the table, and even joke with them, unlike with individuals of Redbeard's kind, who were impervious to other people's humor.

Having no sense of morals, guilt or remorse, Rashid and those like him were treacherous, egotistical and manipulating personalities that could not tolerate frustration, and systematically laid the blame on others, believing that they was never wrong. Endowed with charm, they enjoyed showing off at the wheel of powerful cars, often in bright colors. They were particularly keen on power, controlling others and above all making them suffer.

Detecting selfish egotists, and a thirst for justice, were innate even in very small children. However, if they did not kill one another in the playground, it was only because they had no firearms available.

Otherwise, they would calmly have committed a real massacre.

Before a given, relatively advanced age, children had no empathy. They could not perceive the harm or the pain that they could inflict on others.

Rashid had remained stuck at that childish stage. He had not developed any capacity to put himself in someone else's shoes. In his childhood, because of sexual abuse, mistreatment or neglect, his empathy had not gone beyond an embryonic phase. He had become deaf and blind to the feelings of his fellow humans, like someone born with no hearing or with no sight, excluded from knowledge of one part of the outside world.

As he grew up, he had become an empty shell with no true human feelings. He no longer functioned in terms of anything else but power, sex and money.

While paranoids and schizophrenics did not realize that they were crazy, psychopaths were well aware that they were different from other people. So, to merge into the mass of normal

folk, they wore a human, friendly, smiling mask in the theater of life. However, like transvestites trying to imitate women, their smiles seemed false. The surrounds of their intelligent and calculating eyes did not wrinkle as in laughing, betraying in this way the abnormality of their true nature.

Rashid was a soulless human being, who paradoxically was hoping to have a soul up in Heaven. In Allah he had found a good excuse for his urges as a human beast, thirsty for blood.

In France, Rashid must have been a minor criminal gone to perdition, constantly in trouble with the law, with a career of thefts and rapes against a backdrop of drug trafficking. In the slums of France, Islam was a religion for repentant delinquents, with its God that forgave everyone, even, or perhaps above all, criminals. A keen follower of *ghanima*, a belief that theft from non-Moslems was legitimate as long as it was committed for Jihad and part of the swag was handed over to the Islamic cause, Rashid had become one of God's hoodlums.

He had not embraced the mild doctrines of the Sage of Mecca in which he had nonetheless been brought up. Rather, he followed the teachings of the Murderer of Medina, which chimed perfectly with his unnatural human nature.

A Medina wolf had been born within him.

Involuntarily, Tom glanced at Abdel's beheaded body.

To an outsider, it might seem that Abdel and Rashid had similar symptoms and a single illness. However, the Mecca and Medina lines should not be confused. Followers of the first were ingenuous and kindly lunatics, while those of the second were dangerous neurotics or psychotics, machos devoted to evil.

No amalgam could be possible between the Mecca and the Medina versions of Islam. One was a simple-minded religion of contagious peace, the other a religion of conquest and hatred.

Abdel was the archetype of a disciple of the Sage of Mecca. Rashid, on the other hand, was a typical follower of the Murderer of Medina, a monstrosity created by Mohammed after the Hegira.

Abdel and Rashid were diametrically opposed on all counts.

All but their unconditional love of the egocentric Prophet.

At many points as one read the Koran, you could tell that Mohammed was a narcissistic personality. He was infantile, he had no regard for others and he wanted to be the sole object of all adoration. Just like a child, he wanted to monopolize the attention of everyone around him, making this plain by his blackmailing, menaces and angers.

Just like Rashid.

Tom once more concentrated his attention on Abdel's murderer.

They could have said that Rashid was simply following in the footsteps of the bloodthirsty Mohammed, that the hoodlum had taken the Medina godfather as his model. Instead, well-meaning doctors of theology soberly said that such people had become radicalized, that they had been indoctrinated and recruited, to end up waging an idealized Jihad.

Young Islamist Frenchmen went off to wage Holy War like Rashid, then returned to France, often with traumas from the horrendous massacres they had perpetrated in the name of the Prophet. The French legal system treated them with kid gloves, trying to "deradicalize" them, as if it were possible to "de-indoctrinate" them as could be done with a youngster recruited by a sect.

For the latter, the system could work perfectly. It was feasible to counteract the poison, as could be done with a drug addict, demonstrating how they had been taken in by a guru, explaining how they had been manipulated like puppets on a string. They could be brought to reject the lying beliefs that had poisoned their minds and become solid citizens once more, when far removed from the sect.

For returning Jihadis, nothing like that could be done.

Deradicalization of Islamic fundamentalists just could not work. The doctors in charge of the patients were contaminated by the same sickness that they were supposed to cure.

In other words, the curers were an integral part of the sect. They obeyed the orders of the dead and departed guru of Arabia, because they were Moslems.

Thinking it was for the best, out of respect for the Moslem religion the French authorities had set up a deradicalization structure headed by Meccan experts. The main reason was that they gave in to pressure from Moslem associations, who would have cried blue murder if Islamic fundamentalists had had the courage to abandon their crazy sect and its guru, if he was shown in his true colors.

Under the cover of being humanitarians, these lobbies paralyzed any attempt to shed light on the truth about Mohammed. They systematically brought anyone who wanted to reveal the secrets contained in the Koran before a law court, charged with incitement to racial hatred. Freedom of speech was totally muzzled. Most of these associations were financed by Islamic States, and acted with impunity as a fifth column working to undermine democratic freedoms and replace them with Islamic freedoms, in other words, with no freedom at all.

Because of these infiltrated mafia-like associations, sickness was trying to cure ill-health. Meccan experts were attempting to heal Medina fundamentalists, one kind of lunatic providing care for another.

As if schizophrenics could cure paranoiacs.

No cure could be envisioned, but Meccan doctors calmly hoped for one, certain they knew the truth, and convinced they could help these radicalized youngsters. They put forward a whole slew of arguments to explain their route from behavioral conditioning through indoctrination to enlistment. As they saw it, the young terrorists were just petty criminals that had become paranoid, mentally disturbed delinquents that had gotten bored with the enjoyments of vandalism and had fallen for the false interpretations of the Medina tendency. However, the Meccan doctors never pointed a finger at the real guilty party, the factor that triggered their murderous career.

The triggering factor was Mohammed.

Instead of calling him an impostor and a false guru, they continued to designate him with the noble title of "Prophet". As long as the triggering element was kept in the mental loop, the evil persisted.

What they did was like pouring oil on a fire.

Infected themselves, Meccan doctors were unable to identify the triggering factor. They presented the doctrines of the Sage of Mecca as the sole alternative to Medina-style indoctrination.

As Islam was a good religion, recognized by all world bodies, they could perfectly calmly shift their radicalized patients from the Medina to the Mecca version of believer.

They could then call them deradicalized, cured indeed.

However, this was an error. The patients had not left the sect, they had just moved away from the more murderous part of their guru's ideology.

Still suffering the same sickness, they continued to adore Mohammed. In an illusory way, they had enjoyed the privileged status of gods when fighting in the name of God. The idea of a place in the best part of Paradise was still going around in their heads. Their fingertips had brushed the starry skies, then they had dropped back down to the wretched world below. Such a brutal coming down to the ground left a bitter taste in their mouths. At any time they could decide that a second-rate place on Earth was no match for Allah's Paradise, and they were at risk of falling back into the worst of their religious malady and returning to the way of Jihad.

A shark that had once eaten a swimmer by accident became a man-killer for ever out of pure pleasure.

If Tom knew all the ins and outs of deradicalization intimately, there was a simple reason for it. A childhood best friend, Alice, was the psychiatrist responsible for a unit looking after repentant Jihadis.

Just the previous month, Tom had had a long phone conversation with her.

Brought up a Christian, Alice had converted to Meccan-style Islam for love, for her Moslem husband, an internationally renowned psychoanalyst. Love makes you blind, and she had fallen in love with a killer in the shape of the Prophet Mohammed, believing that the desert sect's guru was a prophet like any other, similar to Moses or Jesus, a Messenger of God who had brought a sequel, the Koran, a divine book that was a perfect continuation of the Old and New Testaments.

Through a distortion of reality, Alice managed not to mix up the delirium of her patients with her own. Despite being a psychiatrist, totally familiar with psychotic delirium, she nonetheless claimed that it was necessary to stop all the phantoms and beliefs that were engendered by the invisible world surrounding us, and show people how they were real. As she saw it, Islam had provided all the details of the world of Jinns, which we could not see, but that we were in permanent interaction with. There was a need to learn the protective formulas passed down by Mohammed, and then to explain and inform, with kindness and mercy, about the reality of this universe of spirits.

For Alice, the paranormal was normality. She believed that the proofs for the existence of these phantoms were abundant in every corner of the Earth, proofs that were more or less scientific, even if not yet explained. She took as absolute truth all the gossip that might go to show there was a world of invisible Jinns, all the incredible tales of near-death experiences, all the stories of miracles that science could not fathom, and all the legends about apparitions and specters. Nonetheless, faultlessly professional, she rejected as nonsense identical accounts coming from schizophrenics she had to treat.

A paradox of psychiatry.

Like a woman denying the proofs of her pregnancy, Alice rejected the vision of the monster hidden under the face of her spiritual father. She refused to comprehend that in his days Mohammed had acted like any other dangerous psychopath and that it was a big mistake to look on his Koran as a religious book, when in reality it was just the tool of a manipulative despot, totally lacking morals or scruples.

It had been no use for Tom to tell her that her religion was just a sect that had been successful. She paid no heed, like schizophrenics clinging to their imaginary mental constructions.

Alice had mentioned God's perfection. Jokingly, Tom had retorted that such a perfect God had nonetheless ordered circumcision, as if to correct a design error in the perfect assembly line of Eden.

Alice had angrily brought the phone call to an end with a traditional “May Allah guide your steps and lead you to the right path”.

Sadly for the right path of truth and for the history of humanity, every religious assassin was followed around by an expert in casuistry armed with an eraser.

Redbeard’s phone rang.

He answered the call and spoke with the caller for a minute or more. A frown on his forehead, he stared at Tom curiously, then grumblingly ended the call. He leaned over to whisper something discreetly into Rashid’s ear, as if Tom had to be kept from hearing.

Rashid nodded silent agreement and stood up.

He walked over to Tom and thoroughly searched him as he lay trussed up on the dusty floor. Rashid found a Swiss passport in the name of Thomas Anderson and small book with green designs on the cover. It was the copy of the Koran Alan had given Tom before his departure.

Rashid waved the Koran above his head as if it were a precious jewel and Redbeard muttered a couple of words. Rashid smiled and answered him in a language that Tom could not understand.

Slipping the passport and Koran into the back pocket of his khaki pants, Rashid kneeled down and removed the prisoner’s gag.

“*Salam alaikum*, my brother,” Tom said to him in French. “I’ve come here to make Jihad in the name of the Prophet, *salla Allah ‘alayhi wa salam*. I was heading to meet a friend of mine called Jawad in a town near here. These American sons of bitches must have been on my trail, though. The C.I.A. wanted to capture me, but thanks to Allah, *jalla jallalah*, you were there.”

His eyes shining, Rashid leaned his head toward Tom’s.

“Do you take me for a fool, or what?” he chuckled. “We found the American parachutes. There are twelve of them, and you were the twelfth man.”

Rashid drew the pistol hanging from his belt and put it against Tom’s temple.

With a sharp movement, he squeezed the trigger.

There was a flash of light and the detonation rang out into the depths of the night.

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The jolting movements of the plane woke Alan.

With his one good eye, he glanced at the sports watch on his wrist. He had slept for barely thirty minutes. All the same, he had the feeling he had slept a whole lifetime.

He stretched his arms and legs, then tugged his gray suit into shape. He was sitting alone in a comfortable private jet with window blinds closed and stark lighting. Alan had his bad day look on his face.

Thomas Anderson's infiltration mission had been a total fiasco. By now, Tom was probably dead, killed by those wretched rag-head salamalaikums.

Alan derisively called all Moslems by the nickname "salamalaikum". They always said *as salaam alaikum*, wishing him peace, but they seemed to have at the back of their mind the fact that Alan was a Jew and that they should keep their distance from him as the Koran commanded. Worse still, some might get the crazy idea of whipping out a knife and putting into practice Allah's injunction ordering the killing of Jews.

How could you not feel a bit paranoid when you were around a salamalaikum?

When a salamalaikum told him that Mohammed, Allah and the Koran were the friends of the Jewish people, Alan had trouble containing himself at such hypocrisy. There were countless chapters in the book spitting out hatred against his folk, not to mention historical passages revealing the racist genocide orchestrated by Mohammed.

When Hitler died, the Nazis had had to pay the penalty for their massacres of Jews. The salamalaikums had never had to do so, because when Mohammed died, the evil empire he had built had been the winner.

If the Nazis had won too, people would learn in school that the extermination of the Jews was justified to guarantee race health. Hitler would still be adulated to this day, just as Mohammed was adulated.

It was always the winners that rewrote history in the books. Thinking of his friend's writings, Alan sighed.

There was nothing left of Tom, but the silent shouts of his works.

On the tray table in front of him, Alan stared at the cover of the book *The Sage of Mecca*, with its hypnotic whirling snakes. Tom had not found a publisher for the literary bombshell this novel constituted, but Alan had had a copy printed up for himself.

Alan was in agreement with his friend when Tom wrote that it was easiest to exploit the cracks in a pre-existing faith. So sects with the aim of getting money or political influence built on the Judeo-Christian heritage, the Messiah and the end of days, claiming that their message was the sole authentic version.

Mohammed had done exactly the same, and his Koran had served as a tool for imposing his dictatorship. This meant that the text of the Koran had been made up as the Medina godfather had needed, to justify the crimes committed by his growing sect, to make mock of his foes, to exterminate the Jews, to intimidate the superstitious, to encourage the faithful into combat, or to organize the dividing up of spoils and sex slaves, naturally keeping the lion's share for the head of the mafia.

Mohammed's religion was indeed a mafia. As in the latter, you could only leave Islam in a shroud; a contract was called a fatwa.

In the fifteenth century, Gutenberg had provided Europe with the authentic text of the Bible. The outcome had been persecutions, massacres and burnings at the stake. In modern days, the world had rediscovered the original mafia Koran, stripped of any sugar coating, and the result was terrorist attacks, barbarities and wars.

When would humankind stop believing all that old garbage?

People still continued to mutilate Jewish and Moslem boys by circumcising them. This inhumane, barbarous and ridiculous act came from ancient times when it was believed that the Moon gave life and took it back. To prevent having life being taken back too soon, to avoid the loss of young children, these ancestors had sacrificed to the Moon a crescent of flesh, the foreskin, by analogy.

Circumcision was nothing but a superstition inherited from a polytheistic lunar cult.

As an atheist, Alan sometimes looked back fondly on those ancient times when polytheism reigned, before the terrible invention of intolerant monotheism, whether Jewish, Christian or Moslem.

After all, intolerance was not an essential part of any belief but monotheism: a single God had by nature to be a jealous God not tolerating the existence of any other God. In contrast, gods in polytheism were naturally tolerant: they lived and let live.

Idolators happily accepted the various gods of their own religion. Later, this tolerance spread to foreign gods, who were received with hospitality, and who later in some instances were given equal rights.

Only monotheistic cults had provided the spectacle of wars of religion, persecutions, and the courts of the Inquisition. Only they had desired the destruction of representations of foreign gods, from the demolition of Hindu temples to the blowing up of Buddhist statues, to the destruction of the Pharos that had stood under the Sun for three thousand years.

Having set limits to the powers and functions of its deities, idolatry naturally admitted the gods of other sects and nations. This made all the various gods and goddesses, all the different rites and traditions, compatible with one another.

In contrast, monotheists recognized just one single object for their devotions, convinced that their worship was fully agreeable to the Deity. As it stood to reason that one and the same Deity could not be satisfied by differing rites and principles, the various monotheistic sects felt loathing one for another and brought to bear on others the holy zeal and hatred which were the most implacable of human passions.

Any religion that imposed blind obedience could not produce people capable of thinking in a free and critical manner, independent of doctrine.

All religions were lies, their teachings as futile as their promises of a better life after death. Their sole useful feature was to offer some reason for hope to the wretched of the Earth, slaves of a global system that chained them to their workplaces like beasts of burden. Thanks to the Paradise they were promised, they could better face up to the Hell in which they lived on Earth. Alas, when they died and their worldly sufferings came to an end, there would be not a sniff of this Paradise, they would never see its gates.

Alan brushed his fingertips across Thomas Anderson's book.

Tom was dead and his novel would end up forgotten, too.

In the book, handsome, good Mohammed was the tree hiding the forests of Koranic lies. Tom had cut down this rotten wood so that minds, freed from a truncated vision, could forge ahead freely, dodging the stumps of media mystification, and going as they willed to the end of the trail to truth, where the road to liberty commenced.

However, there were secrets that humanity ought not to know, as the cure was sometimes worse than the disease.

In any case, Alan had no say in the matter, as his bosses had long since made their decision, telling him, "Unless sheep can talk like parrots, they'd do better to keep their mouths shut". So, of this tiniest sand grain of doubt that could clog the intellectual gears of the captive human machine, of *The Sage of Mecca*, just this one printed copy would remain.

In his jacket pocket, Alan's phone started vibrating.

One-handedly, he scanned the message just sent to him by his spy inside the C.I.A.

His white eyebrows moved into a frown.

So, Alan had been right. By deliberate omission, the Americans had misled him about Charlie. He had not been told everything they knew about him.

As always, if after analysis of all the data the only possible explanation was improbable, then the improbable must necessarily be true.

Looking back, Alan now understood better why Thomas Anderson's mission had been a complete fiasco and had ended with the death of his friend.

His single good blue eye glanced at the cover of the novel with its twisting serpents. As if by magic, they seemed to come to life and begin a threatening rotary movement.

Thinking of the very real threat posed by Charlie, Alan could not help bringing his fist crashing angrily down on the spinning snakes.

The optical illusion ended its hypnotic dance.

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Rashid was shaken by vast, thunderous laughter, a laughter with cold, mechanical echoes. In an unpleasant symphony it rang out into the depths of the night, just as had the noise of the bullet that had ended up by hitting the wall.

At the very last moment, Rashid had lifted the barrel of his weapon by just a touch. The breath of its passing in a burst of flame had caressed Tom's temple.

"Did you see the virgins in Paradise?" Rashid chortled between two bursts of laughter. "If you could see your face".

His tone suddenly turned serious again. He put his pistol back into its holster and got Winnie's knife out of the pocket of his khakis.

He cut through the plasticuffs that bound Tom's arms and legs. Stretching his hand out to him, he helped the released captive to his feet.

For a couple of seconds, the two men stared at each other.

"I know who you are," Rashid finally said with a smile on his lips. "Jawad talked to me about you a few days back. But I didn't make the connection when I saw you. That was Jawad who

just called us. He worked out that it was perhaps you who'd been taken prisoner by those unbelievers.”

Tom nodded without a word but was about to thank him when two fighters came into the room. Obviously attracted by the shot, Kalashnikovs in their hands, they looked questioningly at Rashid.

In his mind, Tom nicknamed these two men in their thirties Joe and Averell, because their resemblance to the Dalton brothers in the *Lucky Luke* cartoon series was comical. One was very short and had a sparse straggly mustache that even a teen would be ashamed of, while the other was tall, gangly and toothless, with a long beard and the look of a simpleton.

In the language Tom could not follow, Rashid explained the situation briefly before giving them an order. Muttering under their breath about their leader, Joe and Averell stomped out.

Rashid grabbed the Coleman propane lamp from the middle of the room. He made a small detour to laughingly kick the decapitated head that rolled further along. He put the lamp down in front of Redbeard. He had stayed sitting cross-legged, leaning back against the wall with his Kalashnikov on his knee, watching the mock execution without any reaction. Frowning, his face closed and suspicious, he steadily observed Tom.

“Come and sit here, my brother,” Rashid said invitingly.

Tom sat on the ground opposite Redbeard.

Rashid put a handkerchief printed with the Algerian flag on the dusty floor. He took out of the back pocket of his khaki pants the Koran that he had found when searching Tom and he put it carefully down on the handkerchief before sitting down alongside him.

By tradition, nothing should be put on top of a Koran, not even another book. It should never be placed in a pile underneath other works, but always at the very top.

A fleeting incongruous image formed in Tom's mind. What a problem for an Islamic bookseller, superstitiously unable to put copies of the Koran on his shelves one on top of another!

Joe and Averell returned, sweeping across Tom's field of vision.

They had brought paper cups and a hot teapot out of which curls of aromatic vapor were rising. Sitting around the Coleman lamp, Joe and Averell handed round the warm drink, strongly scented with mint.

In thoughtful silence, the Jihadis took small sips from their cups.

Tom did the same.

Eyes fixed on the cold unwavering light of the lamp, he did not dare to look to his right, where Winnie was.

Was he still unconscious? Was he dead?

As if he could read Tom's thoughts, Rashid glanced toward Winnie. Hatred for the American was written on his face.

Tom suspected that for a Frenchman of Algerian origin like Rashid, any C.I.A. agent would be the living symbol of American imperialism, the direct inheritor from French colonialism, which he hated more than anything else. In his inner mind, Rashid lashed out at these colonialists for having used force to impose their language, culture and materialistic decadence on the whole world, and especially on Algeria.

He lay at the door of European and American imperialism the responsibility for all the ills in creation, betraying the memory of his noble ancestors. However, Rashid, the shadow of his forefathers, was proud of a different imperialism to which he had pledged allegiance.

Arab imperialism.

That was his pride, what he praised and admired.

Rashid docilely closed his eyes to that Islam which had conquered by the sword territories that had belonged to ancient civilizations. It had crushed and ground into nothingness many a culture, like that of the Berbers, his own origin.

In Algeria, Arab imperialism had not just imposed a new language on a people whose mother tongue was Berber. It had even managed to convince these folk that they were ethnically Arabs, a travesty of the truth. Even worse, it had pushed them into accepting a religion which was totally alien to their own religious traditions.

Like quislings and collaborators under the Occupation that had bowed to Nazi Germany, there could be no better symbol of submission to Moslem imperialism than the picture of the Algerian people prostrating themselves five times a day toward their conquerors homeland, Arabia.

Most Moslems worldwide had been pushed into embracing a religion invented thousands of miles away, into reading a book in a language that they could not understand, in a script that they learned to read and write before they did so in their own mother tongue or the official language of their country. These Moslems knew much more about the history of a people which was totally alien to them geographically and ethnically than they did about the history of their own countries before they were invaded by Islam. Yet another sad consequence of the triumph of Islam was that it had cut millions of people off from their origins, from their own rich, non-Moslem cultural heritage.

Rashid, the psychopathic quisling, cared nothing for that, however.

For him, the enslavement by Moslems of the Berber and French populations of the Mediterranean coast for over a thousand years was a mere detail. The blood-soaked invasions, the beheadings, and the whips that had cracked on the backs of galley-slaves seized from the coasts of Kabylia or Provence were a kindness not properly recognized. The ferocious repression, the wombs bearing the fruit of rape and the forced conversions were just a harmless little joke. The theft of the wealth of nations crushed by the sword and the destruction of their cultures were no more than a small reef in the ocean of Islamic love.

His hatred of Western imperialism wiped out of Rashid's mind the inconvenient historical truth that the French had gone to Algiers in 1830 to destroy the lairs of the barbarous Moslems who were pillaging the Mediterranean. They had set free tens of thousands of slaves and finally, inspired by the Age of Reason, they had liberated captive minds, bringing scientific, medical and technological progress.

Rashid would have tried to refute these historical facts by denouncing the inconsistencies, decadence and atheism of the West, as also its materialism, contrasted with the supposed

superiority of Islam which was spiritual and thoughtful. He would have argued that Europeans and Americans had conquered the world for material goods, while Islam had done so to bring people spirituality.

However, how could blind obedience to a book be a matter of spirituality?

Besides, saying Islam was nothing but spirituality was the height of bad faith. Allah's Paradise was the peak of materialistic searching for pleasure after death, with its virgins to be eternally deflowered, a brothel for tipsy soldiers, where in magnificent palaces docile, heavenly slaves rushed to serve succulent foods and flowing rivers of wine.

The earthly well-being that Moslem imperialism had been incapable of providing for Submitters had been moved up to an illusory Heaven by Islam.

Clicking his tongue, Redbeard put his paper cup down on the ground. In a somber tone, staring at Tom with his suspicious eyes, he spoke to Rashid. The latter nodded, then translated into French.

"He can't understand how we found twelve parachutes but there are only eleven Americans in the village. He asked me to ask you if you know why."

Tom shrugged.

"How would I know?" he said. "Did you search the whole village carefully?"

"Yes, but we found nothing. Don't worry, though, my brother, we'll get him in the end, if Allah wills it, *jalla jallalah*. Unless one of the Yanks choppers has already managed to pick him up."

Tom nodded. Feigning complicity with Rashid, he added, "Tell them it's maybe the dog's parachute."

Rashid chuckled and winked. He translated and Averell, with his idiotic look, nodded agreement.

Redbeard turned scarlet and whacked Averell on the nape of his neck. He grumbled out a couple of sentences, then took his pistol out of its holster, removed the clip of ammunition and held

the weapon out to Tom. In surprise, he took the Beretta that Redbeard was offering to him.

“He doesn’t trust you,” Rashid said. “He thinks you’re a C.I.A. agent. My brother, even if you swear on the Qur’an, he won’t believe you. So, you’re going to have to prove to him you’re really who you say you are.”

The Jihadis stood up and Tom did the same, gun in hand.

Rashid went up to Winnie, who was still lying unconscious on the ground. Scornfully, he urinated on the prisoner’s face. Then he kicked the body held motionless by iron wire bonds. When Winnie opened his haggard eyes, groaning softly, Joe and Averell forced him to kneel, standing on either side of him and holding him in position by grasping his arms.

“Go ahead, brother, kill him!” Rashid ordered.

For a moment, Tom thought it was just a test and that the weapon he held was not loaded. However, his expert eye gave the lie to that thought. The loading indicator on the butt was up, showing that there was a shell in the chamber.

It was not bluff, then.

Tom walked slowly across and put the barrel to Winnie’s forehead.

Ten feet off from Tom, Redbeard stood with his Kalashnikov at the ready, and to his right Rashid had gotten out his iPhone to make a record of the scene. He had turned on the flash function so as to film the American’s execution.

Despite his outward calm, Tom’s mind was on fire.

He had just one cartridge. He could turn round, kill Redbeard with a bullet through his head, then grab his assault rifle and kill the other three Jihadis. The trouble was that there were other fighters outside and one minute later Winnie and he would be dead.

He could try to take Redbeard hostage and escape with Winnie in a car. However, his chances of overcoming the suspicious paranoid with his finger on the trigger of his Kalashnikov were zero.

So, what option should he choose? None of them were viable.

Tom's eyes met Winnie's.

That look cut him to the quick.

Winnie knew he was a goner. The bullet wound in his belly was killing him little by little. If he got no treatment, he had just a couple of hours left.

Above all, though, Winnie wanted the mission to succeed. He did not want his comrades in arms to have died for nothing. In the balance, too, were the thousands of lives at stake, potential victims of a future terrorist attack. His life was worth nothing compared to his soldier's duty.

His sense of honor, courage and sacrifice.

He was willing to give up his life for the freedom and safety of his fellow citizens.

So, with his steely-gray eyes, he begged Tom to give him a quick death.

"We can be heroes just for one day," Winnie hummed almost inaudibly.

As the urine trickled down it, his swollen face formed a sad smile. Nodding almost imperceptibly, he closed his eyes.

After a brief hesitation, understanding he had no other alternative, Tom did so too.

He kept his eyes closed because he did not want to see what he was about to do, as if the fact that he had not seen it would absolve him of the crime he would be committing.

When the pistol spat out the bullet with a deathly screech, Tom did not open his eyes immediately. He felt he might be able to escape for a few more seconds from that macabre reality that had turned him into a soulless killer.

"*Allahu akbar*," Rashid shouted joyfully.

His iPhone in his hand, he was filming Winnie's corpse. Then he turned and zoomed in on Tom's face.

"*Allahu akbar*," Tom replied, forcing a smile. "*Allahu akbar*."

For an instant, he shut his eyes again, wanting to stop being the slave of his vision, hoping that his surroundings were a mirage, wishing he could believe that the reality troubling him was unreal.

Reality, however, was what remained when you ceased to believe in it.

## 13

### **Seventh Commandment: Thou Shalt Not Play at Being a Hero**

**We are all prejudiced.**

**Even if we want not to be biased, we cannot manage to stay neutral.**

**If we are watching a tennis game without knowing either of the players, who are not of our nationality, we think we can observe the match without having a favorite or taking the side of one or the other. In fact, after the first few minutes, one part of our brain starts working, activating identification circuits, and we end up by picking one of the players, hoping that one will win and getting worked up on those lines. Sometimes we do this out of pity, sometimes out of admiration, but we do it above all because of identifying ourselves with the player. This human trend goes back to the beginnings of time when cavemen had to decide rapidly which clan they were going to join, not being able to remain neutral, for the sake of their own survival.**

**That inheritance of *Homo sapiens* has perpetuated itself in our brains right down to modern days, always driving us to take a stance in favor of a cause, a group or an individual.**

**This behavioral characteristic, rapidly paralyzing any neutrality, always develops into two factions. There are those who join and those who reject, those who protect and those who attack, destroyers systematically opposing the defenders of a martyred ideal.**

**A triplet is formed: a persecutor, a rescuer and a victim.**

**This is known as a Karpman drama triangle. It is easily found in discussion forums of on-line journals. As soon as there is a news item with a victim or an individual presented as such, human passions are let loose and people defend or attack, support or criticize, donning the costume of Zorro or of the persecutor.**

**The latter feels sure of things, devaluing, accusing and ironizing. This is not necessarily the “bad guy”, because it can be a case of pointing out the real misdeeds of the supposed victim, revealing undeniable truths.**

**In this theatrical threesome, rescuers can see themselves as good and fair, playing the most gratifying role. That does not necessarily make them the “good guys”. They may be narcissists who cannot help aiding people in order to feel they are valued, intervening even when no-one has asked them to do so. This puts victims into a state of incapacity to defend themselves on their own. Rescuers can even become future persecutors because they do not get the recognition they require from the people they shelter under their Zorro capes.**

**Feeling irreproachable, victims complain, are sorry for themselves and draw attention to themselves, happy to be suffering, being in reality or in fiction the ugly duckling.**

**In the end it is of little importance whether the so-called victim is really such, when it comes to getting a narcissistic hero to fly to the victim’s aid.**

**In the art of victimization, Islam has fully grasped the psychological functioning of the Karpman triangle. It cries wolf about being denigrated by wicked and unjust persecutors and cunningly stirs up public opinion to play the part of a rescuer of its Koranic interests.**

**Unconscious humankind should cease being taken in by the sneaky subterfuge depicting Islam as a victim of persecutors stigmatizing it. Blind humanity should stop playing the rescuer hero, because that plays along to Islamists’ game and shoves into the single category of persecutors anyone who attempts to reveal the true, murderous face of their religion.**

**Islam is not a victim, far from it. On the contrary, it is the persecutor of minds which one day will force its sectarian Koran on these ignorant “heroes”.**

*Extract from the novel “The Sage of Mecca” by Thomas Anderson.*



## 14

### The Ruse

Under the radiant sun, Ali readjusted his black turban so that it entirely masked his face, with the exception of his smiling eyes.

Then, with his bloody sword he chopped off the head of the second poet.

In his delicate role as executioner, he had known perfectly how to interpret the secret signal agreed with the Prophet. When he turned brusquely away from a prisoner, it was a case of an evil Jinn, as Mohammed had confirmed already by ordering the death of these two monsters with their horrible faces. As a charge against them, so as not to trouble the troops' minds with the presence of these two creatures of fire, Ali had lied and said that in the past the pair had persecuted and killed Submitters.

Ali grasped the decapitated head in a firm grasp. He went and flung it at the feet of Mohammed, who was sitting waiting on a chair set on a red carpet and under the shade of a thick awning colored gold stretched out between two tall X-shaped supports made out of poles. After a brief hesitation, the Prophet finally glanced down at this long-standing enemy.

Under the appearance of a poet, this Jinn had never ceased mocking Submission. In the days when Mohammed was still declaiming his recitation in Mecca, this spawn of Satan had systematically taken a place among those following the Prophet and told his own stories, constantly boasting that the tales of the Messenger of God were no better than his own. He had accused

the Prophet of plagiarizing crazy ancient legends to make up his recitation. The devilish poetry of this Jinn always ended with a question put to the audience: Who composed better texts Mohammed or he?

*Your diabolical texts are over for ever. They are burning in Hell with you.*

Pointing his hand at the decapitated head, Mohammed gave Ali a warm smile.

“Thank you. I like this better than the most beautiful camel in all Arabia!”

Standing silently in several ranks around the Prophet, Submitters and Helpers were waiting for more words from him. They wanted to know what decisions he would take about the other prisoners.

The previous day, as he was taking a short nap, Mohammed had been visited by Gabriel. He had dictated to him the will of God after his glorious victory at the Well of Badr over the Meccan army, thanks to the aid of a thousand angels. As an introduction, the angel of revelation had whispered to him that all earthly goods belonged to God, since he had created them, and all this property was also rightfully for the Messenger that God had chosen. As compensation for the items stolen from the Submitters by the Meccans when they went into exile, Gabriel had explained the conditions for dividing up the prodigious spoils gathered on the field of battle, granting one fifth to the Prophet. However, Gabriel had not specified what God’s will was with regard to the fate of the prisoners taken.

Lacking this guidance, Mohammed thus had to make up his mind for himself.

*Oh God! What should I do?*

To make the right choice, he had consulted his companions. Some proposed exchanging the prisoners for a ransom. In contrast, others were for executing them all. This last view was shared by Ali, whose sword was still thirsty for the blood of enemy soldiers. Ali’s judgment was a divine intuition to which Mohammed unfortunately did not listen.

The Prophet preferred to opt for a ransom, favoring life and pity by his choice. Besides, the money they would get would allow aid to be given to Submitters. In any case, now that the evil Jinns were dead, their sinister influence over these prisoners would probably no longer continue. A good few of them would convert to Submission for the greater glory of God.

Pledging his word as Prophet before his men, Mohammed solemnly declared that all the prisoners would be released if a ransom was paid.

The following night, Gabriel came to unleash the wrath of God. He delivered the missing divine words that harangued the Prophet for making the wrong choice. Mohammed was naturally entitled to make mistakes, but his errors, as often was the case, were quickly the subject of reproach in a revelation from the Almighty.

*It is not for any prophet to have captives until he hath made slaughter in the land. Ye desire the lure of this world, and Allah desireth for you the Hereafter and Allah is Mighty, Wise. Had it not been for an ordinance of Allah which had gone before, an awful doom had come upon you on account of what ye took for the captives of Badr.*

Imploring Heaven to forgive his past and future errors, the Prophet nonetheless returned to his City in triumph. However, the news that he learned from Othman's mouth was not good. During a night of initiations, evil Jinns had taken over the three Jewish tribes, gaining possession of men's bodies. Although they seemed perfectly human to everyone's eyes, even the Prophet's, all the Jewish men were henceforth working for Satan. Worse yet, other inhabitants were beginning to be infected, too. As a proof, they were making secret plans with the Jinns, the aim being to assassinate Mohammed.

Othman had likewise intercepted a number of plotting letters exchanged between the Meccan chiefs and high-ranking personalities in the City of the Prophet, hypocritical Submitters that had secretly abjured their faith. Othman read out these messages to Mohammed. He realized just how extensive the conspiracy was when Gabriel confirmed the shadowy proposals to kill him.

To preserve Submission and the Messenger of God, the necessary steps had to be taken quickly. First and foremost, Mohammed had to be protected by posting armed guards in front of his home, and indeed by using a double when he was planning to go someplace. Under his clothing, the Prophet would at all times have to wear several layers of chain-mail armor, so as to ward off the arrows of enemies that might be hiding in the shadow, spying on his every deed and gesture, cunningly awaiting any chance to lay him low.

Nonetheless, God was watching over his Messenger with an army of angels. The Almighty could plot much better than the conspirators themselves, so as to eliminate one by one these servants of the Devil.

However, if Satan could not pierce Mohammed's chain-mail with a sharp blade, he did know that words were mightier than swords. He had in his pay poets that strove to corrupt Submission, to cast discredit and hatred upon the Prophet by murderous verses. Some even called aloud for Mohammed's death.

The Prophet had no other choice but to give his backing for measures to get rid of all these enemies that fired words at him like lethal poisoned arrows.

Ocba, a poet captured during the battle against the Meccans, was brought before the Prophet.

"Why am I to be treated differently from the other prisoners?" protested the captive as he saw the huge saber in Omar's hands. "I came to Badr only to recite my poetry, praising my people's bravery."

Mohammed looked disdainfully at the man kneeling before him.

"It is because of your enmity toward God and his Prophet."

"But you gave your word that we should be spared if a ransom was paid!"

The Prophet feigned not to hear.

"What about my little girl?" begged Ocba. "Who will take care of her?"

"The fires of Hell!" the Prophet roared.

At these words, Omar's saber hacked Ocba's body in two.

"Wretch that you are!" continued Mohammed. "Persecutor! Unbeliever with no faith in God, nor his Prophet, nor in the Mother of Books! I thank the Lord, who killed you and thus brought consolation before my eyes!"

The death of that man, with his diabolical verses, unfortunately did not stop other henchmen of the Devil. On the wise advice of Othman, Mohammed ordered the execution of Afak, a poet claimed to be a hundred years old. Under the cover of wisdom brought by great age, he was nonetheless an agent of Satan, and his language cracked like a whip in the ears of the Submitters.

The hand of God contrived to slit his throat as he slept.

Other soldiers of evil took up the baton after Afak, such as Asma, the daughter of Marwan, who openly called for the Prophet's death after the murder of the hundred-year-old poet.

*Is there no honorable man who can take advantage of a moment's inattention on his part to put an end to the vain hopes of the gullible?*

That was the ending of a poem composed by Asma about the Prophet, and it remained engraved in his mind.

Mohammed expressed the same hope.

"Will no-one rid me of this turbulent daughter of Marwan?"

Omeir, a blind Submitter, heard the Prophet's wish. He muttered into his ear that he would carry it out. That same night, Omeir sneaked into Asma's house, while she was sleeping with her two children. One child was lying on her breast.

Guided by God's hand, the righter of wrongs, the blind man could move around in darkness like a fish in water. Without a sound, he carefully removed the suckling babe and thrust his sword through Asma's heart. He then gently replaced the child on the murdered mother's breast, where it now sucked blood-tasting milk.

The following day at prayer time Mohammed came to seek out Omeir.

"Have you killed Marwan's daughter?" asked the Messenger.

“Yes,” replied the blind man, “but tell me, have I anything to fear?”

He was worried about possible vengeance from Marwan’s family. The Prophet reassured him.

“Not even a pair of goats would fight over that!”

Before all the Submitters, gathered together in the place of prostration, Mohammed praised Omeir for the service he had rendered to God and to his Prophet.

Despite the death of Asma, who was now roasting in Hell, the forces of the Devil were no less strong. They could count on the legions of evil Jinns that unbeknown to all had colonized the Jewish tribes. Kaab was one of them, as the angel Gabriel had confirmed. He was a double threat to Submission, because he was both a Jinn and a poet. After the battle of Badr, this puppet of Satan’s had gone to Mecca to compose funeral orations as a homage to the defeated side, as well as writing satires against Mohammed and his companions. Kaab had also encouraged the Meccans to take up arms and revenge themselves on the Submitters and their Prophet.

Thinking himself untouchable thanks to the power of his tribe of evil Jinns, he foolishly returned to the City of the Prophet, with the Devil’s words in his mouth.

*Weep so that people think that Mohammed is dead and that his religion will cease to exist.*

This calling down of misfortune by Kaab was constantly echoing around in the Prophet’s mind.

In the place of prostration, he began to pray out aloud.

“Oh Lord, save me from Kaab, the son of Ashraf, in whatsoever way may seem good to You, because he has rebelled against You and his poems preach sedition.”

A group of Submitters heard the Prophet’s prayer. However, the members of the Jewish tribe to which Ashraf’s son belonged were sufficiently powerful to protect Kaab in their fortress. The men who had volunteered to kill him explained that only trickery would allow them to accomplish their duty.

“Ruses and treachery are part of the customs of war,” claimed one of them. “No-one can succeed without them, not even you, the Messenger of God!”

These words went deep into Mohammed’s heart. He gave his blessing when he was asked for permission for them to speak badly of Submission and the Prophet, in order to trap Kaab.

Among the men charged with bringing down the ignoble enemy of God, was one of his foster brothers. As night fell, this latter went and knocked on the door of Kaab’s fortress and through cunning lies managed to inveigle him out into a nearby orchard. When the multiple hands of God threw the poet’s head at his feet, the Prophet congratulated them on the good work they had achieved for God’s cause.

The following day, surprise, terror and incomprehension were to be seen on the faces of the Jews.

Mohammed was not taken in by their play-acting. He was fully aware of their true nature, perverse and crafty and working for the glory of Satan and the perdition of humanity. Nonetheless, Mohammed could not tell this truth to the inhabitants of the City that were still unaffected, because in their panic they would have fled so as to avoid contamination by the evil Jinns, and the Prophet would have found himself alone at the mercy of the forces of evil.

As Mohammed saw it, it was high time to eradicate this epidemic sent by the Devil.

So, without any explanation, he simply gave an order to the faithful.

“Kill every male Jew that you can find!”

A Submitter, Muhayyisah, obeyed the Prophet’s instructions, since through him they were God’s. One morning, Muhayyisah met a Jew that was a good friend of his family’s and who he had extensive trading arrangements with. He opened his arms and walked in friendly fashion toward the merchant before suddenly slitting his throat with his knife.

When Muhayyisah finally returned home after wandering around the City of the Prophet looking for other Jews to kill, his elder brother, Huwaysah, was waiting for him.

“You are an enemy of God!” cried Huwaysah. “Can it really have been you who killed him?”

With a cold stare, Muhayyisah nodded in silence.

“Do you understand what you have done?” asked his elder brother. “Do you realize that there is fat on your belly that comes from the money we made from our friend?”

Muhayyisah flourished his knife, its blade red with blood.

“I had the order from God to kill him, and if God ordered me through Mohammed’s mouth to cut your throat, I should do just that.”

Huwaysah took several steps backward and anxiously raised a hand to his throat.

“A religion that makes you like that is really impressive.”

Within the hour, this elder brother, who had not yet embraced the true religion of God, converted to Submission.

Muhayyisah told the Prophet the whole story, along with the fact his elder brother had been converted through the grace of God.

The Messenger of God was not blind like Muhayyisah. He understood perfectly that Huwaysah had converted to Submission for fear that his younger brother would one day put his threat into practice. So, terror had saved him from Hell and thanks to a bloody knife-blade he could now hope to get to Paradise. If terror was God’s weapon for saving human souls and leading them toward the divine light, then terror was legitimate, just like the murdering of people working for Satan, even if it seemed cruel and immoral.

The killing of the Jewish merchant was not a pitiless and fanatical deviation from the Prophet’s teachings. On the contrary, it was proper recognition of the divine words that Submitters should obey, words coming out of a mouth whose virtue was irreproachable. After all, while Mohammed might make mistakes, being only a man, his virtue of divine inspiration was above all suspicion. He was not an actor, a criminal madman or a desert bandit as his detractors said, but definitely the Messenger of God who had become his armed might on Earth, acting for the good of all peoples without exception.

For the good of humanity, Mohammed had to get rid of the satanic Jinns that peopled the World. Nonetheless, his injunctions to slay the Jews led to a response on their part. They would kill any Submitter that murdered one of their folk. Bloody, revengeful escalation ravaged the City of the Prophet. Reprisals by the two sides caused numerous deaths, while a rumor went round that all these killings had started because a randy Jewish goldsmith had simply lifted the veil of a female Submitter.

Mohammed found an excuse in these murderous tensions to justify his plan of attack against one of the three Jewish tribes, the Qaynuqa. Even though the Prophet was bound by a peace treaty with them, Gabriel brought him a commandment from God that allowed him to disregard it.

*And if thou fearest treachery from any folk, throw back to them their treaty fairly.*

So the Prophet went perfidiously off to meet the Qaynuqa and offer them a choice. Either they converted to Submission, or war would be declared.

Mohammed was well aware that the evil Jinns, under orders from the Devil, would refuse to convert to God's religion. Thus, the troops of Helpers and Submitters were able to deploy and besiege the Qaynuqa fortress. Its defenders, suffering hunger and thirst, were forced to surrender after two weeks.

When the Submitters had tied up hundreds of captives and forced them to their knees, Mohammed ordered them beheaded.

One of the leaders of the Ansar Helpers, Ibn Ubayy, intervened vigorously.

“Oh Messenger of God!” cried out his powerful voice. “It is not fitting to slaughter in one single morning four hundred men without armor and three hundred with armor!”

With a finger that seemed to threaten, Ibn Ubayy signaled to the Prophet to come over to him and whispered in his ear.

“These people are good blacksmiths and they will owe me a debt. They will make new swords for us, but we can pay them with their own confiscated goods. We are the absolute winners and if they are disobedient, there will always be time to massacre these disarmed Jews, whom we can banish. Let them go with their

women and children. They will be all the more grateful, they will kiss my feet and the blades of the swords they make will be all the better for it.”

After a moment’s thought, Mohammed approved this trick. If the evil Jinns were stupid and greedy enough to accept, and they would be, this cunning plan would allow him to arm more Submitters to fight the other two Jewish tribes.

“I shall give them to you!” exclaimed the Prophet, feigning annoyance against Ibn Ubayy.

Mohammed would have liked to save the women and children of the Qaynuqa tribe by separating them from their menfolk who had become beings of fire. It was too late, though. Othman had confirmed it a few minutes earlier. Without a single exception, all the members of the Qaynuqa tribe were now infected.

So all of the Qaynuqa were driven into exile. They left behind vast wealth, which was rapidly shared out among all the victors. Mohammed received one fifth, which he accepted so as to obey God’s orders about spoils of war. He soon spent that fortune, by giving alms to the poor and to orphans, and by purchasing new weapons.

The Prophet had been expecting to purify the two remaining Jewish tribes quickly. All the same, God reined in the keenness of his Messenger. The time for confronting the other satanic Jinns had not yet come, because a more imminent danger could strike the Submitters at any time. The Meccan army was preparing to take revenge. Under the grip of the Devil, it was mobilizing to prevent the eradication of the forces of evil that were still present in the City.

A new battle was approaching rapidly.

Ibn Ubayy, as one of the chief leaders of the Helpers, was in favor of waiting for the Meccan army within the City of the Prophet. The Prophet himself was also in agreement with this defensive strategy. However, a good number of those who had fought at Badr, believing that God would help them in all circumstances, thought it would be shameful to wait inside the walls. In the light of their faith and fervor, the Prophet ended by

accepting the majority view. They would go out and meet the Meccans and fight them.

When the enemy army left Mecca, it had a strength of three thousand men. On his side, Mohammed had gathered together one thousand Submitters and Ansar Helpers, who immediately set out to stop the forces of evil.

When he was half-way to meeting them, a messenger caught up with the Prophet to pass him a warning from the spies he had left behind in the City. The Jews were plotting and a revolt was threatening.

*Oh God! What must I do?*

Mohammed secretly brought together his four friends Abu Bakr, Omar, Ali and Othman, along with Ibn Ubayy. It was decided to send the latter back so that by ruse or by force he could put an end to this Jewish rebellion that was brewing.

Before the Prophet had come to Yathrib, Ibn Ubayy, a charismatic figure with an auburn beard, somewhat manipulative, had been the leader of the city. He had managed to win the Jews' confidence and was on good terms with some of them. He had then converted to Submission and put himself humbly at the service of the Prophet. His detractors said that Ibn Ubayy was a great hypocrite, who had not accepted God's true religion other than for form's sake, so that he could become a traitor at any moment if his own interests made it worth his while.

Mohammed and his four friends had full confidence in Ibn Ubayy's loyalty. Although Ali would have preferred to keep him with them for the coming battle, they entrusted him with the delicate mission of keeping order in the City of the Prophet.

So that the Jews' spies would not learn his real reason for returning to the City, Ibn Ubayy did some play-acting. With his three hundred men he deserted from Mohammed's army, on the pretext of not being in agreement with the offensive strategy it had adopted.

Among the troops, who saw a third of their strength disappearing, some Submitters suggested to the Prophet that he could ask the Jews for help, in conformity with the war clause that bound them to him.

*Evil Jinns can never fight against their own satanic army.*

Mohammed shook his head and dodged their proposal.

“We should not have idolators help us against idolators.”–

Future victory did not depend on the number of soldiers. It was just a question of intelligence, making the terrain work for you. So, the Prophet camped his troops in a defile on Mount Uhud, and stationed fifty archers on the heights to prevent any enemy movement to attack from his rear.

“Keep to your positions and cover us from the rear. If you see us winning, do not come join us. If you see us being slaughtered, do not come help us.”

Those were the orders the Prophet gave before the Devil’s army arrived.

For Mohammed’s safety, Ali had assigned to him two bodyguards dressed all in white from head to toe, like two angels watching over God’s Messenger. The latter was armed with two sabers and had put on heavy armor that meant he could move only with some difficulty.

In the ensuing battle, by the grace of God and the lay of the land, Submitters and Helpers gained the upper hand over the Meccan front line. They rushed upon these enemies, who were already nearly routed. However, some Helper soldiers halted to start stripping the dead and wounded. Up on the heights, the archers thought that their army had already won the war. Forgetting the Prophet’s instructions, they went down the mountain for fear that they might lose their share of the spoils. Just a few archers stayed in their positions, shouting to the other men to stay in their posts.

The final victory promised to the Prophet slipped from his hands.

Satan had just shown the enemy cavalry the way, and it galloped through the undefended passage and fell by surprise on the rear of the Submitters and Helpers. Caught in a pincer movement, the Prophet’s army broke up in confusion. Some elements started to climb the slopes of the mountain to get away from the combat.

As commander-in-chief, Mohammed was slightly to the rear of the bulk of his forces. He started shouting fresh orders to them. It was at that moment that he was hit by a cavalry charge. His two bodyguards sacrificed themselves for him. They threw themselves on the swords, which ran them through and through, and with their last breath they fell on the Prophet, who had himself fallen to the ground. Their blood stained the white cloth in which they were dressed, hiding Mohammed beneath a reddening shroud.

A Submitter, who had seen the Prophet thrown to the ground, started crying out that he was dead. On every mouth, this rumor spread as fast as a horse can gallop, and panic seized the troops that had just one thought left: to flee from this place of misfortune.

While the rout of his army was now total, Mohammed's bloodstained face was recognized by a Submitter. Jammed beneath the two corpses, unable to get up because of their crushing weight and his own heavy armor, the Messenger of God was lying on his back. His haggard eyes were staring at the sky and his wounded head was bleeding profusely.

"The Prophet lives!" shrieked and gesticulated the Submitter. "The Prophet lives!"

Mohammed signaled to him with one hand to be silent. He was fearful lest the satanic forces took advantage of this to come and finish him off.

An instant later, Omar surged into his field of vision.

He pulled the Prophet out from beneath the two dead bodies. With the aid of five other soldiers, he carried him off.

When God's foes saw this body clad in such handsome armor, they realized it was the Prophet. Thinking him dead, they roared out shouts of victory that put an immediate end to the fighting.

After this stinging defeat, Submitters and Ansar Helpers returned heads hung low to the City of the Prophet, united in the sadness of having lost so many of their comrades on that accursed battlefield. Scouts reported that the Meccans were making merry at Uhud, still believing that Mohammed was dead. Once the enemy finally discovered that the Prophet was still alive, they would march on the City.

Mohammed had to forestall them.

Despite wounds and great tiredness, the Prophet and his partisans set out to establish a camp around twelve miles from the City. There they lit great fires, so that they could be seen from afar and give the impression of a very numerous force. Mohammed then sent a Bedouin friend to meet the Meccan army.

“Mohammed is still alive!” said the Bedouin to them. “He is at the head of an army bigger than I have seen in my life. The Submitters are in the grips of terrible hatred, and they are thirsty for revenge!”

The lie worked, and God spread panic into these satanic hearts, who quickly sped back to Mecca. With danger at last warded off, his mind calm, Mohammed went back to his people with the idea of some well-earned rest.

Arguing voices immediately were heard. They came from pacifist Submitters, who had always refused to take up arms. They were reproachful about the death of their brothers, who would have done better to stay in the safety of the City, far from this futile affair of war which had led to bitter defeat.

Through the mouth of the Prophet, God replied to them saying that Submitters fallen in combat were not dead. Such martyrs lived on eternally with him in the highest Heaven. Even if they had never left home, death would have struck in their beds all those whose demise was inscribed up above.

No-one could escape the destiny written by God.

Moreover, defeat was not really such. It was a trial sent by God to distinguish true Submitters from false. If God had not sent angels to back up Submitters and Helpers, it was a warning to those who had set greater store on booty than on wiping out the forces of the Devil. The battle of Uhud would have ended in an even greater victory than Badr if the archers had not broken the Prophet’s orders.

Disobeying the Prophet came to the same thing as disobeying God, and that was a sin that condemned you to Hell. However, God was merciful. He would forgive all the transgressions committed at Uhud.

Reassured by these divine words, in order to efface from their minds the humiliation of the lost fight, people started to embroider fine tales about the battle. A collective memory that was full of fantastic miracles told of the warlike pugnacity of Mohammed and his close companions, even though neither of the Prophet's two sabers had run through even one of God's enemies.

In the eyes of the Messenger, from a moral viewpoint Uhud was a defeat. From a military angle, it had barely affected his strength. The Prophet still had almost all his forces more or less intact. After the fight with the external enemy, the time had now come to confront the enemy within: the evil Jinns that had taken possession of the Jews' bodies.

Those of the Nadir tribe had planned to assassinate the Prophet (God had warned him about it) by throwing a rock off the roof of a house as he went by. Besides, they were working on secret alliances with the citizens of Mecca so as to betray the Submitters to them.

Mohammed would have liked to slaughter these satanic creatures. However, his four friends dissuaded him from it, with the backing of Ibn Ubayy. The latter proposed to the Prophet that he should let the Nadir tribe go off and join the Jewish blacksmiths from the first tribe expelled, the Qaynuqa, so that all these devilish folk could continue making weapons. There would be plenty of time in a couple of months to exterminate all these weakened exiles. For the moment, while a third powerful Jewish tribe, the Qurayza, were still living in the City, it was better to use trickery so that the enemies within did not get together to fight the Submitters.

The Prophet accepted the idea of driving out the Nadir by duping them, dividing them to beat them more easily. In an ultimatum, he ordered them to leave the City within ten days on pain of death. The Jews refused to go, because Ibn Ubayy played a double cross, promising them he would come to their aid with his men in this war against the Prophet. As Mohammed had foreseen, the Nadir shut themselves up in their fort. During the siege that followed, they saw their palm-trees being cut down and burned, but no help from Ibn Ubayy or from the third Jewish tribe. This tribe was convinced that Ibn Ubayy would intervene with his men.

All this little satanic world had been tricked, so the evil Jinns finally surrendered. The Prophet imposed conditions for exile: the Nadir were to leave without their weapons and property, each allowed to take away only one camel load of goods. In the Mother of Books, God would know how to divide up all the abandoned wealth wisely.

When the evil Jinns were on the point of departure, Othman came forward. Some few among the Nadir had not been contaminated by the creatures of fire. Strangely, these Jews had not always been Jewish. They were of Arab birth, but had been converted to Judaism by their superstitious mothers. It was absolutely crucial to save all these still healthy humans from the evil Jinns. For their salvation, they had to be brought back to the true religion of God.

Mohammed agreed. He had the satanic Jinns expelled, but all the Jews carefully selected by Othman had to convert to Submission, the only condition for them to keep their goods and their lives.

Some while later, Gabriel came bringing the divine words that approved the Prophet's choice. There was no compulsion in God's true religion. A hand could easily be stretched out to those who believed in God, while rejecting those who worshiped the Devil.

Truth always triumphed over Falsehood.

## 15

### Narco

In a moonscape of desolation, the filthy, gloomy road seemed to go on without end. Straight and wide, it ran off to the horizon where it lost itself among the mountains. Overhead, a cloudless blue sky tried vainly to add a touch of beauty to a desert land scorched by an oppressive sun.

Alone in the midst of this sterile nothingness, the powerful black Mercedes was traveling at a moderate speed. Its tinted windows permitted no view of the air-conditioned interior where three occupants sat on comfortable dark leather seats.

At the wheel, Redbeard was driving cautiously, an air of distrust on his face. From time to time, he raised his frowning eyes toward the sky, as if trying to spot the suspicious sight of a C.I.A. spy satellite. He had a pistol on his lap ready to fire in an instant, watching out for a squad of enemies to appear from nowhere all of a sudden.

Alongside him, relaxed and smiling, with white headphones on his ears, Rashid was enjoying rap music saved in his iPhone. He tapped his knees with his fingers, to the rhythm of the frenzied chanting.

Unaware of the imperceptible breath of death on the nape of their necks, the two men paid scarcely any attention to the person sitting in the rear of the vehicle.

Wearing a full blue burqa, his hands gloved, Tom lifted the veil off his face.

After the attempt at kidnaping by the American forces, Jawad, the Islamic recruiter in Sultan's pay, had preferred to cancel his meeting with Tom. To cover his tracks, he had fixed another meet-up in Kabul, at nightfall.

As a precautionary measure, they had dressed Tom up in this disguise for the long car journey.

With a calm look, Tom coolly observed Redbeard and Rashid, his irreversible decision taken. Before they came to the end of this sinister road, their end would come.

Tom was going to kill them.

He had promised himself he would do so. It was for Winnie, Abdel and their comrades in arms, who had lost their lives while carrying out their duty.

Tom was well aware that it was a mistake, ineffable stupidity. It would not bring back his companions, but might compromise his infiltration mission, and on top of that would mean they had died in vain.

He did not give two hoots.

He was thirsty for revenge. His reason had not been able to stem that indescribable flood of enjoyable hatred that was now flowing through his veins, blood pulsing in his temples with a murderous beat.

So, before the end of the journey two corpses would be rotting alongside the road, prey to the vultures.

Tom dreamed of having enough strength to tear the heart out of that soulless being Rashid with his bare hands. He imagined being like him, like this psychopath with no emotions and no remorse that was the latest development of *Homo sapiens*. He was a being perfectly adapted to modern societies, cold and individualistic, now that the times of tribes with empathy, living in caves and having to face up to adversity together, were now long gone.

Rashid's reptilian brain, wishing for hierarchy, nonetheless was in conformity with the empathetic majority that set the guidelines for normality. However, if that majority was made up of lunatics, paranoids like Redbeard, then other crazies, including Rashid, would follow their lead with gusto, with no limits or

prohibitions left to rein in their perversions, so that their madness became normality in their eyes.

That was the case for Islam.

As long as it was in the minority, it imposed nothing and obeyed the rules of the societies in which it was a parasite, humbly invoking freedom of religion. However, as soon as it became a majority, Islam inflicted its lunatic normality and contaminated healthy people with its mental deviations. It imposed crazy prohibitions, doing away with all liberty, on the remainder of the population whose reptilian part of the brain told them to follow the new standards docilely.

Maintaining a vague expression because he did not want the two men to pick up any hint from his eyes of his plan to kill them, Tom replaced the veil over his face.

He felt as if he was being put into a cage once more.

To think that this portable prison had been imposed on women by Mohammed because of his own illness.

Before his times, before the moment when the madness of one man had become the standard for a whole civilization, Arab women were creatures as free as a modern Western woman can be nowadays.

A Bedouin wife worked alongside her husband. She enjoyed considerable freedom and independence. Leading a nomadic life, caring for herds of animals, she was never a recluse or veiled. On the contrary she was very active. Her contribution to the life of the community was appreciated and respected.

The Arab society that Mohammed had destroyed was of higher value, because women could choose their own husbands, just as Khadijah had done with him. Being independent, she could select the man in her life. She could seek out or wait for a husband to her liking, whether intellectually or in other ways.

She could enjoy a high social status, run a business or simply write poetry.

When Islam arrived on the scene, the position of women was totally downgraded. They lost the intellectual and moral influence that they had previously had.

Apologists claimed the opposite, exaggerating the role of Moslem women within their religion, especially stressing the Prophet's wives. The Koran admitted it openly, though: Allah ordered them to stay shut up at home, and it was forbidden for visitors to talk with them one-on-one in private.

Under Islam, women were condemned to being prisoners in their own homes. They were to be imprisoned in the cage of their own bodies.

Making up tales about how important it was, so as to stress the supposed superiority of Islam, Moslem scholars emphasized the former religious custom of burying new-born girl children alive, for fear of poverty. They claimed that their guru had abolished this barbarous act, which in fact had been extremely uncommon.

Mohammed had pragmatically worked out that it was better to have a supply of sexually submissive partners for his soldiers, with a whole army of pre-teens for them to enjoy, rather than waste this fresh flesh by burying it in the ground.

So, victims of religion whichever way round, the handful of unfortunate girls saved from burial alive had been sent off to join the hordes of wombs subjected to the assaults of dominating males. Instead of perishing rapidly through suffocation in a tomb of burning sand, they had been buried alive in a different way, under a veil that was far more oppressive, heavy as a leaden cope. In a slow death lasting decades, at every breath they took they sighed a little more over the pains of their broken lives in that sandy desert, a real tomb open to the skies.

The Koranic God Virus had inevitably triggered a policy of maximum birthrate, aimed at bringing to the highest possible level the vertical transmission of the same cultural gene to offspring, or at filling up the gaps left by casualties fallen in wars of conquest. In this misogynistic viral world, women were oppressed and treated as nothing more than a machine for procreation, reduced to just their genitals.

They had no right to refuse sex, even on camel back. They were no more than a field that men could cultivate as they thought best, as one verse in the Koran cynically suggested. This verse had been produced by Mohammed when women had come to request

his opinion about an unnatural coupling, when their men took them in the anus from the rear as well as in the vagina from in front.

As the text made no mention of consent from the wife for such intercourse, rape was implicitly legitimate. A male believer became an unpunished sexual predator, who had the right to use all his wives to satisfy whatever desires he might have. He could even do so with any Moslem woman on condition he paid the tax for this, as ordered by the Koran. This prostitution was legalized in the chapter called "Women". A man who could not pay the tariff to have sex with a converted woman could always rape one of his non-Moslem slaves for no charge, even if she was a married woman.

If Mohammed had limited polygamy to four believer wives, he had set no limit at all on what a man "possessed with his right hand", or in other words had gained as spoils of war. An unlimited number of captive female slaves could be his, as a little foretaste of the promised Paradise.

As the Koran was written in Heaven next to Allah, these divine words on the condition of women, such as forced intercourse or slavery, were still valid to this day. It was not the situation of a bygone era, as it was a duty for every Moslem to submit to the will of God as recorded in the Koran.

As for any woman who wanted to escape from this macho Hell on Earth, removing the cloth shackles that served to prevent any vision of the beauty of this world, Mohammed had given an order in one verse that they should be shut away and beaten until they became docile and obedient, going back to being just tormented wombs.

Men were the masters by divine right. Women had eventually become resigned to their status as sub-humans imposed by Allah. Faced with a male universe, they adopted an attitude of respect and faith.

Their only hope to escape their sad fate was the promised Paradise.

Nonetheless, even if they made it up to Heaven, their state of being sex slaves did not come to an end. In this macho Paradise, there were no handsome romantic companions made especially for them by Allah, as Mohammed had promised would

be the case for every Moslem man with his houris. In the Koran, there was no chapter describing women's fate in Paradise. Luckily, though, by deduction from certain verses, Moslem intellectuals had worked out that men not only received seventy-two virgins, but also found their earthly spouses returned to them by right. Women ended up in their husbands' harems, undergoing their endless sexual demands, still slaves for ever of the lecherous desires of men.

Their sufferings never came to an end, not even in the afterlife, indeed perhaps more so there.

What about divorced women? Mohammed said that women were by far the majority among people in Hell. This put pressure on wives to be submissive to their earthly husband at any cost, racked by doubt and fear.

Despite the lying claim made by the Meccans, women were not the equals of men in the Koran. They were inferiors from every point of view: physically, intellectually and morally. Numbers of verses backed up this inequality relative to men. A woman could inherit only half as much as her brother. Since women were psychologically inferior and had unreliable memories, two women's testimonies were required for this to be equal to a just one man's statement to a court of law.

The testimony of two people whose reasoning ability was supposed to be shaky could be accepted. However, the outcome was not even as good as the statement of one person who reasoned fully logically.

That was how Islamic arithmetic worked.

Following that same logic, if two women's statements came to the same as one man's, then in theory testimony from four women should have been enough to make a man's statement unnecessary. However, that was not the case: in Islam, the rule was that testimony that came solely from women should never be accepted.

In other words, if there was no male witness, a true believer could break into a dorm and rape a dozen college girls without fear of punishment from the courts.

Under his veil, Tom sighed.

Moslem countries were the homeland of the rights of men, not human rights.

In them, women had no rights, because only men had any.

Women resigned themselves to accepting this superiority of men, established by God. So, lacking any other perspective, they shut themselves up under veils that they had been duped into believing were a guarantee of a freedom that existed nowhere but in their minds. They voluntarily subjected themselves to these shackles of cloth that were supposed to protect them from the lustful eyes of men.

However, it was not women's responsibility to veil their faces. Men should control their reptilian brains' sexual lusts, which led their regard for others to become blurred. It was men, and only men, who should turn away their lascivious gaze.

That is what Mohammed should have done.

The tyrant of Medina had imposed the wearing of veils on all women, but it was because he was unable to keep his eyes off them. When he tried to look them in the face, their fatal beauty was reflected in his lecher's eyes and his vision was distorted, turning them into fantastic black shapes. Under the effects of sexual arousal, his sight was blurry, he was affected by insurmountable visual disturbances and he ended up by fainting away.

For Mohammed was a narcoleptic.

That was the disease the Prophet suffered from.

This strange malady was not known to the medicine of his day. It turned Mohammed into a helpless onlooker in life, with a black mist coming over his eyes so that he was blinded whenever he looked at an attractive face.

So, not willing for this black veil to affect his own vision because of women, he had slapped one on them, blurring what they could see. So that he could live his life as if he were normal, and without constraints, he had constrained others to suffer effects similar to those of his secret ailment, rather than the opposite. Henceforth, the world had to turn around him. He would set the rhythm, and it would dance to his mad tune, swirling around in a sickly gyration.

The narcoleptics' ball.

Revealing to all what his own personal perceptions were like, Mohammed had imposed upon all humanity his somber picture of faceless shadows with nothing but their eyes visible. These untouchable female specters, these black ghosts, had been shut up in cloth prisons.

For the whole of his life he had tried to overcome his sickness by granting himself special rights and exempting himself from the laws that he had imposed on his nation. In the Koran, his heavenly persona obligingly produced verses allowing him to have more than four wives, without any duty to share out his nights among them in a fair and equitable manner.

He also made up an entire chapter to justify his affair with Mary, his Coptic concubine. His passion for the wife of Zaid, his own adopted son and close friend, was the subject of a divine message, as always highly convenient, in which Allah swept aside his feigned scruples, permitting the couple to divorce and ordering the Prophet to wed the object of his desire.

The whole female sex, with no exceptions, was there just for his pleasure.

Mohammed had built up an impressive harem with over a dozen wives. Apart from them, there were all his female slaves, who had to do whatever he demanded.

The rumor was spread about that the Prophet could perform all his conjugal duties, satisfying all these women, in just a single morning. However, this was a pack of macho lies intended to dupe his gang of murderers.

Despite his best efforts to get over his problem, Mohammed remained a man who was sexually impotent and who fainted before he could achieve coitus. Once Khadijah died, he never again found a mate like his first wife. Her faded beauty had slowed down his sickly over-arousal and she had even been able to have children by him.

As he aged, his narcolepsy did not dwindle, but rather grew stronger.

Mohammed thus avoided any physical contacts with women. He took great care never to touch them, as if they were

contagious lepers. He was seen as a fine model to follow, so present-day Islamic fanatics take care to copy this unhealthy behavior of their Prophet and refuse to shake any female hand politely extended toward them.

Mohammed should logically have had a swarm of children, with so many wives and slaves passing through his bed. However, the harsh reality could not be challenged. Despite the multiple concubines he was supposed to have had sex with every day, ten years had gone by without a single child being born to him.

Narcolepsy explained this oddity, which strangely did not seem to raise any doubts in critical minds.

It was true that Mohammed was said to have had a child with Mary the Copt. However, in the light of her reputation in the harem as a licentious flirt, there was little doubt that the babe was not of the Prophet's stock.

He was not upset by such sexual infidelity, but rather, he was afraid that one of his women might divulge his secret, letting slip the fact that he was impotent. As a precaution, he made up divine verses warning them to stay shut up in the house and not to speak to any visitors except when shielded by a curtain. In his Koran, Mohammed had also issued a formal prohibition on anyone marrying any of the women that he had attempted to have intercourse with.

Such intercourse probably also extended to young boys, as he had fantasized it would be so in Paradise. He found satisfaction above all in the arms of children. To escape from his disease, to find at least an appearance of sexuality, old Mohammed did not hesitate to become a predatory pedophile.

When he was with a young girl aged six, his narcolepsy did not kick in. For three years he was able to practice with Aisha so-called *mufakhthat*, thighing, or rubbing his penis between her thighs, until he eventually deflowered her at the age of just nine years.

Nowadays, this behavior would have led to criminal prosecution. You would expect that Moslems would feel some shame when faced with this abominable aspect of their Prophet.

Nothing of the kind.

Quite the contrary, in internet forums the comments were an unending stream of praise for Mohammed's delicacy in practicing *mufakhthat* with Aisha. The idea that an elderly pervert abusing a young girl sexually deserved to be excluded from society did not even cross their mind. Since it was Mohammed, a perverted act became a religious action, and they were overwhelmed with admiration by the detailed accounts of his depravity.

The Islamic Stockholm syndrome holding Moslems captive through fear had very grave effects on their moral sense. As for parents who had some scruples about their pre-teen daughters becoming sex toys before they reached even the first stirrings of puberty, Allah provided an anesthetic for their queasy consciences in the chapter bearing the title "Divorce", which legalized the worst forms of pedophilia.

Because of a narcoleptic madman, humanity had lost even the innocence of childhood. It had been swept away by the perversions of a man that had eradicated all types of dependency behavior that were not religious, such as gambling or alcohol, because they might constitute a competitor to his religion. As for alcohol, at first Mohammed more or less tolerated it, but finally banned it, because his illness was not compatible with the consumption of wine, which worsened his hallucinations.

Mohammed's hidden illness also produced hallucinations, similar to those of schizophrenia. It was highly likely that some of the delirious visions of the Murderer of Medina were linked to his narcolepsy.

"Restroom stop?" Rashid asked.

Beneath his burqa, Tom's eyes flamed with a murderous glow.

The time had come.

"That would be good," Tom answered.

The vehicle carried on for a hundred yards or so before coming to a halt on the verge. The wooden planks of a semi-ruinous bus shelter cast a sparse shadow on the filthy road, giving an illusion of shade to the non-existent potential passengers. Rashid and Redbeard climbed out of the air-conditioned interior and at once the stifling heat brought them out in a sticky sweat.

Tom also exited the auto.

As far as he could see from beneath his veil, there was nothing but a desolate landscape with no sign of life.

Tom waited for his two traveling companions to finish relieving themselves back of the bus shelter, then headed there himself. He lifted his veil and the hem of his burqa and as he urinated he looked carefully for any long sharp object. Not a single nail was visible. There was not one sharp splinter of wood among the broken planks.

He would have to find another way.

Staring at the sky, Redbeard was arguing with Rashid in front of the black Mercedes. Tom readjusted the cloth prison in front of his face. Walking fast, he made for the vehicle and climbed into the seat that Rashid had occupied since the beginning of the journey. As he slammed the door shut, he opened the cover of the glove compartment. Despite having his vision impeded by the cotton veil, he found what he was looking for and hid it inside his left glove. He quickly closed the cover.

It was high time to do so.

Redbeard was already buckling his seat belt and getting ready to drive, still looking around suspiciously.

Rashid took a rear seat.

“You want to be in the front?” he asked Tom.

“If you don’t mind,” the latter said, turning around briefly. “I feel a bit car sick in the back.”

“No problem, my brother. As long as it’s not a woman driving, anything’s fine by me.”

He burst into cold, mechanical laughter and Tom forced himself to laugh with him. Not understanding French, so unaware of the reason for the two passengers’ hilarity, Redbeard grumbled as he started the Mercedes and drove off along the empty road.

“Letting women drive is the first step on the slippery slope to decadence,” Rashid stated, suddenly reverting to seriousness. “A woman at the wheel is the quintessence of Western imperialism and denial of our values. The very sight of a French woman driving incites our Moslem sisters to debauchery. It’s a provocation! You know that very well, since you’ve lived in

France. It's a proven fact that if they go off driving on their own the Devil takes possession of their bodies, they become unfaithful, and it all can't help ending in prostitution. By nature, women are feeble creatures, giving in to any temptation that comes along. If you let one out of her home without being escorted by her father, brother, husband or uncle, it won't be a moment before she lets herself be dragged down the road to sin."

Rashid pointed his right forefinger up at the roof of the car.

"Allah, *jalla jallalah*, imposed veils on women to protect them from men and the Devil. But who can protect them from themselves? We ought to make them all wear chastity belts. It would be even better if they were all circumcised to get rid of their diabolic arousals. The Prophet, *salla Allah 'alayhi wa salam*, said that there can't be a face-to-face between a man and woman without the Devil getting mixed up in it and causing the worst. Women are charming, whimsical toys that can inveigle a man out of the way of the righteous. Women were created from a rib, but from the bent part of the rib. If you try to straighten them out they'll break, if you do nothing, they'll stay bent. Mohammed also said that if it hadn't been for Eve, no woman would have been unfaithful to her husband, and that any woman that wears perfume and parades herself before men is a fornicator. He saw there was some confusion as people exited the mosque, so he told women they had no right to walk around among men. More than that, they should stay to the sides of the street, not wander down the middle. When any woman came to swear an oath of allegiance to him, if she wanted to shake his hand, he refused. He never touched women's hands. Anyone that touches the palm of a woman's hand when she is not someone he is legally allowed to touch will have burning coals of fire heaped in his hand by Allah on the Day of Judgement."

After a short pause, as if talking to himself, Rashid carried on with this fanatical monologue.

"Allah created women to be wives and mothers. Sending them to school isn't natural, it goes against what they need and what their families need. The Prophet, *salla Allah 'alayhi wa salam*, said that women shouldn't be taught writing, just how to spin thread and the contents of the chapter called "The Night". As

soon as a husband starts humoring all his wife's whims, Allah flings him and his wife into Hell. Woe betide whoever is slave to a woman! Hell is packed with ungrateful women. They never show the least gratitude to their husbands for everything they've had from them. Even if you've spent your whole life pampering your wife, she'll always find some trifling thing to reproach you with. One day she'll end up saying you've never done anything for her."

Tom had stopped listening to Rashid's misogynous ranting a short while back.

At the end of the long straight stretch, a curve was coming into view.

His deadly revenging arm would have its chance.

Tom's right hand discretely grasped the object that he had hidden in his left glove.

A ball-point pen.

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Dressed all in white like an angel, Charlie crossed through the broad band of light that shone into to corridor of milk-white marble. The silver columns that held up a domed roof of gold encrusted with emeralds reflected his figure as he wandered along slowly.

A phone to his ear and his look vacant, Charlie was carrying on a conversation.

"What reality could be better than death in showing this truth in a clear and unambiguous fashion? Through death, Allah has been humbling all the inhabitants of Earth since the dawn of life and will do so until the end of days. Many men live their passage in this world astray, drowned in their wealth, their knowledge or their inventions. Only one great truth prevents them from remaining infatuated with themselves and makes them submit humbly to the will of Allah. That truth is that every soul is fated to die. That's an inevitable destiny from which none can escape. Let those who claim to be acquainted with modern science and civilization, and boast of conquering space put all their efforts and

vast resources together and use all their rockets. They'll never drive away from them that blind force that lays them low and humiliates them, not meet the challenge that Allah makes to us. Every soul must come to death, men can do no more than build castles that satisfy their vanity to such an extent that they take themselves for God, and which reflect their despotism, tyranny and egoism. However, they would do better to contemplate those tombs where they will be nothing more than inert corpses and that earth which will swallow them some day."

Charlie listened to the person at the other end of the line before answering.

"No, of course not! We need his services. Remind him that Jihad is not a defensive war as some make it out to be. In its essence, Jihad isn't concerned with attack, or defense. Its only aim is to achieve the triumph of the word of Allah, to construct a healthy Islamic society and to found God's State on Earth, by whatever means. So, according to circumstances, Jihad may be limited to peaceful advice and orientation, to a defensive war combined with preaching, or even become an attacking war. In that last case, Jihad attains its culmination according to the will of Allah."

Charlie's soft voice took on a tone of contained irritation.

"Jihad is a sacred duty when there is any chance of success against the infidels. Islam requires every adult man, as long as he isn't handicapped or an invalid, to prepare himself to conquer nations, so that the commandments of Allah are obeyed everywhere. Those who don't know true Islam claim that it warns against waging war. They are idiots. Islam says that we must slay the unbelievers as they would slay us! Does that mean that Moslems should peacefully wait until they are massacred? No, of course not. We should kill the infidels before they come to kill our families. Islam says that we should slaughter the disbelievers, put them to the sword and disperse their armies. Does that mean we should wait until the idolators triumph over us? We can wait no longer, it is time to go into action in the name of the Prophet, *salla Allah 'alayhi wa salam.*"

Charlie ran his free hand angrily through his long brown hair, and tugged on his short-trimmed beard.

“Islam says that we should kill in the service of Allah those who might wish to kill us. Islam says that good exists only thanks to the sword and under the shadow of the sword. People cannot become obedient unless it is under the threat of the sword. The sword is the key to the gate of Paradise, which cannot be opened for any but holy warriors! There are hundreds of psalms and hadiths exhorting Moslems to love war and to fight for Allah. So, can anyone still sensibly believe that Islam is a religion that prevents men from waging war? I spit on the foolish souls that speak such garbage.”

Charlie broke off suddenly.

Sultan had just appeared round a corner of the corridor, accompanied by his lieutenant Jawad. The latter, a short man, had dressed in what was also Sultan’s preferred garb: a long white tunic topped by a traditional Arab headscarf. The two men stopped next to Charlie, who uttered a brief polite formula and ended the phone call.

Jawad settled his round eyeglasses on his broad, twisted nose. His bushy dark eyebrows waggled above the top edge of the tinted lenses set in a red frame. His cold, staring, tiny eyes, invisible under the dark glasses, fixed on Charlie’s.

“*Salam alaikum*. Any problem?” he asked in a surprisingly deep voice.

He stroked his long, pale, clean-shaven face.

Charlie smiled reassuringly, showing his fine white teeth.

“*Alaikum salam*. There is no problem that Allah cannot solve. Money will take care of other matters. Everything has its price. If you have money, you can do anything.”

Jawad smiled wolfishly, revealing rotten teeth.

“But what are you doing here, my brother?” Charlie asked. “I thought that you were up North.”

“I’m just passing through. I must meet my new recruit.”

Charlie nodded.

“By the grace of Allah, I hope his skills as a bomb-maker are as good as they seem.”

“I’ll soon find out. I have a meeting arranged with ... what was his name again? I’ve forgotten what he’s called.”

He pulled out of his pocket a piece of paper folded in four that he spread out. It was a black-and-white photocopy of a passport.

“Oh, yes ... Anderson,” Jawad said. “Thomas Anderson.”

Charlie looked thunderstruck. In a faint voice he asked, “Do you mean to say that the Frenchman you spoke to me about is called Thomas Anderson?”

Jawad nodded his head and showed the paper to Charlie. He stared silently at the identity photo.

“Do you know this man?” Sultan finally asked in his high-pitched voice.

Charlie nodded.

“Yes, he’s my sister’s fiancé.”

“Your sister’s fiancé?” Jawad asked in astonishment. “Are you sure?”

Charlie’s sole response was to search quickly for a photo in the files on the phone he was holding.

“Look.”

He showed them the device’s screen.

The snapshot had been taken during a gala charity dinner. Among other guests, it showed Thomas Anderson, Camilla and Charlie. As they sat side by side, the threesome gave an image of unworried, smiling happiness.

“It does look as if it’s him,” Jawad confirmed after comparing the snapshot on the phone with the photocopy of the passport.

As Sultan’s emaciated face leaned thoughtfully over Charlie’s phone, he got an impression this was somehow a past life experience. He mechanically stroked his long black beard, driving that bizarre feeling out of his mind.

“I must see Thomas Anderson as soon as possible,” Charlie said.

“Why so, my brother?” Jawad politely inquired.

Charlie lifted the hem of his white jacket and tugged a silvery revolver out of its holster.

“I have a small gift for him.”

His green eyes lit up with a radiant glow.

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The sun was slowly setting.

Already below the horizon, it had been swallowed up by the land of desolation that it had roasted for a whole cloudless day. Its golden blood was trickling away from the last few reddish mists. Its rays were no more than a pale reflection of their former selves and with a concluding small gleam the brilliant star would have finally have been fully extinguished.

Riding over a layer of dust that was swept by its powerful headlights, the elderly orange and white bus was driving at a moderate pace along the streets of Kabul.

They were almost deserted.

Under the streetlights with their bright orange-yellow light, the few townfolk still around were hurrying to get home before the time of the curfew. This had been imposed on the Afghan capital after a series of murderous terrorist attacks, and prohibited movement during the night.

At the end of a long avenue, the bus reached the depot and halted at an empty stop. The door opened with an unpleasant grinding squeak, and around two dozen passengers gratefully escaped from the discomfort of the worn-out seats. Walking fast, they headed for taxis or for nearby streets.

The driver turned the motor off. With a rapid, tired glance, he checked that all his travelers had left the vehicle, before getting out himself.

He locked the door and limped off.

A few minutes later, Tom cautiously stood up from behind a seat. He looked at the surroundings with great care. Apart from four or five workers busy with maintenance work on buses, the depot seemed empty.

Tom had expected the police to be waiting for him on his arrival. However, the force must be occupied with other matters elsewhere.

Luck was on his side.

Even if he had recovered his passport from Rashid's corpse, he had no visa for a stay in Afghanistan. He thus had to dodge any identity checks by appearing to be a local native. With that in mind, he had put on Redbeard's clothes and a beige cap that he had jammed down as far as his eyebrows. With his long beard and under cover of the night's darkness, Tom hoped to slip through the net of controls.

Out of prudence, Tom decided to remain hidden for a few minutes more before venturing out into the Kabul streets.

He had found an old, tattered plan of the capital on the floor of the bus. Thanks to his photographic memory, he would know his way around the town. Anyhow, the place where he had to meet up with Jawad was not far from the bus depot, he could get there in less than a quarter of an hour.

If he found a telephone on his way there, should he contact Alan to let him know he was still alive? Tom drove that thought out of his mind. He had no desire to talk to the Mossad agent, not wishing to have to give explanations about killing Winnie.

Besides, Tom was not certain he would still be alive in an hour. Would Jawad believe the story that he would cook up about the death of Redbeard and Rashid? At the slightest doubt, at the least glimmer of a suspicion, Tom would be at risk of dying from a bullet through his head.

There would be no form of trial.

In a verse in the Koran, Mohammed had given the near relatives of a dead person a free hand to revenge his murder. The family was authorized to act as judge and jury for themselves and to murder the designated guilty party. As a complete contradiction of the Torah and its commandment "Thou shalt not kill", Mohammed had legalized personal vengeance. Through allowing such a vendetta without any trial or sentence, he had bequeathed a system of violence and uncontrolled tribal slaughters, plunging Islamic society into chaos rather than civilizing it. It was the logic of brutes caring nothing for justice, a string of foolish ethnic conflicts, endless and made up of blind barbarity, with macabre uppings of the ante and vengeful surprise attacks.

At bottom, though, as so often with the desert godfather, it was really no more than a question of money. He added in his verse a financial clause that could wash away blood at a price, allowing the wealthiest murderers to buy themselves out of trouble with the law and kill with impunity.

That was the Islamic law. That was the Sharia that made Tom's head spin whenever he reflected on it.

In his novel *The Sage of Mecca*, Tom had explained at some length that to understand Sharia, you first had to take into account that it was based on a literal reading of the Koran, with all its sectarian and murderous commandments. Secondly, though, it was based on the Sunnah.

For Moslems, the Koran was the very word of God, his divine law which they must obey absolutely, on pain of going to Hell. Although the Koran contained rules on marriage, divorce or inheritances, for instance, it did not lay down any general principles. Numerous legal questions were covered in it in a superficial way and an even larger number of vital matters were simply not touched on in it.

On its own, Islamic law taken from the Koran could lead to nothing but an anarchic society.

To clear up any vaguenesses in the Koran and to fill in the gaps left by God's silence, Moslems had had to legislate about the acts and words of the Prophet, basing themselves particularly on the mythical hadiths. They had set up as norms what they believed had been said or done in his presence, legalizing whatever Mohammed was supposed not to have prohibited.

That was the origin of the Sunnah.

Without it, Moslems would have had no guidelines for sorting out their minor day-to-day problems. Having the Koran as its base, the Sunnah had become the expression of God's commandments. It was the irrevocable and impenetrable will of Allah, which must be obeyed blindly, without hesitation, question or reservation.

At the very start of the Abbasid period, Islamic law had finally become fixed. It was inward-looking, graven in stone of the worst obscurantism, and permitted no changes whatsoever.

Sharia had become immutable.

As the various systems of Moslem legal precedents were not considered until the Koran and the Sunnah had been consulted first, such precedents in Islamic law were limited to questions that had not been mentioned in either. Since no legal expertise, no precedent could ever challenge anything that was made clear in the Koran or hadiths, the foundations of Sharia could never be reformed.

Islamic law could thus not adapt when faced with the constant developments in social realities, in the way that democratic laws could. This was particularly true of the rights and individual freedoms of women and homosexuals. Through a definitive and infallible interpretation of the sacred texts cooked up by Allah, Mohammed's embodiment in Heaven, Islamic law was inflexibly divine and rigid. It could not be adjusted by the intelligence of humans, diametrically the opposite of democratic laws, which were humane and able to evolve.

While democratic laws paid attention to a humanity that was happily in constant evolution, Sharia was always subject to the orders of an irate God, or to be more truthful of a narcoleptic compulsive liar from centuries ago. Sharia was no more than a system for tyranny within and aggression without, with verses ordering no obedience to be accorded to non-Moslems or to any of their democratic laws that ran contrary to the Koran. Countries that built their identity on its lies were caught in a time trap that obliged them to live under the barbarous yoke of a bumbling tyrant from the Dark Ages.

As long as Moslems thought that the Koran was eternally true and that its Sharia provided an answer to all the problems of the modern world, there could be no progress and no evolution possible.

However, for Moslems, whether sneaky Medina-style or thoughtless Meccans, Sharia was not a choice within Islam, it was a target to be reached everywhere that it was not yet in force.

Tom sighed.

Once Sharia had been imposed on the world, a non-Moslem would no longer be able to testify against a Moslem. With the absurd logic of Islamic law in force, in the absence of any other

witness a Moslem could rob the home of a non-Moslem before his very face with complete impunity.

The word of a lying Moslem would carry more weight than the oath of an honest atheist.

Sharia was sometimes so ridiculous that even Moslems turned away from it by clumsy tricks. That was the case for usury which was formally forbidden in the Koran. As loans with interest were vital for trade, Moslems had had to think up a ploy that appeared to respect the religious prohibition, but actually got around it. This was the double sale: a debtor would sell a slave to a creditor and then buy the slave back immediately at a higher price, payable at a later date. The difference between the two prices represented the interest.

Mohammed would doubtless have turned in his grave at the thought.

His rotten corpse could rest easy at such odd deviations. The divine order to wall up adulterous women alive had been adjusted, it was true, but only to an equally cruel tradition of stoning them to death. The cutting off of a thief's hand was still in full force to this day, moreover.

Tom clenched his fists.

The reptilian part of the brain's instinctive temptation to filch items was sometimes stronger than logical thought. Did a small child that pilfered a candy cane really deserve such an atrocious punishment?

It was clear that Allah's justice was nothing like that of democratic countries like France. Through its strong desire to support liberty, the French Republic had mistakenly allowed the little Koranic mouse to squirm into the trunk of the European elephant, as it had been deceived by cunning lies, camouflaged by the word "peace".

Not sensing the danger, the French Republic had tried to be neutral and separate itself from all religions, setting up a lay constitution. In its public schools, this holding back had created an intellectual void, a sort of voluntary censorship, so that all subjects were taught in them from a scientific viewpoint and religion was never mentioned in them, having become a taboo subject.

In the name of neutrality, teachers in France did not have any right to talk about religions or tell the true facts about them. In a few classes, if a couple of Bible tales, such as Noah's Ark, were mentioned, it was only as the presentation of a story without any further explanation for them. However, this was as bad as presenting the cycle of tides, and then letting students decide for themselves whether to put the phenomenon down to the moon's gravitational pull or to divine will.

Out of a principle of liberty, children were left to learn about religions by themselves. It was up to them to test the divine religious poison to discover if it was toxic or not. That was as irresponsible as letting children taste cocaine out of a principle of freedom.

Schools in France had failed in their obligation to impart the truth. They allowed children to listen to uneducated religion dealers selling their addictive cults, whether it was by trying to convince them that Moses had parted the sea, that Jesus had walked on water, or that Mohammed had been good, sincere and the seal of prophets.

Instead of revealing long-known secrets about the viral propagation of religion that had contaminated humanity, or letting scientists with their doctorates vaccinate truth into students' young minds, schools permitted the schizo-religious to spread their madness even in the playground.

If it really wished to avoid even the least distress to stupid minds, on condition that it was prepared to lie, a school could just as well teach that the Earth was not round, because that contradicted a verse in the Koran. Similarly, it could give up mentioning Darwin and the evolution of species, since the Koran confirms the creationist tale of Adam and Eve, emerging from the fable in the Old Testament.

However, the role of schools was exactly that of not lying, of teaching the truth and correct knowledge from an objective viewpoint.

Tom smiled sadly.

He would have wished for his novels to be read, discussed, or pulled apart even, in the classrooms of the French Republic, his adopted and beloved homeland. He would have liked to drive false

beliefs out of those innocent little heads. However, he well knew that he would never live to see his books put into schools. The myths of the Bible invented by King Josias would never be taught there on a par with the myths of Greek religion, no different from them, nonetheless. As they were all built on the foundation of Josias's untruths, the lobbies of all three monotheistic religions would take great care that this fact would never come into the light of day, but would stifle the scandal of their nebulous and dubious origins.

*Woe to that man by whom offence cometh*, is what Jesus said, fearing the revelation of secrets. Mohammed had gone worse than that by making up a verse that ordered the crucifixion of all who opposed him or worked to offend him.

The offense of truth.

Tom would not be the man by whom truth came.

He had given up in the face of the lies in the mythical sacred texts. He had thrown up the sponge when confronted with the God Virus which had become intrinsic to human nature.

What was the use?

Not being crazy, not living outside reality, had become a crime. In the lunatic asylum that had been set up on Earth, but particularly in Islamic lands, madness was obligatory. No unbelieving psychiatrist would be admitted there.

Among the greatest sins that Sharia picked out, failure to believe was the most reviled, far worse than murder, theft or adultery, and the punishment for it was death. With his long beard, Tom would have made a nice victim of crucifixion on the cross of truth, a false Christ, but a truly altruistic Messiah, put to death for having wanted to save the world despite itself.

Tom closed his eyes.

Believers claimed that their religions made people good, and in particular more altruistic. That was a lie, as humans were naturally generous. Indeed, that was how religions preaching mutual help had been able to build themselves around this human characteristic. There was no truth in the claim that religion made people more altruistic.

Quite the contrary.

The fact of being a believer made people less charitable, and even selfish. They thought they were good folk, but through a psychological effect of the moral license granted by the absolution they had acquired, this thought blocked specific actions. They helped others less, whereas those with no religion, not having had their innate altruistic nature eroded by religion, worked far more on a day-to-day basis for the good of humanity.

It might be that a Godless world could often become cold, authoritarian or eugenicist. However, such a Godless world was so very human.

Tom opened his eyes again and checked his watch.

It was time to go. He had let his mind wander for too long and now he had to concentrate on his meeting with Jawad.

In the bus depot, the workers who had been busy around the vehicles had disappeared. Tom slid the window down and squeezed out of the bus with the agility of a contortionist.

Walking swiftly, after a quick check that no-one had seen him, he headed out into the heart of a deserted Kabul. He slipped along as close as he could get to the walls, dodging streetlights and their accusing shine. Thanks to his photographic memory and the plan of the town that he had found, Tom was able to avoid the main streets, preferring the maze of dark alleyways.

Minutes ticked by as this alien shadow moved onward.

He finally reached a poorly lit crossroad where the garish ill-assorted signs of a shopping area were present in profusion. The district was made up of square buildings two or three stories high, with roofs of dirty, battered corrugated iron sheets. With metal grilles lowered in front of most, the windows at street level hid displays of foods or insignificant oddments back of thick curtains.

Tom was no more than a hundred yards or so from his destination when barking broke out to the rear of him. Simultaneously, an extra-powerful flashlight shone on him, projecting a huge black shadow of him onto the sidewalk.

A deep voice shouted an order out into the silence of the night.

Tom did not turn round. He knew very well that it had to be the military or the police. He started running, dodging into an unlit passageway running to his left.

Shouts and barks followed him immediately.

Tom had a lead of no more than fifty yards. At the moment where he was about to disappear around a corner into another laneway, a burst of fire from an automatic weapon thundered out. As he speeded up, Tom wondered whether the shots had been accidental or deliberate. If the security forces had itchy trigger fingers, better not to stay in their line of fire.

He ducked into a dark alleyway to his right, then into a narrower lane to his left.

While he could still hear the sporadic shouts of his pursuers in the distance, the barking had stopped ten or twelve seconds ago. In his mad rush, Tom had not noticed this small but nonetheless crucial detail.

That lack of attention could have been fatal for him.

However, in its rapid dash the dog overturned a garbage bin as it raced ahead. Tom instinctively stopped running and moved his hand toward his belt, having just enough time to turn round and face the ferocious hound that was already jumping at him, fangs bared.

There was a blinding flash, and a loud crack that seemed to fix the moment in time.

Man and animal both fell to the ground.

Time appeared to halt.

For the dog, it had stopped for ever. Its face was smashed and the bullet had killed it instantly. For Tom, dazed by the violence of the impact, seconds went by like minutes. As if he was a groggy boxer, Tom untangled himself from the heavy corpse and stood up. Redbeard's pistol was in his hand as he staggered slightly, raising his free hand to his head. Feeling the contact between his palm and his bare scalp, he realized that he had lost his hat. His brain was working in slow motion, and his eyes looked around for the lost item in the darkness, as if it had become urgent to find it rather than to run away.

Not far off, the loud howling of a siren gave a jolt to his mind, bringing him back to the reality of time in a fraction of a second.

The seconds went back to moving at the normal speed.

Sticking his pistol back into its holster, Tom once more started running through the dark lanes. He finally came back out of them into the dim lighting of the shopping zone, which seemed deserted.

His sense of direction had brought him back to his meeting place. He sprinted toward a red sign on which “Photo Studio Kabul” was painted in golden letters.

Tom pushed open the old door to the left of the shop and closed it silently after him. With his sleeve he wiped the sweat off his forehead. His heart was beating nineteen to the dozen, and it took him several minutes to get his breath back.

Outside in the street, a police car zoomed by, its siren screaming.

Tom was not worried by that. He knew he had not been seen and that he was safe here.

At least, if Jawad believed the lie he would tell about a road accident.

Tom shut his eyes.

The events of the day came back to haunt him.

He saw himself in his mind’s eye dressed in a burqa and pulling the pen out of his glove. Tom raised his veil and took the plastic cap off the pen, then turned with a smile toward Redbeard. He had slipped his left hand under the driver’s neck and with a rapid movement his right hand had stabbed the ballpoint into the man’s eye. It had gone more than two inches into the eye socket, killing Redbeard instantly. Tom had dropped the pen and jerked the steering wheel violently. The car had rolled over and over six or seven times and had ended up immobile in a field, but standing on its wheels.

Rashid had not done up his seat belt. He had been shot out of the rear window to a distance of sixty feet or so away. His skull had slammed hard into the tarmac. He lay in a pool of blood, his body in an unnatural posture, moaning faintly.

Tom had climbed out of the Mercedes through the smashed windshield.

“Why, my brother?” Rashid had been able to gasp out of his bloody mouth.

“I’m no brother of yours,” Tom had growled as he leaned over him.

He had crushed that throat for long minutes, his vengeful fingers sinking into the soft flesh.

Tom had to drive that image out of his head.

He had to build up a false memory, a different reality in his mind. As they had come round a bend, there had been a dog crossing the road. Redbeard had spun the steering wheel and the car had done barrel rolls. Tom had been the sole survivor, and he had prudently hidden the two bodies in the trunk of the Mercedes to avoid the attention of the police. The damaged vehicle was thus still in the middle of the field, and Jawad could go check on the truth of what he said.

Tom had carefully concocted a cunning mix of lies and true facts so that it would sound perfectly natural as he repeated it. All he had to do now was to pour it over the truth and serve it up to Jawad.

Tom opened his eyes again.

He slowly climbed the stairs that led to the apartment above the photo store.

On reaching the landing, he knocked at the single door opening onto it.

No reply.

Tom tapped again.

With a faint squeak, the door finally opened.

Tom walked three or four feet into the darkened room.

He felt a revolver against his head.



## 16

### **Sixth Commandment: Sharia Shall Not Be Satirized**

**Is it possible to laugh at one's own religious convictions? To investigate this question, a psychological experiment was carried out.**

**During the first phase, volunteers from various confessions watched films showing liturgical symbols, mystical images and clips with episodes from the life of Moses, Christ or Mohammed.**

**During the second phase, their sense of humor was measured in terms of their reaction to jokes about religion or caricatures of the three figures.**

**The result was that after having seen these films and pious images, their sense of humor had been drastically curtailed.**

**Religion and humor clearly are not easy bedfellows.**

**Religious symbols and pictures inhibit the sense of humor. They decrease any ability to cope with religious caricatures and to see their funny side.**

**Humor plays with multiple meanings, twisting the sense of words and symbols. This is the exact opposite of religion, since it recognizes only one truth which is professed by its followers and to which one must stick thanks to established dogmas.**

**The mental structure of humor is completely opposite to the structure for religion.**

**It is thus hard for the faithful to laugh at the sacred, or to mock their own beliefs. They are the slaves of a single vision set up as a law, like Sharia for Moslems.**

**Jokes about Sharia cannot make them laugh. They sit down with absolute seriousness to debate whether demons can be counted in calculating the quorum of participants needed for Friday prayers. As these malevolent creatures often take on a human appearance, it is appropriate for Sharia to lay down the law on this subject. It is equally sensible to discuss the spiny problem of the descendants arising from a coupling of a human being and a demon disguised as a human.**

**Ridicule does not kill.**

**So, eternal and unchangeable, Sharia controls the political and social activities of individuals down to the smallest detail. It has unrestricted rights to manage the life of every believer and to make sure that other religions cannot disturb Islam.**

**It intrudes everywhere, from what accommodation to provide for slaves down to how to use a toothpick. It even tells how calls of nature should obligatorily be dealt with.**

**This is God's will.**

**By agreeing to be a Submitter to the Almighty, by living as a slave of His divine law, men can learn to be free.**

**Slavery is freedom.**

**This is because in Islam personal freedom lies in Submission to the divine will. It cannot be achieved by freeing oneself from all external constraints. Since individual liberty ends where the community's liberty begins, human rights cannot exist, except as a part of human obligations. Any who do not accept these obligations have no rights. They must at least be excluded and in the worst case eliminated.**

**Individually, Moslems are like friendly, sociable ants, docile and pleasant. In groups, Islam becomes a sort of ant-hill with a dogmatic collective intelligence, capable of destroying everything in its way to impose the will of the Koran, the queen ant.**

**This collective intelligence, though, is fossilized by its terror of going to Hell. This is so much so that one small, free independent ant may perfectly well be more intelligent than**

**the whole colony taken together, thanks to retaining a capacity for critical thinking better when alone than when under the influence of others.**

**Let us be that free, independent, critical ant, endowed with a communicating laugh.**

**Not satirizing other people's fears.**

*Extract from the novel "The Sage of Mecca" by Thomas Anderson.*



## 17

### Love

Facing the immense starry sky, Mohammed had the feeling that he was nothing. He felt as insignificant as the grains of sand, still warm from a fiery day, on which he was lying, with one arm supporting his neck.

He had the impression that he was nothing more than a small ant inside a book, running over pages written in advance, not knowing how the story would end, as if a prisoner to the whims of an unknown hand that constantly turned the pages of his life.

*Oh God! What must I do?*

For a month now, Mohammed had in vain prayed every day until his forehead was bruised. It was no use: God had kept quiet on the topic of whether or not Aisha was guilty.

His gaze vaguely on the infinite night sky beneath the glow of a dying moon, Mohammed allowed his memory to journey back over seas of painful recollections.

These had taken shape during the return journey from an expedition against God's enemies. As the City of the Prophet was very close, he had ordered his men to resume their march in the middle of the night. All his women had drawn lots and these had designated his very young wife Aisha to accompany Mohammed on the perilous journey. The little redhead had thus been present among the troops that were busy striking camp. She had taken advantage of this to go off and pay a call of nature. On her return, she had realized that her necklace had fallen off somewhere. In panic, Aisha had gone back where she had been, looking for her

misplaced jewelry. She had lost track of time once out of contact with the others, but in the end had found her necklace thanks to a helpful moon's light. In her absence, the men responsible for her transport had lifted up her litter with its long draperies. Believing the tiny Aisha was inside, they had placed it on a camel's back.

When Aisha finally returned to the camp, everyone had already left. She found herself alone, lost in the middle of the desert. Rather than walking off to no purpose, she had decided to wait where she was, knowing that sooner or later people would notice she was missing.

Very luckily (or was it the Devil's work?), a soldier had gotten there in the wee small hours after trotting right through the night. This was Sawan, a man from the rearguard whose mission was to follow the main troop some distance to the rear. He had found Aisha lying asleep on the sand. The sleeping beauty had woken up and with a troubled look had put her veil back over her face. Aisha had climbed onto Sawan's she-camel, and he had led the beast by the bridle, walking until the sun reached its height at midday and finally succeeding in rejoining Mohammed's army.

After the troop had returned to the City of the Prophet, a pernicious rumor had gradually spread from mouth to mouth among the inhabitants. Aisha and Sawan had had a sexual adventure out in the desert.

*Oh my little Aisha!*

Had she really succumbed to Sawan's charms? She had still been a virgin, so could she have let herself be tempted by the calls of the flesh?

Aisha swore she had not.

Nonetheless, Mohammed knew that this wife of his was a little liar and was always making up stories. To get to be the center of attention, she often said whatever came into her mind. Later, when the Prophet's death had come, Aisha even pretended to have been present at the end, giving details that had come straight from her child's imagination, just so that others would find her interesting.

*How could he tell whether Aisha was telling the truth about Sawan?*

From her earliest childhood, the fragile girl Aisha had rapidly learned to lie in order to survive in the world of adults. She did so with such extraordinary aplomb that no-one could distinguish truth from falsehood as plausible comments came from her mouth with its pearly-white teeth and ringing laughter.

Everyone had believed her when she started saying that the Prophet had deflowered her before she reached the age of ten. Even if this was untrue, she continually whispered to those around her that Mohammed took good care to couple with her whenever he could. These false claims had caused a great stir among the Prophet's other wives. In the harem, his spouses were afraid that Aisha might have a child by Mohammed and that out of fatherly love he might repudiate them all. It was perhaps because of these lies that the vengeful rumor had arisen, maybe starting on the embittered lips of one of the women of the harem.

*Unless Aisha had spoken in confidence to one of them and the real truth had been revealed by some indiscreet listener.*

Mohammed sighed.

At the time, he had agreed to marry this child with her huge adoring eyes in order to save her from men's vices and carry her off to Paradise with him. He had done so above all because he wanted to please Abu Bakr, her father, who had never stopped harassing him to accept this union, unnatural though it might be. Afterward, many Submitters had followed his example and permitted their hidden perversions to emerge by opting for child brides.

Mohammed found such relationships unsettling, unhealthy, or even devilish. He saw Aisha as his own daughter, and he could never have had an intimate relationship with her, as his marriage to her was nothing more than a sort of paternalistic protection. However, this sort of marital and sexual union had become perfectly legitimate. God had now authorized it, as if the Prophet in some paradoxical way indicated the words of the Almighty by his own conduct.

It was not the only time that the Prophet's will had coincided with, or even anticipated, God's will, receiving a benevolent echo in the Mother of Books.

Mohammed recalled the episode of the wife of his adopted son Zaid. One day, he had gone to visit this beloved son. However, he had been out when the Prophet had knocked at his door. It was Zaid's wife that had opened to him and invited the Messenger of God into her home with a bewitching smile.

*Zaynab.*

His adopted son's wife was called Zaynab. She was incredibly beautiful and that day was not wearing a veil over her face with its harmonious features. Her long black hair fell over her bare shoulders. She was wearing a skimpy dress and had looked the Prophet right in the eye with an angelic smile. As Mohammed remained motionless without saying a word, Zaynab had slipped off her dress, letting it fall to the floor. She had been totally naked. Mohammed had been paralyzed by this vision, looking like a virgin from Paradise.

Zaynab's hazel eyes gave him an unmistakable look. She wanted nothing better than to be taken. Her lips, red like heavenly wine had drawn Mohammed irresistibly toward a drunkenness of the senses.

"Sweet Lord! God of Heaven!" exclaimed the Prophet exclaimed in a barely audible voice. "How you can turn men's heads and hearts!"

In the presence of this enthralling sight, time had seemed to stop. Mohammed had been besotted by this creature out of his dreams. Above all, he had been deeply consternated by the fact that his curse, or rather the blessing of God that preserved him from all corruption, had not worked. He had not fallen into a trance under the effects of his arousal, and no black veil had come over his sight. A shameful, covetous desire had then surged up in him, an animal's lust, a bestial desire that had fanned the weak flame in his extinguished heart.

Had he at last found true love, a love that would replace his first wife Khadijah?

Without saying a word, as if ashamed, Mohammed had fled far from his adopted son's house. When he came home, Zaynab had told her husband what had happened when the Prophet had visited his house, leaving out the detail that she had stripped completely naked before his father.

“He has fallen in love with me!” had been her claim.

Zaid knew that his marriage was not going well and that the two of them already had had the idea of separating. So he had gone to seek out the Prophet and had proposed to him that he would get divorced. In that way the father, who he loved so well, would be able to take Zaynab to wife.

However, Mohammed had refused.

“Keep your wife to yourself and fear God,” replied the Prophet.

Zaynab had not seen things the same way and she started mistreating her husband, showing him that she no longer had any interest in him. Not being able to put up with any more of this, Zaid had finally demanded a divorce.

Mohammed likewise was no longer able to hide his sudden love for Zaynab. Despite it, the thing that had held him back from declaring his passion to the former wife of his adopted son was a law handed down from ancient times. Seeing such a relationship as incestuous, it stipulated that it was forbidden for a father to marry the wives of his sons. As the Prophet saw things, this ancient prohibition was senseless: an adopted son was not the same as a real son.

As passion was stronger than all else, Mohammed had finally decided to go ahead. It little mattered what gossip would say.

So he had asked Zaid to act as a go-between. He had gone to see his former wife and found her making bread. He had proposed to her that she should marry his father.

“God must tell me to marry him,” came her reply in a somewhat affronted tone. She thought that this would make the Prophet desire her even more.

She had added that she was about to go to the place of prostration and pray.

Zaid had reported this conversation to Mohammed and his entourage, who were also awaiting Zaynab’s response.

Then God had replied to this woman Mohammed desired so much.

During the nap he took after his midday meal, while Zaynab was still in the House of God, Mohammed had been visited by Gabriel. The Almighty authorized his future marriage, since the ignorance of ancient times had given way to the arrival of Truth. Awaking from his prophetic trance, Mohammed had dashed into the main room and declaimed the new recitation that the angel of revelation had just dictated to him.

When he finish, his eyes shining, he had exclaimed, “Who will go congratulate Zaynab and tell her the Lord has joined her to me in marriage?”

Aisha, who was there among his followers, had made a suspicious comment in her innocent little voice.

“Your God truly seems to have been very quick in answering your prayers.”

That day, Aisha had looked at him strangely, as if she did not believe in the divine word, as if Mohammed had lied, making up this recitation himself. Nonetheless, the Prophet was not a liar like Aisha. He was just the Messenger of God, who recited faithfully the will of the Almighty without altering any part.

It was true that a critical mind might find it strange that all these recitations always arrived just at the right moment, or immediately after actions, to justify them. It might even be thought that Mohammed was making them up himself as circumstances required for his personal interests. However, such coincidences were God’s will, as he could not help there being some delay in reading the Mother of Books.

Some Submitters had been surprised that the divine word came only after the fact and not before. If God knew that Mohammed was going to become enamored with Zaynab, why had he not promulgated the law authorizing marriage with the wives of adoptive sons well before the Prophet’s love at first sight, rather than leaving everything to the last minute? If everything was written beforehand in the Mother of Books, why announce things only after the event? If God was aware of everything, why wait for events to be fully accomplished before validating or censuring them?

Faced with these questions, which were reasonable, after all, Mohammed had realized that if God in his great wisdom on

occasions delayed somewhat, it was to preserve men from the works of Satan. Indeed, predestination was normally immutable, being fixed by God in his eternal decrees and not able to be brought back into question. Except, humans' free will could turn them out of God's way. If they came to know before the right time about the future written in the pages of the Mother of Books, the Devil might triumph by being able to influence some men into choosing another route, the way to perdition that was where disobedience to God's designs would lead.

*Oh!*

A shooting star had just traversed the vault of the sky. It was a dart thrown by God's guardians at a demon that had tried to break into the first Heaven.

*Zaynab is like that shooting star: bright but short-lasting.*

His love for his adopted son's wife was just a mirage, a temporary illusion. Mohammed had recently met Zaynab once more about the preparations for their future marriage. Her face and angelical smile had been hidden as the eternal black veil drew across the Prophet's vision and blurred it.

Mohammed now knew that he would not be able to achieve intercourse with Zaynab. She was not yet aware of this and thought she was enjoying a perfect love affair with the Messenger of God. She boasted to anyone who would listen that Mohammed's other wives had been given to him by their families, while the new marriage that was about to take place had been ordered by God from all the seven Heavens.

Like all the other women, whether spouses, concubines or slaves, Zaynab would join the Prophet's harem and would be initiated into his secret: since Khadijah's death, this wife had proved irreplaceable and Mohammed had had no sexual intercourse with any other. Like all of them, Zaynab would have to wear her veil at all times so as not to upset the Prophet by her beauty. Like all of them, Zaynab would seal this strange secret into her heart, unless she wanted to be repudiated and condemned to Hell.

The comforts of the harem, its exclusive privileges and the guarantee of going to the true Seventh Heaven meant that it was a tomb for any murmured rumors, from which no indiscretions had

so far trickled out. If any word did escape, God would know for sure how to protect his Messenger with fresh words written in the Mother of Books, bringing back to obedience any tongues that had ducked away from their promise.

For the moment, his harem was growing like the belly of a pregnant woman, thanks to the flow of captives and the women found by expeditions sent to discover the perfect wife. By the grace of God, he might one day find such a rare pearl, a woman that could at last revive an idyllic love beside an affectionate wife, like Khadijah.

Inwardly, Mohammed felt slightly ashamed at the situation. It was, of course, God's will, but it was terribly uncomfortable for him. He did not want his secret to become known, for fear he would be the laughing stock of the poets in Satan's pay that proliferated in Mecca. He feared that the man he had become, adulated by everyone, put on a divine column, could take with him in any fall brought about by a tempest of mockery the Prophet's recitation.

*If Aisha started talking.*

She was fully capable of it.

As for the adultery committed, if she was truly guilty Aisha would be walled up alive in a house. The Mother of Books was strict on such a punishment. However, four witnesses were needed for the charge to be confirmed. For the moment there were only three, one of them Zaynab's own sister, who claimed they were sure about the accusation because of confidences made to them by Sawan, who swore this was untrue, or by a woman in Mohammed's harem, who they did not wish to name so as to protect her from any reprisals.

At any moment, a fourth witness might appear and thus cause Aisha to be found definitively guilty.

What should the Prophet do?

*It was a vicious circle.*

If Mohammed let Aisha be walled up alive, she would shout out to all and sundry her shameful secret. The unthinking little girl would try to save her life by ridiculing the value of the divine laws in the Mother of Books that were condemning her to

death, by mockery of the Prophet. To break down the wall of the house where she would be imprisoned, she would cause the collapse of God's house on Earth.

If Mohammed left Aisha's crime unpunished, the sin committed would itself split apart the edifice of opinion of the irreproachable virtue of the Messenger of God and his recitation. It would carry him off, and Submission too, into the tortures of the Devil's works.

*A problem with no solutions.*

Like a divine intermediary, a new shooting star appeared, interrupting the thread of the Prophet's thoughts and calming his bruised conscience.

He allowed his wandering gaze to lose itself a little further in the firmament, where the stars burned with the calm fire of precious stones. Although the dawn was still distant, the milky veil that surrounded the world of men with its scarf of whitish light seemed to grow pale and tremble. Meanwhile, an almost invisible golden powder gradually sprinkled across the silent vault a spangling of sparks.

Whenever he faced this growing swarm of heavenly bodies, Mohammed was always astounded and seized with tinglings of pleasure. Deeper than those thousands of stars, further thousands tirelessly appeared as if by magic in the infinite depths of the sky. The soul was perpetually fulfilled by being present before the visible and limitless power of God.

That universe, illuminated with shining points like tiny golden nails, turned on its axis up there in holy splendor. Meanwhile on the darkling Earth, in this desert of dull sand, nothing moved but a slight gust of wind, like the sweet warm breath of a sleeping woman.

*My little Aisha.*

He enjoyed feeling her child's breathing on his aging face. When she slept beside him, she was like an affectionate little cat that curled up in a ball, seeking the warmth of his body with her back. She held him with her long fingers with their delicate nails, not wanting to let him go away, inviting him to prolong the night that was coming to an end as the day broke.

To avoid any jealousy among his women, even if there was nothing physical between them and him, Mohammed had the habit of sharing out his time equitably, spending a night with each of them as their turns came. However, he took no pleasure in this. The exception was the evenings when he found himself in Aisha's arms. Her juvenile air emitted a sweetness and innocence that took him into marvelous dreams. Very often the Prophet struggled to repel that moment when he was going to fall into a divine sleep, so as to be able to gaze for as long as possible under the on-looking moon at this little slip of a sleeping angel that inspired in him an indescribable fatherly happiness.

*Oh, Aisha.*

The whinny of a horse approaching from the distance cut through the calm of the night. Mohammed pulled himself up onto his elbows and turned his head to look at this unknown rider trotting toward him. The man was dressed all in black and rode a brown horse. He stopped a score of yards away. He leaped off his horse and tied it up alongside the Prophet's white mare, which was itself hitched by a rope to one of the tent-pegs of a large marquee made of light-colored cloth. The newcomer glanced inside, then, not having seen anyone there, started looking all around himself.

In the darkness, relieved only by the light of a tiny sliver of moon, he finally made out the dark figure of the Prophet. His arm waved in friendly fashion.

"It is I," said he in a sing-song voice, "it is Ali!"

The Prophet stood up immediately and came to give a warm hug to this black-bearded and so well loved son.

"I missed you greatly!" exclaimed Mohammed.

He had not seen Ali for several weeks. The young man had gone off to negotiate alliances with Arab clans against the tribes of Mecca.

"I have no good news for you," responded Ali, preferring to go straight to the point. "The Meccans are preparing a new attack against us. They will soon be at the gates of the city. While you were not there, I took the initiative of listening to valuable military advice and we have started digging an uncrossable trench to protect the City."

In the night, Ali's sad smile shone on his swarthy face.

"We should go back to the City straight away," suggested the young man. "You are truly needed there."

"Need?" interrupted Mohammed. "You can easily do without me, just as God does."

Ali heard the bitterness in the Prophet's voice. He understood that Mohammed was referring to the recitation that Gabriel had passed on after the fighting at Uhud, a battle in which the Messenger of God had nearly lost his life. In substance, it said that the Seal of the Prophets was not immortal and the day he was killed Submission would have to continue its advance without him.

"It is true a day of misfortune is bound to come sooner or later," said Ali sadly. "However, for the moment there is so much that Gabriel still has to tell you. Your recitation from the Mother of Books is not over, of that I am sure! The story is beautiful and it still has a long time to go."

Ali peered into the surrounding blackness with his dark eyes.

"But what are you doing here all on your own? You know that is dangerous. God's foes are everywhere."

"I had to be alone, so as not to hear the whisperings in the City, the rumors going around about Aisha."

Ali nodded in silence.

"Come with me," said Mohammed to him, taking him by the shoulder.

The two men went and sat where the Prophet had been lying a few minutes before.

Before Ali had gone off on his mission, Mohammed had asked him if he thought that Aisha was guilty, and if he ought to repudiate her before the whole affair took a catastrophic turn. Ali had replied that God had not stinted his Messenger too much when it came to his wives: he had plenty of other women. Mohammed could thus do whatever seemed good to him. Ali had not fully realized how fond the Prophet was of Aisha and that the rumors going around about her were breaking his heart.

Ali was well aware of this now.

In the City of the Prophet, some folk said that it was Ibn Ubayy, one of the main leaders of the Helpers, who had been the first to put about rumors of Aisha's adultery. Ali now told Mohammed about this.

"It seems that all this scandal began with Ibn Ubayy. That surprises me greatly, because I trust him fully."

"It is not Ibn Ubayy," interrupted Mohammed in a gloomy tone. "Aisha has never liked Ibn Ubayy since the day he told her that she was just a fickle little girl, possessive and jealous, who can always wheedle whatever she wants out of me. In her sadness, Aisha is trying to get revenge on him by bringing false charges against him. Believe me, though, Ibn Ubayy has nothing to do with all this. Aisha does not like Ibn Ubayy for another reason, a joke that has been doing the rounds in the harem. In mockery, one of my women said some time past that Ibn Ubayy might be Aisha's real father, since they are both redheads."

Father and son laughed at this joke. Their chuckles echoed out into the mildness of the night for quite a while. Doubts or demons fired off shooting stars, and their voices finally died away, matching the serenity of the firmament.

At the crack of dawn, after their long discussions the two men struck camp to head back to the City of the Prophet. He set up his tent outside the town, near the trench that was being dug. That way he could supervise the work and isolate himself from the rumors that were still circulating.

Then, with his great indulgence, God decided to put a definitive end to the slandering of Aisha.

While the Prophet slept, Gabriel came to him and brought a divine revelation. Aisha was innocent of the crime with which she was being accused.

Reinforced by this new recitation, Mohammed leaped out of his bed to rush to the City. He was taken there by a crowd of disciples, all happy to have their Prophet back. In the public square he declaimed the brand new pages from God that were written in the Mother of Books.

Through the Prophet's voice, God scolded the townsfolk for having passed on by word of mouth such atrocious rumors about Aisha when they were obvious lies. God could have brought

down a terrible punishment on them all for the gossip that they had spread around. Nonetheless, the Almighty was compassionate and would forgive the sin they had committed.

However, God could not forgive the three slanderers.

Since these scandal-mongers had not been able to get together four witnesses, they were liars before God. They should be punished for that odious crime.

Henceforth, new punishments had been fixed by divine decree. Adulterous men and women were to receive a hundred lashes of the whip, and accusers who could not produce a foursome to attest to the truth of their claims would receive eighty. So, as soon as his recitation had been faithfully passed on, Mohammed gave the order to impose the prescribed penalty on the trio of criminals that had disparaged Aisha's honor and integrity.

The whip slashed into flesh amid torrents of blood that washed away the insult in a red flood. With the tears, cries of pain and futile begging, to the sound of cracking leather lashes, every mouth in the City was cleansed of the satanic words that for several weeks had burned on tongues like a foretaste of Hell.

That day by the grace of God the devilish rumor disappeared completely from people's minds. All the same, as an unwitting effect of the divine revelation, another piece of gossip started spreading at the speed of a galloping horse. This was a new rumor of a different kind, not demonic but divine, a marvelous tale that would inflame the hearts and minds of the Submitters.

It started the very morning that the Prophet went to the public square to proclaim Aisha's innocence.

Sawan, the same man that the rumor had accused of adultery was on the horns of a dilemma: should he go see the Messenger of God to tell him what he had seen? The events that had occurred a few hours earlier were constantly bothering him and running around in his head. During the night, he had not been able to get to sleep, so Sawan had set out to walk along the trench that was being built, construction work that he was taking part in, and he had found himself just a hundred feet away from the Prophet's tent. This had suddenly lit up from inside, as if on fire with and intense light. Sawan had seen a silhouette kneeling outside, with its face pressed against the canvas of the tent. Sawan

had drawn his sword and rushed forward, thinking it must be an enemy of the Prophet. When the blade of the weapon touched the back that he had facing toward the attack, a giant of a man had turned slowly and Sawan had immediately recognized Omar. Sawan remained silent, not knowing what to do. He had definitely seen that Omar was spying on the Prophet through a little hole made in the canvas of the tent. Inside, the light was still just as intense and a sweet voice had sounded in a melodious murmur. With a black look, Omar had silently signaled to Sawan an order to leave, which he had obeyed by leaving the scene rapidly.

When day rose, Sawan was facing legitimate doubts. He had finally decided to go find Omar and ask him for an explanation.

“I was not spying on the Prophet,” growled Omar. “I was there to protect him!”

“But I saw you looking through the hole!” retorted Sawan, his tone revealing his suspicion.

After a moment’s thought, Omar had agreed.

“Yes, that is true. When I saw the light, I felt worried and I looked into to the inner part of the tent. I should not have done so, I know, but I was afraid for the Prophet. I should not have seen what I saw.”

“What did you see, then?”

Omar hesitated for several seconds, then told him the truth.

“I saw the angel of revelation, a being of light floating above the ground and reciting God’s word into the Prophet’s ear.”

Sawan had listened to this extraordinary tale in astonishment.

“And when Gabriel left,” added Omar, “he disappeared in an instant, like that.”

Omar clicked the fingers of his right hand.

“And everything became dark once more!”

Sawan had promised Omar never to tell this story. However, promises commit only those who believe in them. The temptation to boast had been stronger than his word, and Sawan had not been able to hold his tongue.

So, the news was very quickly on every lip in the City of the Prophet.



## 18

### Divine Wind

A drop of sweat formed on his forehead.

Tom wiped it away with his sleeve.

All his attention was fixed on the bare electric wires, so Tom was not aware of his surroundings. He no longer heard the drone of the air-conditioning that was spewing a chilly current out into the small room with its white walls and its blocked windows. Perched on a metal stool and leaning forward over an old kitchen table, Tom was busy with the most delicate stage in his work. He was connecting the detonator to the manual trigger.

Under the glaring fluorescent lighting, Tom cautiously soldered the wires. He knew that at the slightest error everything would be over in an instant, as quick as a click of the fingers. When he finished, he used the tip of his index finger to check that the joint was solidly soldered, so the electrical circuit would be fully complete. Everything seemed to be in order as far as he could see.

The last suicide vest was ready.

With an aching back, Tom straightened up.

“That’s it,” he said.

Three pairs of eyes gleamed brightly in front of him.

Tom forced himself to smile at them in friendly fashion.

With his long beard, he had the crazy impression that he had turned into Santa Claus and was meeting three somewhat demented children. They had looked on enthralled and in silence

as he had been making the bomb vests, as if they were toys that on a happy morning in December they would find at the foot of the Christmas tree.

The only thing was that these toys would be lethal gifts.

Of course, that was exactly what the kamikaze trio were waiting for.

Four days before, Tom had got to know the youngest very abruptly, when he had put a revolver to Tom's head. After explaining the reason for the police sirens out in the street, clearing up any misunderstanding, Tom had struck up an acquaintance with this Britisher called David while they were waiting for Jawad.

David was nineteen. He had blue eyes surmounted by thin eyebrows, and an angelic face with a short blond beard and long curly hair.

Seeing his tattoos and the marks of several piercings, Tom had quickly been able to work out David's personality. He was a borderliner.

Borderliners had the feeling, rightly or wrongly, that they had been neglected as children. They grew up with a constant fear of other's views. Impulsive, emotional and anguished, continually under-rating themselves, they saw themselves as impostors inside their own lives. They tried to escape from this with drugs, with attempts at suicide or, when they did not have the courage to harm themselves, by destroying by violence the imposture of the world.

Highly impressive, David had put a shine on his life thanks to religion. He was from a Christian family, but had converted to Islam and found an Islamic guru. He had saw himself as less than nothing and was completely empty, but the preacher had set a divine spark within him and David had suddenly felt endowed with a mission, believing he had become God's chosen one.

Like all manipulators, the preacher had isolated him from his family. He had told him he was Allah's avenger, far more intelligent than all the others. Similarly, whatever evil people claimed behind his back, he was not a loser.

David had swallowed these crude lies whole, unable to see reality because of his unconscious fear of going back to be the depressive that he was. He had fallen into the clutches of a sect

that was by no means penny ante, handcrafted or family run, but a world-wide sect called Islam, a sect which dished out brainwashing on an industrial scale.

“This afternoon I’ll get to see my little brother again!” the sole female voice in the group exclaimed in French.

Tom gave Sabrina a tender smile.

Apart from the melancholic little voice that came as if unwillingly from under her blue burqa, Tom had known nothing about her. He had never seen the face she kept constantly veiled, and did not even know her name.

That had been so until this morning.

After lunch, Sabrina had confided in Tom. She had told him she wanted to get to Allah’s Paradise where her little brother would be waiting for her. He had died in her arms of an illness a few years before.

As if to thank the man who was going to issue her with the precious ticket to Paradise by making a suicide vest for her, Sabrina had even shown him part of her private life. She had shown him her face.

Not in real life, because she would never have dared to raise the veil that protected her from the outside world. She had shown him the screen of her cell phone. Sabrina had played a video recording to him, showing herself taking part in a broadcast on French television about the Moslem religion and secularity.

She had worn just a headscarf over her hair, which in no way detracted from her Italianate beauty with hazel eyes. Sabrina had claimed strongly and with conviction that she was discriminated against in the land of origin of the Rights of Man, in particular because she could not wear full veiling since this was forbidden in public places.

In his head, Tom had started to make a silent protest. Was it not the opposite, with Sabrina trying to disadvantage other citizens by refusing democratically made laws?

During the televised debate, Sabrina had played a clip of an African Moslem woman who was demanding that the richer nations of the world should come to the aid of her devastated continent, unless they wanted to see hordes of refugees pouring

into Europe. Clad head to toe entirely in black, with no more than the slightest fraction of her face visible to the camera, the woman had been filmed in front of a mosque where she had repeated the same word over and again: freedom.

However, how could you help a person that was willingly a prisoner? How could you set free a hostage who shouted out between the bars of her African jail, but on no account wanted any action against the criminal called Islam that was holding her captive?

Victim of the Islamic Stockholm syndrome, she could not grasp that the problems affecting her had their source in her distorted beliefs. The reason for her poverty was her religion itself.

“This afternoon I’ll be seeing my little brother at last!” Sabrina repeated in a happier voice.

She clapped her gloved hands.

“If that is Allah’s will, you will meet him again!”

The nasal voice that had just spoken in French belonged to Mohamed.

Tom had had enough time to get to know this cousin of Rashid’s, a first cousin whose physical appearance was almost identical to Rashid’s. He was from a very pious French Moslem family, and Mohamed had grown up loving Mohammed and his Koran, without, however, actually having read and understood a single page. There were many youngsters that were like him and had blindly adopted that religion out of love for their parents. They had followed family tradition by imitation over the years, without ever having looked through the verses that shaped their innocent lives.

Children build up their perceptions of themselves under the influence of the syllables that echo gloriously within them, as if tattooed into the most intimate part of their genes, their names, which penetrate into the depths of their personality. Islamic names could also influence their future personalities. So, parents that gave their new-born children the name of the Murderer of Medina, or of one of his gang of brigands, were unwittingly planting in them murderous seeds.

In the case of Mohamed, a feeling of injustice arising from the poverty of his family circle had caused these seeds to begin sprouting during his teenage years, leading him into petty crime. They had sprung up in their full glory on the day when he had read the Koran studiously and had finally found true Islam.

Since then, Mohamed had dreamed of just one thing: seventh Heaven.

Popular belief suggested that all Moslems had the right to the same Paradise, the same reward in Heaven for their Submission.

Nonetheless, that belief was wrong.

At least, that was what the Koran said.

This book clearly stated in its fourth chapter that the Moslems who stayed quietly at home were not equal to those who fought for the triumph of Islam. The verse specifies that God set combatants above non-combatants by granting them a greater reward. They would go to the highest of Heavens and be at His side.

Just as there were seven Hells, some of them reserved especially for Christians, for Jews or for atheists, there were seven Paradises, of which the highest was kept exclusively for combatants. It was a place of privilege, inhabited by virgins, where they would also be able to rub shoulders with the Prophet.

In these hierarchical hereafters, the cruise ship of Paradise had a range of classes. The steerage passengers were the followers of the Sage of Mecca while this heavenly liner had first-class accommodations where the disciples of the Murderer of Medina enjoyed the highest level of comfort.

If a believer wanted to reach the premium deck of the vessel, his only choice was to become a warrior. He had the obligation to kill infidels in the name of God, so as to impose Islam in a sea of tears, or die in the attempt with his weapons in his hand as a martyr, as Mohamed had hoped to end his days.

Highlighted by manipulating Islamic gurus, the advantage of the status of martyr, as opposed to that of warrior-murderer, was to see one's sins redeemed by Allah. The absolution accorded to one who died weapons in hand was such as to allow the washing

away of all his various offenses to God, wiping away the thefts of petty crime, consumption of alcohol, and even the most odious of criminal acts.

All these valuable bonus privileges for warriors, and even better, for martyrs, inevitably pushed believers toward the blood-stained tableau of Jihad. This was set against a backdrop of Koranic verses threatening Hell for those who refused to participate in it.

This Holy War was not a struggle from another age, a moral campaign, or a metaphoric battle, as the Meccans claimed. It was a sacred duty, a religious obligation established in the Koran as a divine institution, intended to inflict Islam definitively upon all humanity by murderous force.

It was true that the Meccans, who only wanted to live in peace, were in denial about this reality, accusing Medina-style martyrs of just being madmen that had never read the Koran. Like patients in a psychiatric hospital, they were not willing to raise the question of their own mental illness, so reproached the Medina faction with being crazies, because they had a madness different from their own. The Meccans claimed that martyrs were dangerous visionaries, no better than inhuman assassins, Satans, and that Islam had never taught people to do harm or to kill. On the contrary, the Koran was all love, mutual help and respect for others.

To back up these delusions, representatives of the Meccan version of the Moslem cult regularly appeared on television. These media imams asserted that the route to radicalization, with pushed a believer into becoming a kamikaze murderer, was complex. However, that route was childishly simple: Allah ordered such murders in the chapters of the Koran.

A media imam tried to convince people, or rather to convince himself, that the typical profile of a “martyr” was a young unemployed man, gone astray and finding in death a sort of adventure, however unbelievable that might seem. All the same, it ceased to be so unbelievable when you looked at the verses promising the Seventh Heaven exclusively to such soldiers as were killed in combat against unbelievers.

A media imam would put a mental filter on these verses so as to be able to carry on living sweet Koranic dreams. He would even be so bold as to say that the texts read by Medina-style Moslems were fakes, and were not the Koran. As if there was a true Koran and a false, as if there could be two different books. Unfortunately, there was just one Koran, true or false, and it ordered believers to kill, waging Jihad.

In opposition to “fundamentalist” Islam, the “moderate” Islam of the Meccans was presented by media imams as the sole authentic Islam. Nonetheless, Islam was not a moderate religion. There were only some moderate Moslems, who disregarded the precepts of violence in the Koran, disobeyed God, and did not observe his lethal verses.

Meccan Islam was not the real Islam. Quite the contrary, it was the Medina version that faithfully reflected the teachings of Islam, as they were to be found in the Koran, in the words and deeds of the Prophet, or in Koranic law. Its fundamentalism, its acts of terrorism and its murderous madness had the merit of being logical and even honest when compared to what Allah commanded.

Not all Moslems were terrorists, but all Islamic terrorists were Moslems that followed absolutely correctly the teachings of God’s book, a book that they had read perfectly.

By applying down to the last letter these murderous orders, by acting legitimately in the name of God, the Medina sect was following the truth. This was the real Islam, true to its origins and handed down by the Murderer of Medina, before any hadiths from the disciples of the Sage of Mecca had tried to put a veto in place to stop its barbarity.

The Medina trend were not irresponsible lunatics that usurped an Islamic identity to justify the indescribable. They were not pseudo-Moslems interpreting the Koran falsely. On the contrary, it was the Meccan tendency that were pastiches of Mohammed and had distorted true Islam into another religion, diametrically opposed to the original version.

For ignorant minds keen to have simple and reassuring news, Western media systematically worked along the lines of Meccan propaganda. They never had anyone speak, and never

broadcast reports to the slumbering masses other than from the Meccan viewpoint alone. The pseudo-historians that appeared in these media were all Moslems who followed the Sage of Mecca. They were able to perpetuate the lies in which they believed, so the Medina sect was heard from only through its abominable crimes.

When such bloody events took place, media imams went on air live to denigrate the Medina sect and its martyrs. They claimed that these madmen twisted the Koran shamelessly and distorted its verses out of their true meaning.

In reality, it was the Meccans that were altering the Koran, by taking its texts out of their context, or by denying the death-dealing career of their guru, refusing to recognize its genuine historical context. The Medina group, though, were true to the murderous orders of Mohammed. Their believers were in perfect accord with the violent precepts of the Koran and authentic Islam which they put into practice with the commandments of God.

They were in no way a minority of ignorant folk gone astray as the media in the pay of the Meccans wished to portray them. Ingenuous Westerners put out of their minds these men and these veiled women, these millions of Medina-style Moslems all round the world, who knew the Koran by heart, crying out in the media desert, and humbly working along the lines of the demented principles engraved in the marble of the Koran. History forgot the many well educated leaders of the Medina trend, like Ayatollah Khomeini, who had studied the Koran thoroughly for decades before setting up States under strict Sharia, the destroyer of all liberties, installing in them the true Islam bequeathed by Mohammed and seeing entire nations prostrating themselves in sincere belief, fleeing from the democracy that was contrary to God's book.

Tom had tried to stir up some appreciation of these hidden truths in slumbering minds.

In vain.

His novel had been stillborn.

Even if it had become available in bookstores, the Medina sect would never have allowed these truths to be spread. They would never have permitted the blasphemous secrets to appear in the light of day. They would never have accepted that Tom could

write in their name to insure their voice and their genuine Islam were heard.

A fatwa would have been decreed as the only thanks he would get. It would have been a death sentence just like those Mohammed was so good at handing down, since he had absolutely not scruples about getting revenge or paying off a score in a quarrel through a political assassination.

Ironically, by publishing his novel Tom would have achieved the amazing feat of uniting the Mecca and Medina trends. They would have gone hand-in-hand to a public roasting in every sense of the term.

This was because as soon as there was any criticism of the fabulous Prophet of Arabia, the enemy brothers united to protect their mythical patriarch with a shield of ferocious responses.

“Have you finished?” a voice asked in English.

Surprised, as if coming back down to ground, Tom turned round.

Without a sound, Jawad had just entered the room.

“Yes, it’s ready,” Tom answered.

Jawad readjusted his red eyeglasses on his long twisted nose, where they had a tendency to slip down. Invisible thanks to the round black lenses, his minuscule dark eyes scrutinized Tom’s.

Tom asked himself yet again if Jawad had really believed the story he had told him about the road accident that supposedly had caused the deaths of Rashid and Redbeard. Was Jawad playing a perverted double game? Was he waiting for Tom to finish assembling the explosives before doing away with him? You could be sure of nothing with this small man with his long haggard clean-shaven face that showed no tangible expression.

“And is the car prepared?” Jawad inquired while scratching his head of black hair, cut short.

He had given Tom the job of installing a detonator mechanism in a pickup truck stuffed with explosives. The vehicle was to be left in the middle of a street market in Kabul so as to cause a slaughter.

Tom had hesitated to do this.

Nonetheless, had he any real choice? If he had refused, someone else would have done it instead, he would have been killed and his mission to prevent a new September eleventh 2001 would have failed. Thinking back about Camilla, his heightened scruples had won the day: he had to save Charlie from himself.

So, putting out of his mind the Afghan victims that he would have to bear on his conscience, Tom had immersed himself in the making of this bomb. Nonetheless, he had connected only a quarter of the blocks of C-4 to detonators, hoping that some of the plastic explosive not go off despite the blast wave, potentially saving dozens of lives.

“Yes, the car bomb’s ready, too,” Tom replied.

Jawad smiled wolfishly, revealing his rotten teeth.

“Perfect! When evening is coming, you’ll have the privilege of driving the car to the market.”

Tom nodded agreement.

“It’s an honor, thank you.”

Jawad silently looked at Tom’s shaven head and its multiple wounds. He paid more particular attention to the long blond beard with its scattering of gray hairs.

“You’re going to have to dye your beard black,” Jawad said finally.

“Why?” Tom said in surprise.

Jawad pointed his thin index finger to the ceiling.

“Rashid was always a bit quick at spreading around propaganda videos without asking my opinion. You know, you’ve become a real American star on the Internet.”

Frowning, Tom did not immediately grasp the full significance of Jawad’s comment.

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Alan clicked on the button of the mouse.

The Mossad agent sat in front of the large screen of his computer and watched for the umpteenth time the video that was doing the rounds in social networks.

It had been filmed with a cell phone and the scene was lit by the device's flashlight which made disturbing shadows move around the two people who were present in it. A figure could be seen from the rear, pointing a pistol at the forehead of a kneeling man. Then came the shot, the spurting blood and the lifeless body slumping onto the ground.

Alan clicked the mouse button once more to stop the video.

He knew by heart what would come next. A cameraman shouting joyfully "*allahu akbar*" while taking a close-up of the corpse, followed by a zoom in that showed the killer's face very clearly as he smiled and also shouted "*allahu akbar*" twice.

Thoughtfully, Alan closed the weary lid of his one good eye. He leaned back in the overstuffed black leather easy chair.

So, Tom was still alive. Even if his survival had been due to an immense sacrifice, his infiltration mission seemed to have been successful.

Excellent.

Of course, not everything was perfect, because Alan had had confirmation of the identity of Tom's victim. It was the dog handler that had accompanied him in the parachute jump.

Nonetheless, omelets could never be made without breaking eggs. This was especially true in the field of espionage, even if this time the eggs were his own assets.

Alan recollected the telephone conversation he had had with Tom just before he had embarked in the plane heading for Afghanistan.

Alan had reminded him that he would be sure to face difficult choices in winning the confidence of Sultan and getting to Charlie. He would very likely be ordered to make bombs that would kill innocent victims. He would have to keep firmly in his mind that the deaths of a few would allow the lives of thousands to be saved.

Tom had responded that he would try to keep his mind cold. Alan had asked him what he meant by that. Tom had told him a tale with dramatic choices. It was about a little girl that had been kidnapped and tied to the rails of a railroad. A train was arriving at high speed with five hundred other children on board,

but it could be derailed to save the little girl or no action could be taken and it would kill her.

Either you let the little girl die, or you might kill five hundred innocent victims.

That was the dilemma.

An icy cold mind would opt for the less horrible solution, and would let the little girl die rather than the five hundred children.

Tom had then asked Alan to imagine that the little girl was not just some nameless and faceless unknown child, but his own daughter. What would Alan do? Let his own offspring die or deliberately kill five hundred children by causing the train's derailment?

Alan had answered that he would probably derail the train to save his daughter. Tom's response was that his mind had reacted in hot blood, and not in cold.

Alan opened his eye again.

Tom had remained icy cold to the end. He had preferred to sacrifice the life of the dog handler so as to continue his mission and be able to save thousands of lives by attempting to ward off a new September eleventh.

Running his hand through his white crewcut hair, Alan grimaced.

The problem that he now had was that the Americans would not understand it that way. Tom had knowingly killed an agent in the Special Forces working for the C.I.A. and that was an organization that never let a crime against one of its own go unpunished.

If Tom achieved his purpose, getting to Sultan and Charlie, Fatima, the undercover C.I.A. agent, would cross his path. Fatima might no longer have a green light to help him; she could on the contrary have orders to arrest him or indeed to kill him for the crime he had committed.

Alan took his smartphone out of his jacket pocket and punched in a number.

His contacts with the Americans and the C.I.A. would be very fraught, but Alan would be able to make them see reason. Only Tom's mission counted.

Whatever the cost.

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Horn blaring as it crawled along, the elderly white van was making little progress.

Tom was at the wheel and steered through a flow of pedestrians that was like a river of motley colors, and seemingly inexhaustible in its flood. After considerable footwork on the brake and accelerator pedals, Tom finally reached the end of the street where there was a control post for checking incoming vehicles, in the shape of a decrepit wooden sentry box.

Tom wound down the side window and handed over the pass that the single armed soldier asked him for. A Kalashnikov slung over his dark green fatigues, the man with his short beard gave a knowing wink. After going through the motions of verifying the document's authenticity, he handed it back to the driver.

"*Allahu akbar*," he whispered in a barely audible voice so that only Tom could hear him.

Tom nodded in silence and the vehicle started off again. In the wing mirror, Tom saw how the soldier was abandoning his post in a hurry to get away from the area which in just a few minutes would become a real Hell on Earth.

Tom's thought was that Jawad definitely had henchmen everywhere. He drove out into the large market square.

It was surrounded by four blocks of two-story buildings, between which a large number of narrow streets ran out of it. It was rectangular in shape and some three hundred fifty feet wide by seven hundred long. In an apparent chaos, it had been invaded by hordes of peddlers, who had laid out their wares on the ground, the tarmac surface covered by a checkerboard of multicolored cloths. In the clear sky of Kabul, the aroma of spices mingled with the

odor of cooked food coming from small portable stands. A friendly murmur of voices arose as the townsfolk came to buy provisions before the curfew hour arrived.

It was a happy, noisy surge of people rushing to get their eatables. They were all winners in that race, carrying off big sacks full of fruits, vegetables and fresh meat.

Tom tried to disregard that oh-so-human crowd.

Through the van's filthy windshield he avoided looking at those men, those women whose veil was just a headscarf wound around their neck and head, and those others who were faceless, invisible beneath their burqas. He did not want to look in the eye people he was about to murder.

As Jawad had ordered, Tom parked the van next to an ice-cream stall that was set up against the wall of a fruit and vegetable store.

He turned off the motor and then swiveled round. He slid open the hatch into the rear of the van and gave a last glance around the interior. A black tarpaulin covered the bomb as it waited to spread death and destruction.

Tom paused a moment, looking not at the device that he had assembled himself, but at another dark tarpaulin, much bigger than the one covering the bomb, which was lying at the back of the van. That was strange.

When he had finished placing the explosives that same morning and locked the rear doors of the vehicle, the other tarpaulin had not been there.

Something bad was hidden under it. What could it be?

Tom checked his watch. There was not much time left.

Somewhat puzzled, he slid the hatch back in place, got out of the van and locked it. His beard was dyed, his head covered with a black wig and a brown pakol cap, and he was dressed in a long blue tunic. He slipped the van's keys into his pocket.

Walking as quickly as he could, he headed for the street where the control post sentry box stood. Sometimes having to nudge people gently out of his way, he made a path for himself among these women and the men who he seemed to be a perfect clone of, on the basis of how he was dressed. While on the outside

he was just one more pea in a pod full of similar humans, on the inside Tom was the complete opposite of these believers.

He had been miraculously cured of religion.

In the past, Catholicism had wound him up in a cocoon, just like a spider does to its prey, so that he would docilely obey the dogmas it laid down. Praying, or in other words talking to someone who was not there, hoping for magical advantages after performing some ritual or another, these were all senseless acts. His religion, though, had given him the possibility of accepting such demented actions in ways that were socially acceptable, whether they were individual or collective worship.

Religion gave psychological reassurance. His mind had been like a little duckling, quacking with fear as soon as it is alone, but ceasing to feel separated from its kind as soon as a mirror is put in front of it. His own reflection persuaded him that he was not alone, the multiple reflections of Christians had convinced him that he must certainly be on the right track, since there were such huge numbers of others like him.

Thirsting for orders and authorities, and yearning to belong to a powerful community, the reptilian part of his brain had quenched this thirst thanks to the mirage of the number of Christians all round the world. It had shut out the fact that there were thousands of millions of people who were not part of this group, erasing from his consciousness all the Jews, Buddhists or Moslems with a repeated saying that was comical in that it should have applied to his own religion as well. "It's not just because there are lots of people who are wrong that their opinions have to be right".

Happily, marvelous truths that had hit him as hard as electroshock treatment had given Tom the lucky chance to cure himself of the Catholic God Virus and to immunize himself against its Islamic sister strain.

The latter was even more virulent than the original pandemic.

Way ahead of its time, it had paradoxically behaved like a computer virus. The first stage of such a virus, a Trojan horse, exploits a fault in the host system.

In the Arabs at the time of its first stirrings, the fault had been their ignorance about monotheistic religions. Mohammed had accumulated themes taken from the Jewish and Christian traditions that an uncultured audience could not identify. He had presented them as a personal divine inspiration, paralyzing minds by repeated messages inspiring fear, and so had managed to gain control of a handful of ignorant followers.

As these superstitious early converts saw it, the verses they heard were novel and hard to follow. They could not be the product of one of their own kind. So, they most likely were of supernatural origin, maybe divine, or even miraculous.

Once the text had been attributed to what they did not understand, they were unable to grasp its hilarious imperfections. They had not been able to judge its contents rationally or defend themselves from it. So they had been incapable of escaping from the Koranic spider that had slowly but surely woven its web inside their heads.

In the second phase of its attack, the Islamic virus had inserted into their brains lines of malicious code. It had wiped out the defenses of these Arab hosts by destroying three vital facilities: hearing, sight and speech.

Believers had become deaf to what others said, as Mohammed forbade them to discuss his verses with unbelievers. They had become mute, because they no longer dared to say anything for fear of blaspheming. Finally, they had become blind, seeing nothing but the Koran, because it claimed that Allah sufficed for all purposes.

Feeling inferior to the Almighty Creator and his hacker Prophet, for fear of sacrilege, these Arabs had not dared to oppose the moral abuses or the repeated crimes of the man who like a pirate had taken their small inner voice.

Worse yet.

In the final stage of the infection, the Islamic virus had taken possession not just of their minds, but also of their bodies. It made them advance sword in hand, like programmed robots, to slaughter their neighbors in ways they had never imagined, not even in their most horrible nightmares.

No longer seeking to do anything but please the programmer that made himself out to be godlike, and twisting their human side out of recognition, these zombie hosts had propagated the virus into the blood of those they knew.

Lacking any human feelings or compassion, these moronic machines had taken the lives of their kindred so as to be sure their own would never end. Their quest for virtual immortality drove out any reasoning and all that was natural in instincts, everything that was beneficial in them, anything that favored life or guaranteed the future. Why have common sense, why have any gratitude to one's ancestors or kindness toward one's descendants, why bother to co-operate, to promote or even to think about any shared well-being?

To live in such a way that there was no longer any sense in living was now the sole meaning in the life of these infected puppets. The Islamic epidemic had turned them into brainless living dead, rushing toward the eternal abyss dreamed up by the master of the virus, Mohammed.

To this day, the inheritors of this supposed immortality took great care that no lawyer could come and challenge the death insurance to which they subscribed on embracing Islam.

At the slightest criticism of the clauses in God's contract, they cried out that this was blasphemy. They went out into the streets to let loose their anger like upset customers. They did not allow any rational expert to demonstrate that the Koran was a fake scripture.

Even the most intelligent among them could not admit they were in the wrong. On the contrary, they believed that everyone else was crazy not to think like them. They wish was to correct that "madness" by making their Koranic disease universal.

Of course the madmen did not realize they were mad.

A lunatic thinks that other people are crazy, since they live outside his reality. They are shut out from his universe, his vision, his truth.

When Tom walked among these contaminated people, it felt to him as if he was strolling through a vast lunatic asylum open to the skies. He saw them, proudly wearing Islamic veils or Arab skullcaps, like patients with a Mad Hatter's stovepipe. All these

crazies smiled at one another in blissful ignorance, greeted one another naively, and were guilelessly unaware that their minds were contaminated by a mental virus that distorted their slightest reasoning and their least question about life toward irrational behavioral responses.

Tom walked through this crowd like a doctor among the sick, among holy believers that actually thought they were sane. He went forward like a psychiatrist surrounded by potentially dangerous schizophrenics. The danger would arise if he dared to utter a single doubt about their false perception of the world, or if he tried to prescribe an antidote to it in the form of the real truth.

For Tom, the sole difference between one of these believers and a schizophrenic was that when a schizophrenic spoke to God, God answered.

“Oh!”

His mind on other things, Tom had not seen in front of him the six-year-old girl who he had just bumped into. The child had dropped the ice-cream cone that she had been holding.

For an instant she stared at the ice-cream lying on the ground, and raised her innocent face toward Tom before hastily readjusting her purple veil to hide it.

He felt giddy.

His future victim’s big green eyes were immense pools of emerald, beautiful and almost the same as Camilla’s. In them, Tom had the impression that he was seeing her once more, feeling her presence in this place as if she had come down from Heaven to prevent him from committing a crime for which there could be no reparation.

Astounded by this unreal vision, Tom would have liked to let time run on unhindered. He would have wished these few seconds to remain unmoving for all eternity.

However, appearing from nowhere a ghostly arm appeared and grasped the child’s hand. Tom sadly watched the sweet figure of the little girl head off into the crowd, hand in hand with the phantom-like silhouette of her mother, clad in a burqa.

A sudden thought burst like thunder in Tom’s mind.

“No, not that way!” he muttered without realizing it.

For an instant, he was paralyzed with horror.

He had just realized that the girl's mother was taking her back to the ice-cream seller, at the very place where the van had been parked with its bomb.

What should he do? He could not let this new incarnation of Camilla die.

What was to be done?

Tom checked his watch. If he did not hurry, Jawad would trigger the bomb from a distance without waiting for him to return. Exact timing had to be respected, as Jawad had reminded him before he set out.

Tom imagined he could dash toward the little image of Camilla, grab her in his arms and run off into the distance. Or he could speak to her mother and force them to leave the market place. However, none of that seemed feasible: the minutes were ticking away.

There was just one solution left.

His face strained, Tom pushed into the crowd, mercilessly shoving aside any who got in his way. After what seemed an infinity to him, he came out onto the avenue that ran along the northern side of the market. It was four lanes wide and was crowded with disorderly lines of taxis and other vehicles parked alongside the sidewalks bustling with passers-by.

A hundred feet away from Tom, on the other side of the avenue, a black Mercedes with tinted windows flashed its headlights to attract his attention. He walked rapidly across the road and got into the front passenger seat of the powerful car that was parked between two other sedans.

"You're right on time for the show," Jawad chuckled in English.

Sitting at the steering wheel, the man with his red eyeglasses held a cell phone in his hand.

"Wait a moment!" Tom said.

"Why, what's going on?" Jawad asked, staring at his passenger.

Tom's mind whirled.

His only alternative was to win time, allowing a few precious minutes for the miniature Camilla to buy her ice-cream and move away from the coming massacre.

He had to make up some story, anything that might be credible, the first thing that came into his mind.

“There’s a problem with the van,” Tom began.

Jawad scratched his long twisted nose with one finger.

“Is it in the wrong place?”

“No, no, it’s not that. Before I left it, I looked in the back. There’s a tarpaulin next to the bomb that wasn’t there this morning.”

“Don’t worry,” Jawad cut in with his deep voice. It’s a last-minute extra. I managed to get some boxes of T.N.T. and put them in the van myself. They’ll make the fireworks even more impressive.”

He started laughing joyfully.

Tom forced himself to smile when inside his conscience was screaming at him.

The addition of T.N.T. would make for a much worse explosion than initially foreseen. The number of dead would rocket, and the life of the little Camilla would be snuffed out if she had not gotten far enough away.

Such slaughter had to be prevented.

“May I have the honor of setting loose the wrath of Allah?” Tom asked.

Jawad agreed.

“If you like, my brother.”

He gave Tom the telephone.

“Press the green button,” Jawad ordered. “I already punched in the number.”

The number in question was that of another cell phone connected to the detonator in the van.

In an instant, Tom had coolly analyzed the possibilities open to him.

If he did away with Jawad in the car, that would be the end of his infiltration mission. He would never get to Charlie and he would not be able to prevent a new September eleven.

On the other hand, though, his conscience could not let that bomb explode in the market place. The deal had changed, the number of lives at stake had become too colossal. Besides, the miniature Camilla must still be within the lethal zone.

Tom tried to go for broke.

“I saw Moslems in the market square, real Moslems, sisters decently and correctly veiled. We’ll kill them and Allah has formally forbidden that. *Whoso slayeth a believer of set purpose, his reward is Hell for ever.*”

Tom had quoted that verse, hoping it would hit a mark in Jawad’s mind.

While the Koran ordered the killing of unbelievers, it prohibited the slaying of Moslems. Mohammed did not accept they should be put to death unless they had renounced Islam. He had established that commandment to prevent his troop of murderers from killing one another in foolish duels. Besides, who would be idiotic enough to order the killing of the members of his own sect? Not the guru of Medina in any case.

Jawad’s reaction came quickly.

As if by magic, he had a revolver out of his pocket and stuck under Tom’s chin within an instant.

“Life means constantly starting over,” Jawad chuckled. “I already had this conversation. Not with you, with another guy. He refused to kill real Moslems, as you call them. But the sisters you saw aren’t true Moslems. They go to that place of sin, they rub shoulders with other women who are not veiled, the ones who leave their faces uncovered to stir up the Devil in us. All those women are in cahoots with sinners, they passively support all that just by being in such places. That market is Satan’s lair. Everyone who comes here is in a demon’s den and should be punished by the hand of Allah.”

Jawad paused an instant before going on, “Now, either you press the green button or I will. But in that case, you’ll no longer be in this world to see Allah’s wrath at work.”

Jawad cocked the trigger of his revolver with his thumb.

“I’m going to count: three, two, one.”

Hell burst out on Earth.

Tom had just pressed the phone button.

At first, it was like the Big Bang. Starting from an infinitely tiny spark, a vast sun surged up out of a single point. Greedy with an unmeasurable hunger, it swallowed up everything it touched. Its tongues of fire regaled themselves on all the substances near them, vaporizing them in an instant, incinerating the bodies of those people, who had been bold enough to think themselves immortal.

Then it attacked those who had not had the privilege of being turned instantly into smoke and gas. It melted them into boiling flesh, shattered them into a thousand pieces and carried these off on its fiery new-born breath. The blast wave that had just been brought to life shot the human jigsaw puzzle along at a supersonic speed, propelling these scraps of victims far from the scene of the crime.

These fragments of men, women and children became murderous accomplices of the explosion. A lethal gust of bits of broken bone hit other innocent victims as fatally as if they were razor blades or knives being hurled at them. In a destructive tornado, they mingled with day-to-day objects, like keys or coins, forming a shrapnel that was the executioner of those who had hoped to be able to escape the inevitable. As they were caught up with by the deadly blast and the mingled mass of flying debris, the final targets fell to this scything killer like puppets whose strings are cut.

The explosion then shrieked with painful birth screams. These merged with the noise of smashing windows and the groans of some of the surrounding buildings as they collapsed in ruins.

As if aware it was already dying, the sun of death closed its brief seconds of existence by celebrating its own funeral. It transformed into a thick cloud of smoke that spread rapidly all around it. Like a shroud of modesty, it extended a dark curtain over the ravaged market square and the nearby streets filled with fleeing fugitives.

A night of horror in the full light of day.

Inside the black Mercedes, Tom had just had a foretaste before the grayish veil enveloped the car in a dense mist. A scattering of assorted debris had rained down on the avenue. A detached human head had hit the vehicle's hood and bounced off to roll along the sidewalk.

Tom had seen it like a snapshot. There was a face lacking nose, lips and eyelids, a burnt head that had belonged to a woman or more likely a child.

Could it be the miniature Camilla?

As that terrible idea struck him, the dark curtain had fallen over the macabre scene, as if bringing an interval in a play. It plunged Tom into dismay and left him in near darkness within the car.

Jawad, for his part, seemed to be over the moon.

A smile on the corner of his lips, he had just tucked his revolver away in the pocket of his jacket.

“Have you heard the tale of the mosque of harm and disunity?” he asked in a dispassionate way.

Without waiting for Tom's response, he went on.

“The hypocrites had built a mosque and they told the Prophet it had been constructed for the sick and the needy so that they could pray there in winter. They asked him to come pray in their mosque, hoping to get his approval. In fact, the mosque was just a fortification serving as an observation post for our enemies and was intended to cause divisions among the believers. Allah's Messenger learned from the Archangel Jibril the evil intentions of the builders of the mosque of harm and he sent his troops to destroy that place of perdition.”

Tom was barely listening, tormented by a flood of thoughts. He nodded in silence.

Nonetheless, in his memory the true historical facts were shouting out a totally different scenario. They depicted a bloodthirsty paranoid impostor, who had eliminated any and every competitor or intellectual opponent. Mohammed tolerated no-one but Mohammed. His religion consisted of the destruction of anything that was not him, so under the pretext of a supposed plot

he had destroyed that mosque, too charitable for his liking, burning alive the unfortunate poor that had gathered in it. The justification for this barbarity had merited a couple of lines in the Koran. Allah had allowed it, and that savage precedent still had people following it down to the present day.

Jawad's deep voice continued.

“Allah had that pretense at a mosque destroyed, because it was really intended only to weave plots in the very heart of the Moslem State, through doubt and a division. The behavior of the Prophet underlines the need to destroy all places of perdition, wherever Allah and his Messenger are disdained, even if those localities are apparently above reproach. Just remember, the second Caliph Omar ibn al-Khattab had a whole village burned down because wine was sold in it and he did the same to a tavern which he described as a place of debauchery, an act that has been approved by all the Ulemas. If Allah ordered the destruction of the mosque of harm, then have no doubt, my brother, about the need to wipe away that market which was nothing but the lair of the Devil!”

His look vacant, Tom agreed.

“Yes, you're right, my brother. Satan darkened my vision, but thanks to Allah, *jalla jallalah*, you were there. Thank you.”

Inwardly, despite all his apparent external calm, Tom was boiling with rage. As Jawad spoke, he had imagined himself plunging his thumbs into the eye socket hidden behind the eyeglasses, bursting his eyes, then strangling him with his own bare hands. He had envisioned that pleasure of a human animal on killing the man who had forced him to become a beast. In spite of that irresistible desire that had invaded every particle of him, Tom had gotten over the crazy temptation through a colossal mental effort, remaining master of himself. While promising himself he would put Jawad to death in a not too distant future, he had analyzed the situation coldly. The damage was already done, and he could not turn back the clock. So, he would have to put his wished for revenge to one side, focusing solely on his infiltration mission.

Above all, he must take care to do nothing indiscreet ever again with Jawad.

As if indicating the interval was over and the play restarting, shouts of survivors rang out.

Jawad turned on the windshield wipers to clear off the layer of cement dust that had adhered to the glass.

Outside, the cloud of smoke had more or less dissipated, putting on show a landscape of desolation, gray and filthy, as if covered by the ash from an irate volcano. Pouring out of the road that led into the market square, a flood of bloodstained humanity spread out into the avenue. Horror was reflected in the eyes of those dozens of people, who seemed to be walking onward aimlessly, like zombies, between the lines of taxis that were still waiting.

Among these living dead, there were husbands and fathers carrying their dead or dying wives or children in their arms. They trudged on toward no obvious place, shouting out incomprehensible words, begging for human or divine assistance which showed no sign of appearing.

From all around came groans of pain, crying, insults against whoever had committed this inhumane carnage.

Powerless, in a waking dream, Tom stared at these creatures that he had decimated. All around him nothing could be seen but wounded bodies and bloodied faces, some of which turned angrily up toward a heaven that they saw as to blame, expressing their total stupefaction.

On the sidewalk next to the Mercedes, a teenager came staggering onward. His hands clutched his belly, trying to hold in his entrails that were falling out of it. As the last of his blood trickled away, he collapsed on the car's hood before slipping down onto the ground.

For a brief moment, unconsciously clenching his fists, Tom closed his eyes.

When would this nightmare finally be over?

In any case, not immediately, as the first ambulance sirens had begun to ring out and they were not a sign of the end of the bad dream. On the contrary, they were just a prolongation of the barbarity, as they were the signal that death was awaiting before throwing its last reserves of soldiers into the fire of atrocity.

Once three rescue vehicles had managed to make their way through the flood of humanity, they took station fifty yards or so from the Mercedes.

In the middle of the avenue, Sabrina was watching them.

One minute earlier, she had climbed out of the car parked in front of Tom's.

In her blue burqa, the slim silhouette of the young woman appeared to have put on weight because of the suicide vest she was hiding under her robes. The detonator had been connected up inside her glove, and her orders were to wait until the ambulance crews came along on foot with their gurneys. Then she could walk up to them and set off her bomb.

Rumbling out in the distance, with barely a second's interval between them, two dull explosions were distinctly heard. In nearby streets, David and Mohamed, the other members of the kamikaze threesome, had just blown themselves up.

Sabrina waited no longer and at once disappeared in a ball of shrieking fire.

Her body flew into pieces and the metal ball bearings in the vest cut down a score more innocent victims. From no more than a dozen yards away, they hailed down on the Mercedes, which very wisely had been armor-plated.

Protected by the bullet-proof windshield now pockmarked with impacts, Jawad cursed Sabrina, who had died too soon for his liking. Not one paramedic had been hit. He seemed disappointed by this grand finale, having wanted to be in the front row to watch the murderous spectacle in detail.

In a corner of his memory, Tom had the knowledge that sometimes these human bombs forgot all their orders and set off their lethal charges ahead of time. This was because they were impatient to be carried off to Paradise by the wrathful breath of God that they were bringing with them, by the deadly divine wind that they would set free, divine wind being the original sense of the word kamikaze. Wishing only for a better life, a life of immortality free from pain, wanting to get their earthly sufferings over as soon as they could, these kamikazes drove out of their minds the mission assigned to them, to cause the greatest number of deaths possible.

Occasionally on television, surprising scenes were shown with hostage takers losing interest in the fate of their victims, even though they had plenty of time to shoot them down in cold blood, and seeking only direct confrontation with the police as soon as they arrived. They were in such a hurry to reach the Seventh Heaven and couple with the virgins they had been promised, that they were turned into mindless suicides willingly throwing themselves into the hail of unbelievers' bullets. Head first, and with their weapons raised uselessly toward that fantasy Heaven, these bumble-headed terrorists leaped in among the police with a smile on their lips, as if they were jumping happily into the sparkling water of a swimming pool, believing that they would be plunged at once into the rivers of Paradise.

"Let's go," Jawad ordered, opening the car door. "It's time to get out of here."

The two men stepped out of the car. To avoid calling attention to himself, Tom walked a dozen paces after his companion. They walked the length of the sidewalk scattered with bloodstained wounded and reached the end of the avenue, where Jawad turned into another street. Tom was about to follow his lead when he came to an abrupt halt. Facing him the miniature Camilla was coming toward him, holding her mother's hand tightly.

As a forlorn hope, Tom had dreamed that he might see them again one day, both hale and hearty. His wish had been fulfilled, but Tom regretted it immediately.

The little Camilla's face was no longer angelic. A metal spike had pierced the top of her skull and exited through her eye socket leaving her blind in one eye.

Her one green eye stared out as she walked along clutching her mother's bloody hand, which had been torn off by the explosion. She was no longer anything but a lobotomy patient that smiled gently as she wandered along. She seemed like a fragile short-lived butterfly enjoying the last instants of its existence.

Rigid with horror, Tom watched this phantom pass him by.

Then for the first time he bitterly regretted having made a mistake about the cartridge when he had attempted suicide. That flutter of a wing in the West had triggered a tornado of fire in the East.

## **Fifth Commandment: Thou Shalt Refute the Perfection of the Koran**

**The Koran is not a human creation.**

**The Koran is a divine emanation, a faithful transcription of the original scriptures which are kept for all eternity in Heaven.**

**Thanks to its literary structure, the Koran is of an inimitable and perfect nature. Its unique rhyme scheme is described by linguists as a miracle, which God alone could have produced. This miraculous characteristic, moreover, has been demonstrated by very well-known scientists using graphs and diagrams.**

**At least, this is what Islamic propaganda says.**

**It also adds that whatever the level of education and general knowledge readers may have, the language of the Koran will be clear and comprehensible for them, accessible to everyone. On this point, God has revealed in its verses that He designed this Koran with a view to easy memorization, and that He wrote it in Arabic.**

**In Arabic? Easy for everyone to understand, and perfect?**

**In fact, the imperfections of the Koran are innumerable. It contains sentences that are incomplete or incomprehensible without the aid of explanations in footnotes. Besides, it is not all in Arabic, as it has more than a hundred words from other languages. Mohammed was incapable of expressing certain**

concepts using only his mother tongue. An instance is the term **Nabi**, meaning prophet.

The dogma of the Koran's perfection is blown to pieces by the grotesque oddities in its language. There are words which are not standard Arabic, others which are used with meanings a long way from their normal sense, adjectives and verbs which do not agree as they should in gender and number, and pronouns used illogically or ungrammatically.

Did Allah play hooky when they were teaching Arabic grammar in school?

If that was so, He must have done it again when they were teaching History. An instance is when in His Koran He describes Alexander the Great (under the nickname of "The Two-Horned One") as a fervent monotheist. Of course, the Macedonian was a pagan, just the sort of polytheist that a Koranic verse orders should be killed.

Many things are presented in the Koran as indisputable truths. However, some are scientific errors (sorry to tell you, God, but the earth is not flat!), others are anachronisms (Mohammed confuses Mary, the mother of Jesus, with Mary, the sister of Moses). Yet others are a mix of fantasy tales told as if they were real historical events, such as the fable of the "People of the Cave", a garbled version of the Christian myth of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus. These are particularly hilarious for anyone who is able to think, rather than believe blindly.

Nevertheless, is it possible to tell the truth to these childish minds, who want to cling to a creed as unrealistic as the tale of Santa Claus despite all the evidence?

In a sudden surge of unmotivated pride, these mild dreamers will respond that if the Koran had really been written by men, how is it that since it was created no human has ever been able to produce something better, or at least as good, even as a challenge?

My answer would be that Mohammed should not have put such a boast into a verse, thinking that he had the very best poet-scribes in his pay, with an inimitable style. He should not have said it was impossible to write similar chapters.

That was a big mistake.

**This was because the poet Bashshar Ibn Burd composed much better verse. Unfortunately for this contemporary of Mohammed's, he was killed by the authorities, and his precious work went largely unremembered. He was a victim of the Islamic Inquisition, like so many other unknown folk who might have succeeded in stirring anesthetized minds out of their torpor.**

**What a pity that these lost souls were unable to listen to all those sincere friends of humanity, instead of docilely swallowing everything they were told to believe. Just one instance would be the great Arab scholar Rhazes, who in his day wrote the following lines with their prophetic echoes.**

**“All men are by nature equal and equally endowed with the faculty of reason that must not be disparaged in favor of blind faith; reason enables men to perceive scientific truth in an immediate way. The prophets, those long-bearded goats, cannot lay claim to any intellectual or spiritual superiority. They allege that they bring a message from God, exhaust themselves disguising their lies and wish to impose on the masses a blind obedience to the “words of the master”. The miracles of prophets are impostures, based on trickery, and the tales told about them are no more than lies. Their frauds are evident in the fact that they all contradict one another. One asserts what the other denies, and yet they all claim to be the sole depositaries of truth. So the New Testament refutes the Torah and the Koran contradicts the New Testament. As for the Koran, it is no better than a mish-mash of absurd fables, one canceling out the other and ridiculously asserted to be inimitable, when its style, language and eloquence, so boastfully praised, are in fact very far from being perfect. Habits, tradition and intellectual laziness encourage men to follow their religious leaders without a second thought. Religion is the sole cause of bloody wars that have ravaged humanity.”**

**Nevertheless, unfortunately for that humanity with its devastated minds, as another man said in another life, no prophet is accepted in his own country.**

*Extract from the novel “The Sage of Mecca” by Thomas Anderson.*

## 20 Hatred

Since it had risen, the Sun had followed him like his shadow. This shadow was now almost invisible in the near vertical rays.

The Prophet had paid no attention to all this. Pickax in hand, he had never stopped digging. As an effect of his efforts, combined with the burning rays that had beaten down on his back like a fiery whip, Mohammed was perspiring profusely. The tail of his turban was over his face, so he found it hard to breathe through the thick green cloth soaked in the sweat of a day of intense work.

*Oh God! Give me the strength to accomplish the task of this day.*

Dressed in his white tunic, Mohammed allowed himself a brief pause and raised his eyes up to the blue sky. Cat-like, he cautiously stretched his aching back. Then he laid the pickax down in front of his bare feet, turned and walked a few steps to a wicker basket out of which he took a leather bottle full of mint tea. With a pleasure heightened tenfold by the infernal heat, he took a few small sips while looking around at the men, women and children who were busy on every side.

In the trench that was being dug, some thirty feet across and thirty deep, the workers were pressing ahead despite their great tiredness, inch by inch. With the industriousness of an ant-hill, the small pickaxes and shovels were nibbling tirelessly away at the colossal earthen slope, so that it was cut away a little more every hour. In parallel, leather sacks were filled with the spoil and

hoisted up by constantly moving ropes. The dirt was tipped out to form a parapet some ten feet wide and eight feet high all along the edge of trench that was being dug. With this newly raised thick barrier providing protection for them, archers would be in an ideal shooting position for striking down the enemies of God when their advance was halted by the uncrossable ditch.

With a somber look, Mohammed mentally counted the workers in the trench. Some people were missing. Others were just pretending to work, and as soon as no-one was looking, they would slip off quietly to the city with the pretext of some urgent business. In the eyes of these hypocrites, Mohammed had seen fear, resignation or discouragement. They thought that all was lost, and that in digging the ditch they were digging their own tombs. The Meccan army would triumph and fling their corpses into it.

Since the defeat against the Meccans at Mount Uhud, some Submitters had been having doubts. That defeat had reduced the Prophet's prestige in the eyes of the Arab tribes. Some of them who had so far been inclined toward the side of the Submitters had gone over to the Meccan confederation. From then on, Submitters had been attacked and even killed when they traveled in small groups. A great to-do had affected the inhabitants of the City when they had heard it claimed that one of the message-carriers of the Prophet had recently been captured and sold by a desert tribe, ending up by being tortured to death in the main square in Mecca.

Mecca's renown had never shone so brightly. The new army raised by its coalition had a strength somewhere between ten and twenty thousand men from numerous localities and would not be long in descending on the City of the Prophet to reduce it to ashes and enslave its inhabitants.

Those were the pessimistic thoughts filling the minds of the defeatists.

However, final victory would not go to the most numerous army, nor even to a smaller army that was busily digging a strategic uncrossable trench. Victory belonged to God alone.

For centuries the whole world had acclaimed the victories of the Two-Horned One. People praised his courage, combativeness and tactical genius; they extolled the performance of

his weaponry or the quality of the training of his soldiers. His successes were attributed to the cohesion of his troops who stuck by their leader through thick and thin, and had been able to overcome enemies a thousand times more numerous.

Nonetheless, all these tales were pure vanity, all these facts of no importance, and all these claims were false. In truth, the Two-Horned One had needed just one thing to triumph over everyone.

*To be pleasing to God.*

Indeed, what worth could intelligence, strength, verve or talent have, when faced with Submission to God? Little enough, for sure. Man was not put on Earth to rise above, but rather to abase himself before his Creator. That was what the Two-Horned One had done, humbly submitting to the will of the Almighty so as to win himself an empire.

Those who believed in God and blindly respected His commandments would receive everything without any effort. Those who thought they could do without Him would lose everything, whatever their labors and whatever their merits.

Just like the Two-Horned One, Mohammed knew that he would be victorious, because he was fulfilling God's will. Nothing could prevent him from extending this new empire over these lands of idolators. Nothing could stop the divine word written in the Mother of Books spreading into every corner of this land of unbelievers. Like an uncontrollable fire, Submission would stretch out into the whole world until there was not one single blade of the weed of unbelief remaining to be burned.

For the present, though, Mohammed had to make sure that the pessimistic thoughts that were present in defeatist minds did not expand into the midst of the Submitters. Otherwise, they might interrupt the coming emergence of the empire.

The Prophet put his hand before his eyes and looked at the Sun at its highest point through the gaps between his fleshy fingers.

*Oh God! Soon, I shall have to ...*

A child's voice interrupted his train of thought.

"Messenger of God!" cried the voice. "Messenger of God!"

Mohammed turned his head toward the small figure visible on the edge of the ditch.

“What is it?” asked the Prophet.

The child, a ten-year-old boy, waved his arms.

“There is a problem in the other cutting!” replied the boy, still gesticulating.

Mohammed put the bottle of tea back in the wicker basket. Under the worried gaze of the workers, he then climbed up the ladder. The boy led him to the entrenchment which lay further to the West. On its edge, a crowd of a hundred or more people had gathered and was staring down at three men in the bottom of the ditch.

Mohammed climbed down a wooden ladder to join the three who were waiting for him. They were Ali, Omar and a Submitter called Jaber, who explained the situation.

“We have hit a rock,” said this gray-bearded man in his forties with his reedy voice. “It is impossible to crack it! Besides, it must be huge.”

With his skinny hand he pointed in front of him at a great blackish block that was sticking out of the dirt. Omar came forward and tapped on the dark obstacle with his meaty fist.

“I have tried to break it myself,” grumbled to giant of a man. “But all I have done is smash two pickaxes. Look!”

At his feet lay the two tools, their iron heads split in half.

The Prophet approached the lump of black stone. For a moment he stroked it gently.

“Bring me a fresh pickax,” ordered God’s Messenger finally.

With a hobbling gait, Jaber fetched the tool. Mohammed took it in both hands and raised it above his head. Eyelids half lowered, he paid no attention to all rounded or squinting eyes watching him from above.

“Oh God!” rose his voice in the direction of the sky. “Give me the strength to destroy this rock, just as you will give us the strength to destroy our enemies.”

The golden rays of the Sun ran like living flames along the metal head of the pickax. The crowd remained silent, fascinated

by this unusual spectacle, appearing to guess that a miracle would follow.

Then the Prophet struck the rock with all his might. The blow bounced off its surface without leaving even a scratch. However, at the third stroke, more carefully placed, the rock disintegrated into shining lumps with a rumble as if it had been struck by lightning. A cloud of dust immediately rose around Mohammed and the three men with him, drowning the trench in a flow of pulverized fragments.

When the cloud finally settled, the astounded eyes of the crowd saw four ghostly figures emerging up the ladder, entirely covered in dust.

Down in the trench, the rock had disappeared.

“God is great!” cried out all the folk present. “God is great!”

Every one of them believed they had seen the greatest of God’s miracles. Yet they were mistaken. They could not know that an even greater miracle would be accomplished by the grace of the Almighty, and within the hour.

So, unaware of this near future event, some rushed off into the city to report what had occurred before their very eyes.

Jaber came to look for the Prophet. He had seen how hungry Mohammed was. Like most of the workers, the Messenger of God had not eaten for three days. Hidden underneath his dirty tunic, he had tied a large flat rock against his stomach to relieve the hunger pangs he felt.

Times were hard and famine threatened the population of the city, because the harvests of various crops during the year had been particularly poor. Provisions were scarce already and rigorous rationing had been put in place by the Prophet, who had himself humbly set an example by fasting these three days past, a fast that was copied by the bravest and most faithful Submitters.

Jaber respectfully requested the Prophet for permission to leave. Still covered in the dust of the shattered rock, Mohammed gave his blessing. Jaber was able to go home. Outside his small white house, he washed himself with water from a jar, telling his numerous neighbors about the adventure he had just had. Once he

had cleaned himself up, he spoke to his wife, who was standing veiled head to foot in black among the neighbors startled by the account. He told her to prepare some food for the Prophet. They had enough left for one meager meal: a small piece of goat's meat and a loaf of barley bread.

Jaber hobbled back to see the Prophet. In the meanwhile Mohammed had washed and replaced his dirty tunic with clean clothing.

“Oh Messenger of God!” rang out Jaber's reedy voice. “Do me the honor of coming to dinner in my home with Ali and Omar.”

“Do you have much food?” asked the Prophet.

The man in his forties shook his head with its hollow cheeks and gray beard.

“No, Messenger of God. A little meat and bread. Barely enough for four.”

“Perfect!” exclaimed the Prophet in a loud voice. “Tell your wife to keep the meat cooking and the bread in the oven until I get there.”

Mohammed spoke to the workers standing around him.

“Oh men of the trench! Jaber has prepared food for you. Let's all go to his place!”

A look of incomprehension on his face, Jaber started out ahead of the Prophet. His wife was waiting for him in the midst of a crowd of neighbors who had gathered in front of his house.

“The Prophet is coming with Submitters and Helpers,” said Jaber to her. “They are all coming to eat with us! What can we do?”

“Does the Prophet know what we have for our meal?” asked his wife.

“Yes, of course! I told him!”

“Then let it be left to God and the Messenger to sort out the situation!” said the veiled woman, shrugging her shoulders.

A few minutes later, Mohammed arrived in the company of three hundred people. Long cloths were spread on the ground, and wooden poles were thrust into the dirt so that large awnings could be spread from them to ward off the Sun's rays. The laneways

around the white house became packed with astonished people who sat and waited for the promised food.

The Prophet went into the small building and stood to serve out the meal. From the oven built into the wall, he took the single loaf of bread which he cut into slices. Then he took the goat's meat out of the cauldron that stood on the floor, cutting it into long, thin pieces that he laid on the slices of bread. Next, he handed some to Jaber and his wife.

“Eat and hand round!” ordered the Prophet. “These people are hungry.”

The couple passed some food to those around them. It went from hand to hand until it reached the street where hundreds of guests were waiting.

For more than an hour, Mohammed went through the same actions, slicing the bread and cutting the meat. The oven and the cauldron were replenished every time that the Messenger of God took goat's meat and barley bread from them.

Everyone present was astounded, delighted and sated thanks to this multiplication of the food prepared by Jaber's wife. After eating their fill and more, many departed from the scene leaving bread and meat uneaten on the cloths. They hastened into the city to proclaim God's miracle of which they had tasted abundantly.

These extraordinary events had the immediate effect of silencing all criticism. They brought the townsfolk definitively together in support of their leader with his new divine powers.

Henceforth, their only thoughts were for the coming victory over their enemies.

The forces of the coalition would besiege the city in vain, since no-one would lack nourishment. The Prophet would provide by multiplying loaves infinitely, and he would call down the thunderbolts of God to wipe out the Meccans, just as he had destroyed the black rock.

Minds soothed, the workers finished digging all the various trenches. Only a single month had been needed to accomplish the construction of the entirety of these works. Some groups, more highly motivated than others, had performed the feat of completing

their assigned trench in six days, by working day and night without rest.

It was high time.

The immense army of the Meccan coalition had just reached the outskirts of the city. No scouts had been sent on ahead, as they were in a hurry to finish off the Submitters and gather the immense spoils promised as quickly as possible.

So, the cavalry charged forward without any prior reconnoitering. Surrounded by a huge cloud of dust that looked like a buzzing swarm of bees, it descended on that modest town that the enemies of God still called Yathrib.

Just fifty yards from the first trenches, the coalition assault came to a sudden halt. Faced with these broad entrenchments and the high banks beyond them, the coalition troops were taken completely by surprise. Incomprehension could be read on the faces of their various leaders. From the saddle, they gave their orders. Men mounted on camels or horses set off to go around the city. When they returned, they reported that Yathrib was surrounded by ditches which combined with the already existing ramparts to make an impregnable ring.

Protected by their embankments, the Submitters took advantage of the concentration of their flummoxed enemies to loose off a volley of arrows against them. In return, insults and a hail of missiles flew off to fall on the earthen parapets where the defenders were taking cover.

In the infinite depths of the blue sky, forming a timeless image, the star that brings light and heat seemed to halt in its day's course above all these motionless soldiers, turned into statues by their discomfiture, petrified by this impenetrable Yathrib. At that point a whisper started slipping along from lip to lip in the mouths of the Submitters, a murmur announcing that God would spare all these men from combat, without exception, through the miracle that there could be no battle.

“God is great!” shrieked a teenager. “God is great!”

Hundreds of Submitters at once echoed that noble heavenly truth.

In their opponents' camp, a strange reaction responded to these voices glorifying the Almighty for his mercy toward his earthly creatures.

Laughter.

It started first among the military leaders, emerging as short bursts intermingled with a few choice comments. Then, just as a spark can set fire to strong alcohol, it exploded suddenly and fiercely from the throats of thousands of soldiers laughing as a single man. It was a crazy, uncontrollable laughter that shook with thunderous waves of sound the City of the Prophet that lay before them.

For, if these trenches were uncrossable, this was so in both directions. The inhabitants of Yathrib had become their own jailers. Indeed, they could not counter-attack with their cavalry or even run away with all their belongings.

Henceforth, the Submitters would be prisoners even before they had been captured.

For the coalition forces, victory was just a question of days, all the more so because they knew that Yathrib was cruelly short of food. It would thus be enough to encircle the city and wait for the starving townspeople to surrender one after another. A battle had never been so easy, without loss for the Meccans. Moreover, this was not by the grace of the God of the Submitters, but by stupidity of their so-called prophet.

So, the laughter grew louder. It rang out up until night fell at the end of the first day of the siege.

For the next few days, the good humor of the enemy contrasted with the fear that reigned in Yathrib, particularly while the townsfolk went to sleep. They had the impression that the slightest nocturnal noise was the signal for a surprise attack inside the city, as if the Meccans had been able to sneak in secretly to slaughter people as they slept. No-one dared even to go out to the latrine. In this state of permanent anxiety, two groups of Submitters even went as far as to shoot at one other, each troop thinking the other were coalition forces who had infiltrated.

Yet the Meccan army had no interest in attempting that sort of a suicide mission. Apart from a couple of skirmishes led by the few troop leaders who were determined to get to grips with the

Submitters at any cost, the orders were clear and could be summed up in one word: wait.

The Submitters would run out of food in a matter of days, or maybe even hours. The coalition forces had absolute confidence in this, paying no attention whatsoever to the written reports from their spies inside the town saying that Mohammed had the ability to multiply loaves of bread or to bring down thunderbolts from the sky.

Such ridiculous missives were met with nothing but laughter. This was all the more the case because other messages stated that Mohammed was on the brink of being willing to sign a peace treaty to spare the starving inhabitants of Yathrib.

So the coalition forces waited foolishly, not realizing that all of this was part of an enormous ruse, a disinformation ploy by the Submitters who were in no way short of provisions. The Prophet had taken care to lay in stocks, but on his orders all the Submitter continued to play-act famine to fool the spies and above all to win time.

This time was needed so that as the weeks went by real hunger struck brutally at the ranks of the coalition troops. Around Yathrib, there were no crops left, as the previous month the inhabitants had harvested everything they had sown. The grazing nearby was woefully insufficient for the horses and camels, which started to weaken. As no rain had fallen, the land had dried out and drinking water had been used up alarmingly quickly, as had their other provisions, unlike those of the Submitters. The enemies had not seen that they had stuck a finger into cogwheels that were forcing them to stay where they were. They were themselves shut up in a cage without bars, and day by day their army was slithering into an abyss where vital resources were completely lacking.

So, inside the City of the Prophet, Mohammed grasped that the hour for the final blow had chimed. He set to praying fervently for three consecutive days. He asked God to finish off the coalition troops. It would be enough for the new season, which was late in coming, to arrive with its accompaniment of violent tempests. God heard the Messenger's pleas. A hurricane laden with torrential rain and icy winds swept brutally down on the region. In one dark night, it overturned all the enemy cooking pots

and carried off all their tents, despite their having been solidly anchored in the ground.

With no food or shelter left, enemy morale and cohesion disappeared in an instant. All the coalition Bedouins, who had followed the Meccan army because they thought they would win some easy plunder, realized that there was nothing to be gained by lounging around next to a muddy trench, under heavy, chilly rain, watching their animals die because of a lack of fodder. So, they left the ranks one after another. Most of the army also wanted to go back to Mecca, as it was the pilgrimage season, and the gods were waiting for their offerings.

That day, the Meccan army disintegrated, as if God's thunderbolts had been cast by the hand of the Prophet. He did not celebrate a victory, though, as the external enemy might have been defeated, but the internal enemy was still there.

#### *The Jews.*

The evil Jinns that had taken possession of the bodies of the Jews of the Qurayza tribe still represented a terrible menace for the rest of the population. At any moment they might extend their domination over his men by contaminating them.

Luckily, Mohammed was keeping a close watch on their doings.

Everyone knew that the main reason for the victory of the Submitters over the Meccan army was God's act in the shape of the miracle of the tempest. The secondary reason was known to few. It was the work of the Prophet and his companions who had known exactly how to thwart the crafty maneuvers of the Jews.

Prior to the arrival of the coalition forces at the gates of Yathrib, emissaries of the Jewish Nadir tribe, the same clan which the Prophet had expelled, had come to meet in secret with the last Jewish tribe remaining in the city, trying to encourage them to take up arms against the Submitters. However, the chief of the Qurayza tribe had refused point blank. Treachery was not part of his vocabulary, and he had stressed his loyalty to the peace treaty that he had signed with Mohammed.

Ibn Ubayy, who still had the Jews' confidence, had attended this meeting, because he had promised that his troops would also rise against the Prophet. Playing this double game, the

manipulative strapping redbear had been able to report the gist of this Jewish meeting to Mohammed. He had been surprised that the Qurayza chief had refused to betray him. However, the Messenger of God knew that all of this was just a masquerade on the part of the evil Jinns that simply had not trusted Ibn Ubayy. In his plan to rid the city definitively of its Jews, Mohammed needed them to commit an act of treachery. Ibn Ubayy had put in an effort and had finally convinced the Qurayza tribe by claiming that if the Submitters won a victory over the coalition, Mohammed envisioned killing all the Jews in Yathrib.

Fear of this had led to the treason that the Prophet had been counting on.

When the coalition forces arrived, surprised by the trenches, about which the Nadir emissaries had not been able to warn them in time, the supposed famine affecting the townspeople had delayed the initial plan for an attack. The Qurayza were the defenders of ramparts whose gates were to be opened to the Meccan army before both joined in taking the battle into the heart of Yathrib. When the coalition army had finally decided to break into the town by force through the entrances guarded by the Qurayza, Mohammed had spread division among them that had been the secondary cause of the enemy defeat. The coalition had not been able to put into effect their plan to force a way into the town.

To achieve this, Mohammed had once more resorted to the trickery at which he was past master.

For a substantial sum, a coalition soldier had been bribed, and had converted to Submission. He had been assigned the mission to spread discord by speaking to the Qurayza. He had told them that one part of the Meccan army was weary of the phony war and might raise the siege at any moment, abandoning the Jews to Mohammed's mercy. He had counseled them to demand a few coalition hostages, prominent men or officers, so as to make sure there would be no defection, and to guarantee to the finish the loyalty of their allies. The bribed soldier had then gone to meet his former brothers-in-arms. He had told them that the Qurayza had in no way betrayed the treaty of alliance binding them to the Prophet. They would make an excuse of a request for hostages so as to

capture leading figures and hand them over to Mohammed, thus securing victory for the Submitter side.

This cunning stratagem of the Prophet had worked perfectly. Having doubts about the Qurayza, the coalition army had not dared to pass through the gates in the ramparts guarded the Jews, for fear of falling into a deadly trap put together by the Submitters.

*War is nothing but fraud and deceit.*

This war was far from over. Mohammed must now turn his armed forces on the evil Jinns who were swarming in the city, like rats in Pharaoh's land. So, the besieged of yesterday became overnight the besiegers of today. The Jews' fortress was completely encircled.

Three weeks were enough to bring its fall. The evil Jinns lacked the Prophet's powers to multiply food by the grace of God.

Mohammed could not expel them, as he knew that they would go off and reinforce the Devil's troops in Mecca, as the exiled Nadir tribe had done. However, the Prophet need have no concern about them. The angel Gabriel had been clear in respect of them and had given him God's strict orders. Adult and adolescent males, who were all infected by the work of Satan, must be killed. As for the women and children, even though they were not contaminated, they would be given as slaves to the Submitters and Helpers, in view of their inferior status from God's point of view.

The Mother of Books would legitimize all these acts.

So, at sun-up, hundreds of Qurayza, officially accused of high treason, were led in groups of five or six onto the market square. During the night, trenches big enough to take all their bodies had been dug. Mohammed was sitting with Ali, waiting on the edge of these future tombs. Alongside others, sword in hand, Ali started to cut the throats of the captives or to behead them as they bowed their heads, all along the trenches where their corpses were then flung. This punishment from God started in the early morning, lasted all day and ended only late in the evening by the light of torches.

As if hypnotized by the sight of the blood of the evil Jinns that had not stopped flowing out onto the reddened ground,

Mohammed had sat from first to last, watching in silence the putting to death of these satanic creatures. Under their peaceful exterior appearance, he knew there lay their true faces, monstrous and bestial.

Even if they had men's bodies, these Jews had not been human for a long time now. Not a scrap of pity of any sort touched the Prophet's heart.

Quite the contrary.

Love, peace and mutual assistance were the cutting edge of Submission for all the men or even Jinns who put themselves entirely into God's hands. In contrast, those, be they humans or evil Jinns, who turned away from their Creator to worship the Devil, deserved just one single sentiment in return.

*Hatred.*

## 21

### Scientific Miracle

Where was he?

His mind was hazy, and Tom was not really sure any more.

In front of him, a number of stores stood in a line on two levels on either side of a long, broad shopping mall that ran off into the distance. Their bright and attractive storefronts displayed clothes and luxury jewelry, but did not attract the attention of a few couples of lovers who were wandering calmly along. Above them, illuminated by a Sun that was hidden by clouds, an immense glass roof was being battered by torrential rain. The drops of water that were hammering a devilish rhythm on the transparent vault, their harsh rattle making an unattractive accompaniment to the Classic music that filled the space with the slow notes of melancholic violins.

Tom looked in vain for the invisible loudspeakers relaying that sweet music. His eyes finally settled on a storefront with a large notice advertising books, and another belonging to a sports goods store.

To Tom's great astonishment, everything was written in French.

He obviously must be in France.

However, that had no sense to it. How could he have gotten back so quickly to the country he loved? He had no memory of the journey. If his memory was failing, though, the reason must be simple: clearly, he had to have been drugged.

Jawad must have given him some drug to swallow for him to be in this altered state, so he would not back out at the last minute, a drug Jawad must give to his kamikazes so they would be focused and concentrated on their targets. Tom knew the effects of such substances, and especially the hallucinations they caused. In the last few seconds of his life, he would see demons all around him, like those Mohammed saw, and had depicted perfectly in the Koran.

Tom lowered his head to check the belt full of explosives that was solidly attached around his waist by a padlock.

Where was the firing system?

When he saw the cell phone fixed to the detonator, Tom realized that Jawad would let loose the wrath of God from a distance.

The thought reassured him.

In a few minutes, he would die as a martyr, so as to gain access to the Seventh Heaven alongside Allah and his Prophet. Then he would have an entitlement to the privilege of meeting once more with the earthly companion who was his by right: Camilla.

Once they were together again, they would live eternally young and beautiful in the divine firmament.

Tom smiled as he thought of that moment when he would be able to embrace the one true love of his life as he passed through death. They would both be gently soothed by lovely heavenly verses.

In the shopping mall, the violins had ceased sighing out their melodious sobs. Now the hidden loudspeakers were relaying God's last word: the Koran itself.

A captivating, marvelous voice emitted an *a cappella* chant that found its echo in Tom's innermost depths, as it recited the verses with their heavenly promises. At first wondering how a Koranic intonation could come to be heard in such a place, Tom realized that Jawad had managed to reach the mall's security center so as to broadcast God's recitation.

Tom hurried onward.

The long awaited moment would delay no longer in coming. He had to get closer to the unbelievers.

“Tom!” a woman called out.

He turned round.

Camilla was there near him.

How could that be, since he was not yet dead?

The hallucinations from the drug he had taken were adopting a strange form. Nonetheless, Tom had no complaints, only too happy to have a foretaste of the Paradise awaiting him.

The cell phone started to ring over and over.

Terrified, Tom realized that the explosive belt was about to blow up. He would be killing the incarnation of Camilla.

With a start, Tom sat up in his bed.

It took him several seconds to work out where he really was.

He stopped the ringing of the phone that lay on the small bedside table and that he had programmed to wake him up. His gaze moved toward the window. Outside, the morning was gray and gloomy, and heavy rain was beating against the panes.

He mechanically scratched at his long beard, dyed black, and rubbed his other hand over his shaven head.

The verses of the Koran were still ringing within.

However, the *a cappella* chant was not coming from inside his head. It originated outside his room.

Next door, Jawad was listening to a chapter of the Koran. A powerful loudspeaker that set the white partition wall vibrating broadcast the verses that were chanted musically and were pleasant and catchy, like a pop song from a foreign hit parade that you could hum without knowing the words or meaning. They were sublimely beautiful, sparkling and hypnotic.

Not so or Tom who understood the words perfectly. It was a passage from the chapter “The Spoils of War” exhorting Moslems to massacre non-Moslems.

A beautiful but bloody refrain, equating to Paradise for obedient assassins.

Tom recalled the nightmare he had just had.

Nonetheless, was it really a nightmare? Might it rather be a gorgeous dream with that death which would have delivered him from earthly sufferings, and led him straight to the Seventh Heaven to be with Camilla once more?

If this demented dream had been possible, would he have succumbed to the sirens of the Moslem Paradise to live there with Camilla? If he had been able to, he would even have sold his soul to the Devil, or to Mohammed, which came to the same thing, and he would have paid allegiance to him. To be with Camilla again, Tom would have been capable of killing all of humanity, just as the Murderer of Medina would have to attain his aims.

Only, Tom was no longer of an age to believe in Santa Claus or in the false promises of a narcoleptic schizophrenic. The Moslem Paradise was a chimera, a fairy tale for kids to which all the unfortunates of the world clung.

Capitalist societies must take the blame for creating those lost men without souls, heartless robots who trudged on with no chance of a prosperous future, no better than stultified machines. The only way out of these damaged lives was death, with the crazy hope of Paradise making that end the most beautiful thing that could happen to these stifled human tools, slaves of a hellish and tyrannical world. Mohammed and his lies represented hope, and men needed their hopes, even if they were false, so as to accept their condition, no better than a beast of burden.

As long as there was a system of world exploitation, it would take care that the real face of Mohammed or the truth about his lying Koran would not come out. This was especially true of schools, where these distilled lies would continue to be expounded.

*Creak.*

On the stair leading to the floor where his bedroom was, Tom had just heard the slight creaking of a step, at the very moment when the “rhymed prose” of the Koran coming from the speaker had paused for an instant before returning to its sing-song litany.

Tom climbed out of his bed and dressed rapidly. He put on black pants and a long matching tunic, together with leather ankle boots.

He creeped stealthily to the door and cautiously opened it a crack. It shed light out onto a broad white-painted corridor that ran off to the left. On the right were the first steps of the spiral stairway that went down to the first floor.

Suddenly a pistol appeared in his field of vision less than two feet away. It was a sand-colored Glock 17 held by hands wearing mittens.

Tom slammed the door open sharply. His left arm streaked out like a striking cobra to snatch the weapon, while the side of his right hand slashed at the neck of the unknown assailant. As if watching a movie in slow motion, Tom saw the Afghan policeman tumbling backward into the dark stairwell, with a khaki helmet that was too big for him falling off his head. In his fall he carried with him the other four members of the squad, who had not yet reached the landing.

Two shots rang out.

Tom had fired into the air with the pistol he had seized from the policeman. While these men did not appear to have the training or experience of elite troops, they would not be long in regrouping to come back to the attack. It was better to put some prudence into their minds with the crack of shots. That would win some time for Tom.

Jawad appeared on the threshold of his room, wearing a white jellaba and holding a Kalashnikov in his hand.

“It’s the police!” Tom shouted to him in English. “There are far too many of them. We’d better get out of here.”

He did not want Jawad to bring about a bloodbath among the security forces with his assault rifle.

Wearing his round tinted eyeglasses, Jawad nodded agreement.

“Follow me!”

He went into his room, Tom tailing him. For a few seconds Jawad looked out of the window and for a moment Tom thought they were going to get out that way by jumping down into the garden below. However, Jawad left his observation post and made for an old wardrobe that was set against the wall opposite from his bed. He pushed it to one side and under it appeared a circular

opening around a yard wide cut through the wall and leading into the next-door apartment.

Jawad scrambled through the secret passageway. Tom put one leg through and tried to drag the wardrobe back into place after him. However, Jawad tapped him on the shoulder and shook his head to indicate that this was not necessary.

The two men crossed three large empty rooms and entered a fourth. This was as bare of furniture as the others, apart from a huge poster on the wall for the movie “Matrix” that Jawad ripped away.

Under the cinema poster, a slightly smaller circular opening had been cut. With a wave of his hand, Jawad invited Tom to go first.

“After you, Mister Anderson,” Jawad said, a smile playing over his lips.

Tom slid through the hole, and was very quickly joined by Jawad. He turned round to activate a movement sensor linked to three sticks of dynamite, all of this being taped to the pierced wall. The first person to risk going through the hole would set off an explosion.

“That’s fine, let’s go!” Jawad ordered.

The twosome went down a stairway and found themselves faced by a metal door bolted on the inside. Jawad opened it cautiously. Outside it was raining cats and dogs. The water was already getting through Jawad’s white jellaba as he shot out into the empty laneway.

Tom did not follow him immediately. He stood on the threshold wondering if he had the time to go back up and disarm the bomb on the wall. He had no desire to be responsible for a massacre.

These thoughts were swept aside in an instant, as his arm instinctively rose and pointed the Glock 17 at a figure that was turning its back to him.

He squeezed the trigger and ten steps from where he stood a body slumped to the ground, killed by a bullet through the nape of the neck.

Jawad turned round.

Between him and Tom, a policeman in blue fatigues lay in a pool of blood on the waterlogged ground. This backup for the security forces had popped up from nowhere. His red laser sighting beam had been shining on Jawad's head and it was clear he had been about to fire without a challenge.

Tom had had no choice. Only Jawad could bring him to Charlie, so he had to protect him at any price.

Even a price paid in blood.

“That way,” Jawad shouted signaling with his hand.

Boiling with rage at having had to shoot the policeman down in cold blood, Tom hurried after his companion who had just headed into a laneway to the left.

Hidden beneath a green plastic cover stood a black motorbike with two full-face helmets of that same color. Jawad threw his Kalashnikov and the cover to one side, climbed astride the powerful bike and started it up. He passed a helmet to Tom who hoisted himself onto the pillion and pulled his own helmet over his short hair, still wet from the rain.

“Throw your pistol away,” Jawad ordered. “If we come up against a police roadblock we have to be clean.

Tom did as he was told and the bike shot forward.

With great skill, despite the particularly slippery pavement, Jawad drove at high speed through the narrow streets of that district until he came out onto one of Kabul's main streets. So as not to attract attention, he joined the flow of slow-moving cars.

Thirty minutes later, they finally arrived at the outskirts of the capital of Afghanistan, and drove into a residential street. A white van was waiting on a small parking lot among other vehicles.

Jawad parked alongside it, took off his helmet, and raised his long pale face toward the gray sky. The rain was lighter but was still falling. The sight of that seemed to satisfy Jawad. He was obviously thinking that the cloud cover meant no spy satellites or drones could spot them.

He opened the rear door of the van and climbed in, followed by Tom. The vehicle appeared to be an emergency hideout. There were folded blankets, mattresses rolled up on themselves and five big sports bags. Wet through, the two men

dried themselves and changed into dry clothes that they took from one of the bags. Once they had put on the long white tunics, they went to sit in the front of the vehicle, and Jawad took the wheel.

“Where are we making for?” Tom asked.

“We’re off on the most beautiful of journeys,” Jawad replied enigmatically, turning on the windshield wipers.

The van headed north.

The miles went by monotonously. Their passage turned the urban townscape into a desert road that ran up into the mountains in steep curving sweeps, cut into the hillsides. Like a snake ceaselessly trying to bit its own tale, the roadway zigzagged as it climbed toward uninhabited zones.

“Are you married?” Jawad suddenly asked.

Tom looked out of the corner of his eye at the driver who had so far stayed silent. The question felt odd to him, as if Jawad already knew the answer and just wanted to test him.

“I had a fiancée,” Tom began prudently. “She died.”

“Good!” Jawad cut in. “You’re lucky, thanks be to Allah’s will. Our Submission to Allah takes priority over everything, including wives and children. The Qur’an warns us that our wives and children are like enemies for us, and we must beware of them. Our property and our children are just a temptation, while in the company of Allah there is an immense reward! Cutting off family ties, that is the true secret of Allah’s orders for becoming a real soldier, so as to be ready to fight and die in his name, so as to go to Paradise and join the Prophet, *salla Allah ‘alayhi wa salam*.”

Tom nodded agreement, preferring not to rub this man with his twisted mind up the wrong way. He hesitated to ask him why he did not take a place among his kamikazes to carry out a suicide bombing and meet up with the Prophet in Paradise as quickly as possible. However, the answer was obvious. Jawad would never agree to leave behind him a society that had not been brought into conformity with his crazy view of the world. He could not go to Heaven without having carried out a compulsive, sick program of cleaning up the Earth, even though he knew that Allah would fling into Hell all of humanity that did not submit.

Tom preferred to stay silent and focus on his forthcoming meeting with Charlie. Tom knew full well where this winding mountain road was taking him. It went straight to Sultan's eagle's nest.

Before he had left on his infiltration mission to Afghanistan, Alan had shown him maps of the region, and in particular of the location of Sultan's residence, which lay to the north of Kabul. The Mossad agent had explained to him that it was in that palace perched on a mountain that he would find Fatima, the C.I.A. spy, and also Charlie.

His meeting with Camilla's twin brother was coming, then.

How would he go about that future one-on-one? What manipulation technique could he use to bring Charlie to reveal to him the secret plans for the September eleven style attack thought up by Sultan? Above all, how could he extract Charlie from the Medina sect he had fallen into, saving him from himself?

Initially, the first priority had to be obtaining information on this future September eleventh. To achieve that, and cause valuable details to be let slip by the highest levels, the psychological key might be flattery, as in Aesop's fable of the fox and the crow. Everyone loved a compliment, and negotiators used and even abused them to reach their objectives. Even when they were aware they might be uttered just to gain a favor in return, the great majority of people could not resist them, particularly those with a very high regard for themselves. They willingly dove into that flattering mirror from which they could not escape, like the myth of Narcissus.

On the one occasion he had met Tom, Charlie had talked a lot about himself so as to give a glowing picture of himself. He had taken several selfies and immediately sent them to his social networks, as if seeking admiration. At the time, Tom had thought he detected narcissistic tendencies in Charlie. Was that really the case?

Tom recalled his one-to-one classes with an eminent psychiatrist in Paris who had instructed him about all the various personality disorders and their possible combinations. That specialist had first of all taught him that distrust, aggressiveness and anger were among multiple personality traits, indispensable

human characteristics. They were a set of reactions which allowed all life scenarios to be confronted efficiently.

Such behaviors were very human. They had been adopted by our ancestors through the well-known process of natural selection, because they had provided the earliest *Homo sapiens* with an undeniable aid to survival in hostile surroundings. However, men knew how to weigh things up. They could tell whether a situation was dangerous or not, whether violence should be avoided or used in defense against aggression, whether anger should be contained or let loose to send a strong signal to others.

Patients with a personality disorder could not make these distinctions. Not analyzing case by case, their minds generalized to all the various situations in day-to-day life with which they were confronted a single identical, rigid and ill-adjusted reaction. Not being able to adapt their conduct with its neurotic inflexibility, they considered their rigidity to be a natural, inevitable way of functioning, believing it completely normal to fire off identical arrows of character traits from the bow of their attitudes under all circumstances.

The psychiatrist had quoted as an example the story of a patient called Albert whose oddity was to feel threatened or in danger even when he was surrounded by harmless, mild-mannered people, repeating robotically the same automatic defensive behavior. It was completely logical to be distrustful and even paranoid, if a burly African-American asked you the time in the middle of the night in a district of the Bronx of evil repute. There was a good chance his intention was to steal your watch. However, if the same scene was played out in a swanky cocktail party, with the giant African-American in a tuxedo, asking you politely for the time, it should not trigger any defensive attitude. It was different for someone like Albert who would feel an imaginary threat from such a stranger. He could not respond other than by an inappropriate reflex of anxiety and desire to run away, or even of aggressiveness.

That was characteristic of personality disorders. There was an unsuitable over-use of what in other contexts might be a beneficial adaptational behavior, because of an error of interpretation by the brain when considering its surroundings.

The Achilles' heel of the mind of a narcissistic personality was to be unable to prevent itself wrongly believing it was in competition with others, even when the situation was nothing like that, and that it should put itself forward systematically. Having a feeling of superiority over others and a lack of empathy for them, in the end it needed admiration and recognition.

Nonetheless, in Charlie's case there was also a need to take into account a psychological effect from his circumstances. There were men who took senseless risks by crossing against the pedestrian red light through dense traffic, just because an attractive woman was waiting at the crosswalk with them. The aim was to impress, to enhance their status and unconsciously to prove their courage relative to the other men present. It was something that these men bold for a moment would never have done in the absence of that fatal beauty, remaining obediently at the curb until the "walk" signal showed.

That evening of the charity gala when Camilla had introduced her twin brother to Tom, had there been some statuesque blonde in a red dress that had made Charlie's heart beat quicker, so that he had begun competing with all the other men there? Had he been trying to charm the creature of his dreams with his emerald-green eyes, the same color as Camilla's?

Thinking once again of his lost soulmate, Tom recalled the moral promise he had made to himself to save her earthly double from the clutches of Sultan and his Medina sect. He had to succeed in doing this. Nonetheless, turning him aside from his fanatical murderous commitment would be a hard task.

His commitment was now deeply rooted in Charlie. This was because, despite himself, he was affected by an ancestral psychological mechanism.

So as not to turn back at the first sign of an obstacle barring the way to the conquest of the world, early *Homo sapiens* had bequeathed to humanity a need for coherence that led people to press onward ahead, regardless of difficulties. The result was that we do not change our minds easily and are caught in the cogwheels of an almost irrevocable commitment. The further we advance, the less the likelihood of turning back; the more an action costs us in money or time, the more it binds us thereafter.

It is like simmering a stew for a long time and then adding too much salt by mistake, well into the cooking period. Rather than throwing it all away and starting again at the beginning, the time and effort committed lead us to try to save the meal with all sorts of spices and flavorings that in the end fail to make the dish very palatable. Another example would be waiting in a line snaking around the stalls in a funfair, when the arrival at the ride is not visible, but in contrast the minutes or even hours that have already been spent without seeming to get much closer could easily be counted. Rather than leaving and returning another time, the investment made persuades people to hang on to the bitter end.

This is all the more insidious, because people think they are free to leave the line at any time. Because they believe themselves able to depart whenever they want, they never leave. The feeling of being in full control of one's will paradoxically leaves one as a voluntary prisoner. Faced with a doubt about whether it is better to leave or to stay, the decision taken is not to choose, but simply to copy the behavior of the other captive folk there, through an effect of gregariousness that is more powerful than reasoning.

When in doubt, people always imitate others. For that reason crowd movements can arise in an irrational fashion from one human, the flake who leads to a snowball. Gurus running sects are very well aware of this effect from uncertainty. They push their new victims into copying the submissive attitude of their other disciples who are already under their control, so that the newcomers conform to the group will.

In his day, the perverted narcissistic manipulator Mohammed had done nothing more than use a mix of uncertainty, weakness and fear to transform wise Arabs into docile sheep whose behavior was as foolish as that of lemmings.

To achieve this, the tyrannical shepherd had taken care to separate his flock from Jewish or Christian herds by Koranic injunctions that forbade them from having a non-Moslem as a spouse, a friend or a boss. Any perverted narcissistic manipulator makes sure to keep parents, children or friends well away from their prey, so that they no longer have any points of comparison about what is being inflicted on them, about what is fair or unfair, or about what is true or false. So, Mohammed also had isolated his

victims to keep them from contact from “hypocrites” or “people of the book”, so that these others could not reveal to them which were true scriptures and which were not. Through this confinement, the Arabs had been unable to compare the official story of Moses contained in the Torah with that in the Koran, taken from a Jewish children’s fable. They had had not chance to contrast the New Testament with chapter three of the Koran that recounts a far-fetched whacky nativity of Jesus made up from fragments of apocryphal gospels. As a consequence, Mohammed had been able to lie calmly, reinventing as he wished the history of the monotheistic religions that he claimed were in error, unlike his words, which he presented as the sole true authentic message of God.

After isolation, a final stage has to be carried out by perverted and narcissistic manipulators. They have to break down their victims’ minds so that they no longer know how to react intelligently, and become totally dependent on the manipulator’s will. The latter sneakily alternates kindness and meanness, pleasant gifts or verbal and physical violence. That was just like Mohammed who had changed from promises of Paradise to threats of Hell, from merciful forgiveness to beheadings.

So, after that final conditioning that brings about a state of absolute mental feebleness, docile obedience toward the perverted narcissist is at last in place. The victims become deaf and blind to the kindly folk whose hands are trying to help them break out of their supposed Paradise, really the worst of nightmares. If the manipulator has some official function such as a judge or department head, then submission is all the more total. Obedience to authority is a reflex deeply rooted in our genes. An official title, a doctor’s white coat or a uniform cap mark out power instantaneously in the reptilian part of our brains, thirsty for social order.

The worth of an authority is never questioned unless the questioner also has some power, but no-one could be in a sphere as elevated as Mohammed’s. In the hierarchy of the prophets he was the last and greatest representative of God on Earth. He was due all obedience, as accredited by the Koran that he had made up himself.

“Here we are,” Jawad said.

The white van had just reached a barrier painted red where an elderly watchman was on duty, sitting on a metal stool. On recognizing Jawad, the guard lifted the barrier and the vehicle went on along the curving road for a hundred yards or so more before it came out on a huge plateau overlooking the valley.

There were a number of words that Tom might have chosen to describe Sultan’s house, but the term “house” was definitely not the best name for it. Rather, it was an immense palace constructed entirely out of white marble, a sort of replica of the Taj Mahal, surrounded by luxuriant gardens, perfectly maintained lawns and multiple pools into which the rain had just stopped crying the last of the sky’s tears.

After driving through the entry gate under the welcoming warm smiles of three armed men, the van continued along the lengthy paved track that ran all the way to the building. It stopped five paces away from the great main door, incrusting with a thousand diamonds.

The moment that Tom got out of the vehicle, this sumptuous door opened and Charlie appeared on the threshold.

The two men stared at each other in silence.

Tom looked for some sign of astonishment in the green eyes that were gazing intently into his. However, Charlie did not seem at all surprised by the presence of his late sister’s fiancé in such a place.

A slight breeze came to take its part in the meeting, ruffling Charlie’s long brown hair. His hand stroked his short-trimmed beard for instant before dipping slowly into the back pocket of his white tunic. It brought out a silver-plated revolver.

Charlie raised both arms to chest height and pointed the gun’s barrel threateningly at Tom. For an instant, he thought that Charlie was going to bring his two hands together to grasp the weapon’s butt and fire at him.

The opposite happened.

The two hands moved away from each other and the arms opened welcomingly before the chest. In this posture that had

become one of friendship, Charlie went toward Tom and clasped him in a hearty hug, with the revolver still in his hand.

With his green eyes lit up by a radiant glow, Charlie kissed him warmly on each cheek.

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From under a niqab and through the tinted windows of a fourth-floor bedroom, two dark eyes were observing the meeting between Thomas Anderson and Charlie. The two men were too far away for Fatima to hear what they were saying, but the encounter seemed particularly warmhearted. Charlie had just handed over his silver revolver, and Tom had taken this strange gift in his hand. Standing in front of the front door steps, Charlie was still talking, a smile on his lips, his hand laid in friendly fashion on Tom's shoulder.

Fatima could not believe it. Tom had managed to reach her location, arriving all the way into Sultan's home. She was now wondering if she could rely on his help to do something about Charlie.

Nothing could have been less clear.

Just like Charlie, Tom seemed to have sunk into Islamic madness. First of all, he had killed a C.I.A. agent in cold blood, with a bullet right to the head. He could not deny this, as Fatima had seen the video going the rounds of the Internet.

Then he had wreaked carnage on the market in Kabul. Fatima had proof of his murderous involvement. She had overheard a phone conversation between Charlie and Jawad, and she had understood very clearly that Tom was the man who had made the bomb, but also the one who had deliberately set off the lethal device.

Fatima shuddered. In her memory, the pictures she had seen on television were coming back to haunt her. She could not get out of her mind the images of the mutilated corpses of the women and children who Tom had killed.

How could he have done such a thing? What had gone on in his head to turn him into such a bloodthirsty monster?

From the outside under the gray sky, Charlie and Tom had just come into the entry vestibule, leaving Fatima to fret about her worries.

What would Tom do about her? Could he denounce her as the impostor she was? If he did that, Sultan would be crazy with rage and her end would be ....

*Knock, knock.*

Someone was at her door.

Fatima was filled with foreboding. No-one ever came to see her in her room. Her heart started beating nineteen to the dozen. She vainly searched for a place to hide. The only piece of furniture in the big white room was a king-size four-poster bed. It would be the first place anyone would look if she hid underneath it. Her gaze unfocused, her mind concentrated on the window, as if she might be able to escape through it and fly off far away from this palace where she had become a volunteer prisoner.

*Knock, knock.*

The hand tapping at the door was getting more insistent.

“Fatima, open up! It’s me!”

Sultan had spoken in his high-pitched voice. Fatima walked resignedly toward the door and opened it slowly.

Wearing his long white tunic topped off with his traditional Arab head cloth, Sultan stood in front of her, visibly upset. Stroking his lengthy black beard, he stared into her eyes.

“Can you serve tea to my guests?” he asked. “Two of the maids have gone off to the town to buy provisions, and the one who stayed isn’t feeling well.”

Under her black veil, Fatima smiled in relief.

“Yes, of course, I’d be delighted to.”

She shut the door after her as her faceless shadow-like figure followed Sultan into the corridor.

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With his head turned toward the bay window and sitting comfortably on a davenport, Tom gazed out for a moment at the magnificent panorama of the valley that lay before his eyes, despite the gray sky. Around him, the grand room in the Oriental style where he sat seemed to have been built inside a cloud. Everything in it was white, from its marble flooring up to the ceiling with its Arabesque motifs, from the thick, yielding carpet to the lamp that hung like a vast snowball. The one discordant note in this heavenly white place appeared to be a copy of the Koran with a green cover, lying on a low table, itself milky white.

Tom turned his attention back to Charlie who was sitting opposite him on another davenport of the three arranged in a U-shape.

“I don’t get it,” Tom said. “What is the real meaning of this gift you’ve given me?”

He glanced briefly at the silvery revolver that he had in his right hand. Charlie smiled enigmatically.

“You see this gun,” Charlie began in his clearly American voice, “Well, not so long ago I was holding it stuck into my mouth. I was about to kill myself with it.”

“Kill yourself?” Tom queried.

“Yes. And do you know why? It was because of you. Yes, I nearly died because of you. Let me explain why. I was going through a difficult period in my life, just back from my mission in Africa. My car had hit a landmine, I saw my best friend with his legs blown off dying in my arms. I had his blood all over my face and hands and that horrible sight came back to haunt me night after night. When I got back to the States I came across your book by chance in Camilla’s room. I think she didn’t want me to find *The Pontius Pilate Report*. She always did want to protect me, even from the truth. When I read your novel and understood how big the lies I’d been believing in really were, realizing that Moses was just a myth, the same as Noah’s flood and his Ark, finding out about the real story of Jesus, my heart was broken. Even if my mind protested, even if I wanted to carry on believing in the beautiful lie of Christ the son of God, I knew in my heart of hearts that your writings were telling the truth.”

Charlie leaned slightly forward.

“You know, Tom, your book left me as good as dead. If I was a poet, I’d say your pen had run me through the heart and I was nothing more than a creature without a soul. I can’t deny it, your book did away with the man I had been, and I was angry with you for it. I’d likely have killed you if I’d met up with you face to face like now. But you weren’t there, so I wanted to break with this life of lies, I didn’t want to have to face up to that other reality confronting me. I put this revolver into my mouth and I was about to squeeze the trigger. But strangely, a white bird landed on the windowsill of my room, and then I realized that God was sending me a sign. More than that, he was sending me a problem to solve. Why do the Old Testament and New Testament both tell false stories? Why was God’s word contrary to the historical facts?”

Charlie grasped the Koran lying on the low table.

“Alongside your novel on the shelves in Camilla’s room there was a translation of this book. I’d never read it before, but when I did, wow! What can I say, this book is magic. Allah spoke to me in his own voice. In some of the *suwar*, the chapters, there were *ayat*, or verses, that were aimed directly at me, as if Allah was talking to me one-on-one, as if Allah was inside my head. It was an amazing sensation.”

His eyes shining, Charlie paused at that point, lost in his thoughts.

His mind in turmoil, Tom went through what Camilla’s brother had just told him. So, the origin of Charlie’s sickness was to be found in *The Pontius Pilate Report* which Tom had written. After reading it, instead of being immunized against the Catholic God Virus, Charlie had caught another mental illness that was even worse, the Islamic God Virus. He had fallen into the psychological trap that Tom called the “Koran horoscope effect”.

This mental ambush had been born in Mohammed’s lifetime, when the Murderer of Medina had used an indoctrination procedure which consisted of attributing imaginary knowledge to those who contradicted him. In particular, he had suggested that the People of the Book were covering up what they knew and hiding a secret treasure which could bring them to Paradise to the detriment of others. This had triggered a paranoid tidal wave of criticism in the hearts of the Moslems, which had poured out in the

form of hatred for their Jewish or Christian friends who were accused by a verse of concealed malevolence. Mohammed had surfed on this wave of condemnations.

In the Koran, many verses are aimed at denigrating, insulting or cursing Christians and Jews. This was Mohammed's battle plan as revealed in the second chapter. It involved propaganda intended to manipulate the minds of his followers so as to seize the property of the Jewish tribes of Medina, ordering them killed or deported as part of a campaign of ethnic cleansing.

However, despite being supposedly all-seeing, his non-existent God was incapable of indicating to him the precise identity of his numerous opponents. So, Mohammed had not been able to name directly the folk who he was satirizing, and thus he resorted to cunning insinuations instead of clearly designating the people he was attacking in his Koran. By using roundabout language in some verses, on the lines of *there is a party of them*, Mohammed had unwittingly created the "Koran horoscope effect". Readers were obliged to interpret vague and nebulous terms, so their self-centered minds conspired to assign a personal sense to them. So, a confused and senseless phrase became true in the mind of the one interpreting it. This was just like the astrological predictions that can be read each day in newspapers. It does not matter which sign of the Zodiac you read, you can always manage to recognize yourself in the phrases with half-expressed convolutions that can be given whatever sense you like. The more the language is vague and empty of meaning, the more easily the brain can fall into the trap of seeing itself in these spurious morning recommendations.

The same happens with the Koran in which can be found similar advice, not star-based but more like subliminal suggestions, which the crafty desert manipulator put into his verses. The principle was to drown the intellect, which was avid for closure, in tales without an ending or questions left unanswered, so as to oblige the subconscious to drink in the warnings that Mohammed scattered about in his phrases.

Key Koranic messages, these exhortations were a threat or an intimidation intended to stir up fear. For your own good, *fear Me*, as Mohammed's tongue cracked out like a whip.

Believers were not described as those who loved him, but those who feared him. His Koran was a book of fear, as this was the very heart of its conception, like the fear of the unknown or of death. Such a fear was the twin of cruelty, so it is far from surprising that cruelty and the Koran have gone hand-in-hand down to the present day.

“In the holy Qur’an,” Charlie broke in on his thoughts, “the truth about Christ, which you also put in your novel, jumped off the page at me. Jesus was never crucified, that’s all false pretenses! Jesus isn’t the son of God, or God himself, and it’s clear that logically he can’t be a man and God at the same time. Allah made me see that. He also showed me why the Old and New Testaments had become untrue with the passing years. It was the copyists who were supposed to reproduce them by hand who were perverted by the Devil over the centuries, and they garbled the true words of Allah transmitted to the prophets. Westerners always blame God for all the evils in creation when a disaster strikes on the Earth, but they never think to accuse the Devil. Yet he’s the one who works for evil, he’s the one that removed the archeological remains from the Sinai desert to try to get Moses forgotten, it’s the Devil who got rid of all the traces of the flood and of Noah’s Ark. Yes, I finally saw it was the Devil who faked the true story of humanity. Thanks to your novel, thanks to the holy Qur’an and thanks to the Prophet, *salla Allah ‘alayhi wa salam*, I understood all that. I have to thank you for opening my eyes, and that’s why I’ve given you this revolver that almost closed my eyes for ever.”

Tom nodded approval.

The golden rule for any negotiator was never to contradict a convinced individual. If a paranoid claimed he had been tailed by the postman, he should never be told that he was imagining things and his ideas were untrue. Quite the contrary, it was necessary to play along with him and ask what day or on what occasion the postman had been spying on him. If a schizophrenic affirmed he had seen a U.F.O. landing in his garden, above all the response should never that extraterrestrials did not exist. It was necessary to join him in his madness and question him about what kind of

flying saucer it had been, what color it was, and what galaxy it came from.

It was the same with a religious person. It was impossible to tell such an individual that God or the Devil had no existence outside his mind, all the more so if that believer, like Charlie, systematically uttered a phrase of praises in Arabic every time the name of Mohammed was mentioned. This eulogy, which consisted of adding after the Prophet's name *blessings of God be upon him and his family and peace*, triggered a contradiction in the brain. It just could not express any negative judgment on what was described to it in terms indicating praise. Just as with the *Holy Bible* or the *holy Koran* which anesthetized any critical spirit by the very name they were called. So, believers could not put in question what they adulated, nor could they wonder whether the "good and generous Mohammed" was a truly sincere prophet. This was because their brains were already too biased by the formula to look for a proper answer to the question: the Prophet was good and generous, so he had to be sincere.

"Will you take this gift?" Charlie asked.

Tom acquiesced.

"Yes, and with thanks. I'll take it with all the more happiness because I had exactly the same revelation as you about the Devil. That's why I'm here today by the grace of Allah, *jalla jallalah*. I was able to ...."

Tom interrupted his sentence.

A dark shadow had just entered the white room. Bringing a tray with cups and a red teapot, it politely bowed its head veiled in a niqab. Without saying a word, the woman came up to the low table and set down the scalding hot drink.

While she was kneeling to serve the tea with its strong scent of mint, her dark eyes briefly met Tom's. He got the impression of recognition from that furtive glance and immediately thought of Fatima, the C.I.A. spy. Were those not the same dark eyes he had seen in the photograph of her, the one that Alan had shown him while he was in Jerusalem? He was sure they were, so as soon as she got a chance, Fatima would contact him. She must already have reported to her superiors, telling them that Tom's infiltration mission was a success.

But a success at what price?

Tom had killed so many people to reach Charlie that he was still asking himself how he could continue living, with these horrors carved into his heart. Worse still, he had just learned that he was to blame for Charlie's transformation. It was because of his novel that Charlie had turned into this Islamic assassin, so Tom would be the only person really responsible for the death of thousands of innocent folk if he did not manage to thwart the attack planned by Camilla's twin. Because of *The Pontius Pilate Report*, Tom felt he had become a sort of Frankenstein of literature, whose written creature had escaped from his control.

In his novel, doing away with a heavenly Christ, Tom had brought to life an earthly Jesus who had left Charlie's mind in turmoil, and thrown him into the clutches of that monster, Mohammed. Whatever the good or bad of it, Charlie had not had access to his other work *The Sage of Mecca*. If he had read that, would he have been cured of the Islamic God Virus, or would he more likely have accused the Devil of having guided the pen of its author? Extracting Charlie from the Medina sect would now be an arduous task for the man who had unwittingly pushed him into the Islamist abyss.

Rapt in thought, Tom absent-mindedly stared at the woman who was serving the cups of tea. When she stood up and set off with the empty tray, Tom's eyes followed her without his being conscious of it. With silent steps, she disappeared through an opening in the shape of a rounded arch that cut through the white wall.

Charlie had noticed how much attention Tom had paid to the woman in her niqab.

"You know," he said, winking at Tom, "the Devil can take many different shapes, even very charming ones."

He burst out laughing and Tom imitated him.

Returning to seriousness, Charlie opened the Koran he had in his hand.

"Even if the Devil can take various forms so as to pervert men, he isn't as powerful as he'd like. He may have been able to lead astray those copying the Bible so as to induce men into error, but he's never succeeded in corrupting the holy Qur'an. You

know, the first time I read it, what struck me was the wealth of subjects that are discussed in it: creation, astronomy, the Earth, the animal and vegetable kingdoms, human reproduction. Where the Bible's full of colossal scientific errors, because of the Devil, in the holy Qur'an I didn't find even one. That's what made me ask myself, if a man was the author of the Qur'an, how was he able, in the seventh century of the Christians' era, to write what's nowadays proven to be in conformity with modern scientific knowledge. What human explanation could be given for that fact? How could an inhabitant of the Arabian Peninsula, in the times when France was ruled by King Dagobert, have an acquaintance with science that was a dozen centuries in advance of his times?"

Charlie fell silent for an instant before continuing.

"So, logic forced me to understand that no human clarification should be looked for, it had to be a divine explanation to account for the scientific information you find in the holy Koran. That's the proof that Allah is really the author, and the scientific *ayat* which have to be seen as "miracles of science" should make us all humble."

Turning the pages of the Koran, Charlie looked for one particular verse and read it out aloud.

*"And whosoever it is Allah's will to guide, He expandeth his bosom unto the Surrender, and whosoever it is His Will to send astray, He maketh his bosom close and narrow as if he were engaged in sheer ascent.* That's an obvious allusion to what nowadays we call altitude sickness or astronaut sickness. You know as well as I do that the higher up you go, the less oxygen there is in the thinner air and the less you weigh. That makes you stifle, but you can cure it with an oxygen mask or by pressurizing the interior of your aircraft. How could an illiterate shepherd from the seventh century have had any inkling about such a phenomenon if the holy Qur'an had not been Allah's inspiration?"

Charlie turned over the pages.

"In this other *surah*, this chapter, there's another scientific miracle in the tale of the People of the Cave that Allah plunged into a long sleep. *We caused them to turn over to the right and the left.* At first sight, this extract from an *aya* doesn't attract much attention from any ordinary person. However, someone with

medical training would see a sign in it, because modern medicine confirms that patients who have to stay in bed for a long time must be regularly moved from one side to the other to avoid skin necrosis on the parts that are immobile. Could an illiterate shepherd in the seventh century have been more than a dozen centuries ahead and have known modern medicine? It wasn't the Prophet, *salla Allah 'alayhi wa salam*, who could have stated scientific facts like this from his own knowledge. It could only have been the effect of some superhuman power, in this case the work of Allah."

Tom nodded agreement.

He held himself back from telling Charlie that in the fable of the People of the Cave, the Koran may well say that God turned their bodies over, but it was not for medical but for dramatic reasons. It was to have readers' minds conjure up the image of living people who moved naturally in their sleep, and so were not dead and rigid.

Tom also refrained from contradicting Charlie about altitude sickness. The version of the Koran that Charlie had in his hand was only an interpretation of the Arab original. The translator had written *He maketh his bosom close and narrow as if he were engaged in sheer ascent*. The verse in Arabic could be rendered *He compresses his chest and causes anguish in it as if he were trying to climb into Heaven*. In reality, this passage made no reference, direct or indirect to suffocation from lack of oxygen.

Tom had to rub Charlie's mind up the right way, by parroting his Koranic statements.

"Yes, that's perfectly clear," Tom stated. "There's no way you can doubt the supernatural origin of the holy Qur'an. I have another scientific miracle from the holy Qur'an in mind. It says: *When the night grew dark upon him he beheld a star. He said: This is my Lord. But when it set, he said: I love not things that set*. That *aya* is number seventy-six in the *surah* "Cattle". Well now, Halley's Comet is visible from Earth every seventy-six years! Besides, in that *aya* the name "Halley" appears. How could a scientist who gave his name to a comet in the eighteenth century be mentioned in a book from the seventh century unless that book is of divine origin?"

With a foolish smile on his lips, Charlie agreed.

Tom smiled back, meditating the fact that the Arab terms for “star” and for “comet” were completely different words. Besides, the name “Halley” was not really in the verse. It could be twisted out of it only by taking the end of the third word and the beginning of the fourth “*Aalayhi allaylu*”, and even then was not the correct pronunciation. In other words, with a bit of imagination, any historical figure can “miraculously” appear out of a set of distorted phonetic combinations.

“You know,” Charlie began, “the day...”

He broke off in full flow.

Jawad was standing in the arched doorway.

Under the tinted lenses of his eyeglasses, his small dark eyes were scrutinizing the two sitting men. He finally walked forward and held out to Charlie a sheet of paper he had in his hand.

“The private jet will be ready for this evening,” Jawad announced. “They just confirmed the flight plan.”

Charlie put the Koran down on the low table, took the sheet of paper and scanned it.

“That’s perfect!” he exclaimed. “We can start getting ready.”

Jawad nodded in silence.

“You’re going on a journey?” Tom asked.

Charlie smiled at him.

“Not just us, you’re coming too.”

“Right,” Tom said, winking at him. “What’s our destination?”

His eyes shining, Charlie gave him the paper.

“We’re going to the most beautiful city in the world.”

When Tom read the destination written on the sheet of paper, surprise made him blink rapidly.



## **Fourth Commandment: Thou Shalt Prophecy Koranic Blunders**

Every time that there is some new scientific discovery in the field of physics, chemistry or biology, pseudo-scientists rush to the Koran so as to try to demonstrate that the discovery in question is already mentioned in that book. Thus, for these backward minds, from electricity to Einstein's theory of relativity via space exploration, all the major knowledge of the modern age had already been described in the Koran in the seventh century. In their eyes, all of this goes to prove the divine origin of the Koran, since Mohammed was no more than a Bedouin who could neither read nor write, who must have been completely unaware of our present-day knowledge.

Contaminated by the Islamic God Virus or their intellectual dishonesty, these pseudo-scientists base their research work on chapters that they interpret according to their whim of the moment. They have no hesitation in distorting the original verses by means of incorrect translations so as to succeed in digging up an umpteenth imaginary "scientific miracle" in the Koran.

If ever by some chance they do not actually distort the Koran, they forget to say that Arabs in the days of Mohammed were not prehistoric cave-dwellers. Among them there were scholars and in particular renowned astronomers who had a clear awareness of the skies, as had the Greeks a thousand years earlier.

Any sentence taken out of its context can yield a meaning diametrically opposite to its real sense. All the so-called “scientific miracles” of the Koran can be explained either through falsification or on the basis of what was common knowledge at the time it was composed. It is enough to examine them with just a little scientific rigor and critical sense to see that it is no more than a question of twisting facts to fit.

These religious fraudsters can easily be hoist with their own petard if verses are read intelligently. If the Koran is truly the infallible word of God, then just one single error contained in its pages must render all the rest of what is written there null and void.

In fact, its scientific and historical blunders are innumerable, from the Flood that never happened to Moses who never existed, from the conception of the first man from clay to the creation of the Earth in two days.

Naturally, these pseudo-scientists will still try to duck the question by claiming that God’s days are special days, and correspond to millions or even thousands of millions of years. Unfortunately for them, Mohammed in the chapter called “The Pilgrimage” gave the mathematical formula for converting Allah’s days into human years: *unto Him in a Day, whereof the measure is a thousand years of that ye reckon.*

When he was at God school, Allah must definitely have been a really poor student at human math, not to mention lousy at geology, when he claimed that our planet is no more than a few thousand earthly years old. Any kid from grade school knows more about the true origins of our world than the Creator himself. If some angel or another let his tongue run away with him and whispered the grades on Allah’s report card into Mohammed’s ear, there is no doubt that his corpse in Medina would whirl in its grave so fast that it would cause earth tremors.

In the view of some people, though, that would just be yet another scientific miracle. This is because the chapter “The Snatchers” indeed prophesies that the day the earth quakes at the first sound of a trumpet, immediately followed by another, there will be hearts trembling with fear.

*Extract from the novel “The Sage of Mecca” by Thomas Anderson.*



## 23

### The Question

First a fringe and then an ocean of red streaked out into the dark vault of the heavens. It progressively drowned the stars in a growing deluge of blue. Then those lights which had twinkled with a golden gleam finally died one after another to give way to the new star with the power of multiple glowing embers. Their brilliance swallowed up the dark shadows with its resplendent light.

Standing alone and motionless, Mohammed contemplated the spectacle of this rising sun, before the hundreds of tents of white canvas where bodies still exhausted from a night of relentless marching were resting. When the fiery disk climbed above the horizon, a light breeze stirred, blowing grains of sand over the Prophet's bare feet, and rippling slightly his long black tunic and hair.

Despite his tiredness, the Messenger of God had not been able to fall asleep. So he had stayed like this, outside his tent, enjoying the calm of the desert. Nonetheless, a yawn of fatigue recalled to him his need to try to get at least a little sleep before the fresh march that was scheduled.

Mohammed regretfully left the mild warmth of the day. He slowly walked back to his tent. When he lifted the canvas flap, he suddenly stopped short.

Sitting inside, an old man was awaiting him. He was dressed in a white robe over which his long milk-white hair and thick beard spread. Revealing pearly white teeth, he smiled at

Mohammed and gestured silently with his hand for him to sit with him.

As if bewitched by this presence, the Prophet went into his place of rest. He came and sat facing the elderly man on a large red carpet scattered with many cushions. The oldster's blue eyes seemed to sparkle with malice.

*Was it Gabriel?*

For a brief moment, Mohammed thought that it might be the angel of revelation, because it was impossible for any stranger to reach this far without being spotted by the guards who formed a cordon all around the camp at some distance. However, Gabriel had always adopted the earthly body of a child.

*If it was not Gabriel, then who was this visitor?*

As if reading the Prophet's thoughts, the elderly man thought it best to give a short explanation.

"I had a long journey before I arrived to see you."

His voice was attractive, warm and deep. It resonated into the utmost depths of the Prophet's heart and made his entire being tremble. He nodded, working out that this stranger must doubtless be some high-ranking emissary or an ambassador sent by a powerful king. That would be the reason that he had been brought directly to the Messenger of God.

"What is your name?" Mohammed inquired.

"To tell the truth, my real name is of little importance. However, some call me the Sage of Mecca. To be frank, I like to be called that."

The Prophet politely bowed his head, then asked, "Have you come from Mecca?"

"I was there a while ago. Unfortunately, times have changed."

As if lost in pleasant memories, a smile on his lips and his eyelids fluttering, the Sage picked up a still steaming container that was set in front of him on a wooden tray with two pottery beakers. The boiling water flowed out in a thin stream, releasing an exquisite perfume of mint sweetened with honey.

Without a word the two men stared one at the other as they sipped with enjoyment at the tea that had been served

The Sage was the first to speak.

“Despite your age, to me you still look young, with your black hair and your beard.”

Mohammed lowered his eyes, as if caught in the act of dyeing his hair. He did so to satisfy the whims of Aisha, who did not want a husband who looked old like the Sage of Mecca.

He carried on by posing a strange question.

“Is there any truth in the tale of the miracle of the rock that you smashed with just a couple of blows of your pickax? Or it is just one more of the abundant legends going round about you, just like the fables of the warlike exploits of your companions, such as Ali?”

The Prophet’s face scowled. He was about to respond angrily, but the Sage cut him short.

“They say you are as cunning as a fox and as strong as a lion, not to mention as cruel.”

“I am not cruel,” protested Mohammed. “I do nothing but carry out God’s orders!”

Seeing that the Prophet was annoyed, the Sage used milder words.

“They say that God made you the perfect model to emulate. They say your character is modest, sincere and faithful. Even if you are free from all sins, they say that you do not see yourself as perfect, infallible or different from other men, and that your best quality is to be conscious of your own defects. They say that you never become angry for any personal reason, but only when what is sacred to God is violated. You are the most charitable of men, you listen to the needy because you are like them. You repair your own shoes and you patch your clothes, you sleep on a simple mattress laid on the ground. They say you are magnanimous, amiable, very strict in your morals, and that you never criticize the food that they serve you. If you like a dish, you eat it, otherwise you just leave it and never reproach anyone. It seems that you adore sweetmeats, honey and pumpkins. They say your hands are softer than silk and that your skin has the most agreeable of scents. They also say that you have a great sense of humor and that you never lie.”

Under the white beard, a slight smile ran over the lips of the elderly man.

“They say that you are no poet, so that you would be incapable of making up by yourself anything remotely as good as your recitation. They say you are energetic, but also steeped in your divine mission. You are a warrior who is not squeamish about inflicting death, who likes women and does not hide from them, while giving over a great deal of time to prayer and disdaining the pleasures and wealth of this world. God has put all the treasures of the Earth at your disposal, but you prefer those of the next world. Your life makes real and applies all the principles of Submission and all God’s laws. They also say that with you as his intermediary, God has accomplished many miracles.”

The Sage began laughing softly.

“Do you not believe in the truth of these miracles?” asked Mohammed.

“I do not believe in the reality of God,” retorted the old man. “Nor any other deity, for that matter.

Incomprehension was clear on the Prophet’s face.

“You do not believe in God, or even in other divine beings?” inquired Mohammed, astounded.

“No, above us there is nothing. And yes, the sky is empty.”

*This man is completely demented!*

The Prophet wondered how on earth the Sage could doubt the existence of God with all the proofs there were about him. You would have to be truly blind not to perceive the perfect reality of God.

“You think I am a madman?” chuckled the elderly man. “Who knows, perhaps I am. However, the one who is definitely completely off his head is you. The same is true of all your Submitters. Believing in God is typical of the crazy folk who suffer from an obsession about the future, who in their deepest hearts have an incurable unease, a sense of being incomplete. Then they open the door to the fallacious feeling that they are controlled by a superior being up in Heaven, and our disquiet, our intelligence and our conscience are anesthetized to fall into the abyss of a reality that is not real.”

“God exists!” interrupted Mohammed.

“You are right, it would be a great pity if God did not exist,” replied the Sage in a grave but cynical tone. “That would spoil the enjoyment of narrating all our resentments to that perfect God who has created such an imperfect world. This is a world of famines and storms, pain and death, a world of crying and distress, a world of illusions, an infinite prison that we call life. You people have dreamed up a Paradise somewhere out there so as to be able to tolerate the Hell of this life, a life of fears and tears. However, none of all that has any existence, it is all just other people’s dreams. You should open your eyes and ...”

“You will end up in Hell for your disbelief!” growled the Prophet.

Stroking his white beard, the Sage was silent for several seconds before replying.

“In Hell? Do you not find it strange that there is such a disproportion between the mere fact of not believing and the terrible punishment of being condemned to eternal torments? How could a truly merciful God impose a vast and unlimited penalty upon a minor and limited offense? That does not seem to make much sense. That notion of eternal punishment seems incomprehensible. Then again, everything becomes clear when we learn about the doctrine of predestination. Everything is written in advance, and God has willed everything beforehand. In truth, God has created men that he had deliberately made blind, just like me, with the sole aim of sending us to a place of cruelty and tortures. You worship a heavenly being that has made a Hell and created countless generations of humans with one single purpose, for their destiny to be to end in Hell, humans that God himself has chosen to lead astray from the true way, the only reason being to make other humans terrified. Your God and your religion are nothing more than fear and terror. Because of that, rather than acting from a sense of duty toward our fellow humans, from generosity or from sympathy, Submitters act from fear, to avoid divine punishment, and from selfishness, to obtain rewards from God, in this life and in the hereafter. When it comes down to it, fear corrupts all real morality. Under the heel of fear, believers act prudently in their

own personal interests, so as to elude the torments of Hell. Your religion is just a terrifying idealization of wickedness.”

“God is not the incarnation of malice!” shouted Mohammed. “It is the Devil who causes evil and turns men aside from God’s way to plunge them into Hell!”

The Sage looked hard at the Prophet, then asked, “According to you, who created Heaven and Hell? Was it your God or the Devil?”

The strange visitor gave a broad ironic smile.

“Perhaps, though, you are entirely right: it could well be that the Devil is the incarnation of evil, because a God of goodness and love, the cause and originator of all that there is indeed irreconcilable with the notion of evil. How could our imperfect world be the work of a God of perfection? How could a God of peace in his infinite goodness, and all-powerful to boot, have fashioned from nothingness a world of errors, sadness and cruelty? How could he be the have created evil, sadistic, malicious beings? The trouble is that in that case your God is not infinitely powerful. In truth, your God could not have made all beings fully in accordance with his will, and so his power is limited. Your God is faced with a situation over which he has no dominion, a free space that escapes his control. Worse yet, your God has an enemy, a double of himself who confronts him like his reflection in a mirror. However, in his megalomania, he refuses to see his dark counterpart, and he pretends that he is just an inferior being that he insults with the name of Satan.”

“You are delirious!” cut in Mohammed. “Sunstroke must have made you lose your mind. You must have been out in the sun for too long while on your journey here.”

The Sage started laughing.

“The delirious one here is you!” retorted the oldster. “You refuse to look truth in the face!”

“You, you ...”

Mohammed wanted to speak. Nonetheless, his tongue had become numb, and his mouth could no longer utter the words that were running around in his mind that was roaring with rage.

It was the Sage who spoke.

“You say that your God is all-powerful and benevolent. However, God behaves like a tetchy tyrant incapable of controlling rebellious subjects like me. He is hot-tempered, arrogant, jealous, all of which are surprising imperfections in a supposedly perfect being. If God is self-sufficient, why does he need humanity? If God is all-powerful, why does he demand men’s help? Above all, why did God chose an obscure Arab trader living in a jerkwater village in the back of beyond as his last representative on Earth? Do you think it is sensible for a supremely moral being to demand flattery and absolute adoration from his own creatures? What should we think of a God who has created humans so that they can grovel in the dust five times a day to pay homage to him? Such an obsessive desire for praise is hardly a praiseworthy virtue, and it is certainly not worthy of a morally supreme being. Your God also changes his mind over and over again. Is it normal for an all-powerful being to modify his orders so frequently? One day it is white, the next black. Can he not manage to make his revelations once and for all, and provide a definitive version of his commandments? After all, is he not supposed to be the incarnation of absolute wisdom?”

The Sage of Mecca leaned slightly forward.

“Your God is much more inclined to punish than to reward, to inflict pain than to give pleasure, to destroy than to build. He takes his pleasure from allowing beings that he has created to feel that they are nothing more than his slaves, his contemptible instruments, his Submitters, so that we can recognize his superiority even better, so that we can be sure that his power is far stronger than our power, that his cunning is way more than our cunning, that his will is above our will, and that his pride is much greater than our pride.”

The old man calmly served himself another tea, drinking it silently in small sips, while his blue eyes stared at the Prophet who felt as if suddenly turned to stone. He had become like an immobile statue, powerless, unable to make the slightest gesture.

*What could this strange spell be?*

For an instant, the Prophet thought that a white Devil was sitting opposite him and had put a curse on him to paralyze him

this way. Just by looking at his guest drinking the delicious minty tea, Mohammed suddenly saw his mistake clearly.

*The tea must be poisoned!*

If the Sage had not been touched by the effects of the poison, it must be that he had taken an antidote just beforehand. As if guessing his thoughts, the oldster gave him a long smile.

“I love this little touch of honey in the tea!” exclaimed the elderly man. “Do you?”

The Sage put his beaker down on the wooden tray.

“You know, ever since your first wife, Khadijah, died your God, who was so benevolent in Mecca, has been very different. He has undergone a strange change, would you not agree? He is associated with assassins that he calls martyrs, when the real martyrs are actually their victims. That gang of criminals formerly killed people for money. Now they do the same thing, in the name of God, but always still grabbing a share of the spoils, but in addition being guaranteed a place in Paradise. That seems a great reward for a bunch of brigands! And here am I, a poor madman, who will go straight to Hell for my crime of lacking faith. You might object that it was the Meccans who came to make war on you. However, keep in mind that the inhabitants of Mecca came and fought to try to save the Jews who you slaughtered, deported and robbed and who you reduced to slavery. Any nation in the world, here or elsewhere, today or tomorrow, would have done the same to combat your fanaticism, your murderous madness and your personality cult.”

Gravely nodding his head, the strange visitor pointed his index finger toward his listener.

“Submission is not the worship of God, it is the worship of Mohammed. Hence, your figure is put in the front row, so much so that God has no more than a bit part, being just a simple helper of the Messenger. God is just an underling who advises you on your policies, who gives you a hand in sorting out the minor problems of the empire you are building for yourself day after day. He assists you in smoothing out the difficulties that crop up from time to time. That puppet up in Heaven is very useful in holding back men who are coarse, violent and bloodthirsty, quick to anger, unshakeable in their hatreds and their thirst for vengeance,

indifferent about shedding human blood, greedy for plunder and as changeable as the wind in their friendships. It is from your mouth, and not your God's, that these men look to for answers to their questions. It is not God who's important in their eyes, but the Messenger. God is no more than a useful theory, simply responding with revelations to any awkward question, correcting their errors, legalizing their faults and encouraging their violent instincts. I have been told that one of your secretaries abjured Submission, because he was disgusted by the opportunism of your divine revelations that always emerge at just the right time to justify your actions. In Mecca, I myself met a poet, the son of Saad, who also had become an apostate. Your former scribe tells anyone who wants to listen that he himself produced certain parts of your recitation."

*Lies!*

The Sage started laughing.

"No, I am teasing you! I didn't meet the son of Saad in Mecca. It has been an age since I was there. You know, I often wonder what the town must be like nowadays. There must still be those beautiful women there who walk around with their faces open to the air. That is very different from here. You have turned women into faceless prisoners. Do not try to tell me that it is God's will: God does not exist, hence it has to be the will of a man. Because of you, women have become no more than objects. No one looks at them, since in any case you cannot see their features under their veils. That causes a sexual frustration against which your Submitters defend themselves by imagining that women are evil and wish to soil and defile them. In that way, the pleasure of looking becomes in their eyes a sin distancing them from your so-called God. You have turned men into fearful, superstitious, violent creatures when faced with women."

Closing his eyes for a moment, the Sage sighed.

"I am still just as intrigued, indeed even fascinated by the violence in your religion. It exploits the animal urges of humans, but also sexual urges and urges to dominate. Those who join it see it as a real liberation, a chance to set free at last their evil urges that they had been stifling for too long. Men are and always will be animals, animals inclined to seek out the protection of a dominant

male to whom they voluntarily submit, even if he is evil incarnate.”

As if lost in his thoughts, the Sage remained silent for quite a while, not saying a word as he smoothed his white beard with an industrious hand. Then he restarted his monologue which seemed completely crazy and incoherent to the Prophet’s mind.

“You know, you have won. You will conquer and your evil empire will seep out all over the world. The coalition tribes that you defeated at the battle of the trench will all come and join you from greed, so as to go and plunder the wealth of Mecca or of other cities. They will convert because they are tempted by spoils and final victory, but they will have to real inclination for Submission. Of course, if things go badly, they will be quick to abandon their new religion as rapidly as they took it up. However, the future is mapped out and victory will be yours. All the men in those tribes will learn that treachery, cruelty and injustice are not blameworthy if done in the name of your God, and that lies and trickery in the cause of Submission have full divine approval. Those men who have never broken a promise will learn that they can free themselves of their pledged word, as long as it is for God’s cause, and they will join the stronger side.”

The old man’s face was twisted by a grimace of sadness.

“I should have liked my words to have struck a fatal blow at that foul beast. However, I think that I have barely put a scratch on the monster that you have become, and which is not about to fall dead. I still can dream, though, that from that scratch an infection might start that will spread progressively through the edifice of lies that has been built around you, so that in the end it collapses and makes you see the truth face to face. Perhaps all that is out of our hands now, and only future generations will awake from the nightmare into which we are about to plunge them, generations that will then look back on us with a mixture of surprise and incomprehension, generations who will wonder how there was ever a time when it was possible to have believed all this. Yes, it is doubtless a process that has escaped our control and that nothing can stop now. I simply hope that in the end the truth will always triumph.”

Mohammed's wild eyes turned to his left. The hilt of his saber was sticking out between two cushions. If he could muster the strength needed to grasp it, he would be able to slay this servant of Satan who had poisoned him.

With a superhuman effort that brought fat drops of sweat to his pulsing temples, the Prophet tried to stretch out his arm. Nonetheless, it was as if his limb was glued to his side, and he had no control over it.

"Above all, remember that none of all that is true!" exclaimed the Sage suddenly. "Keep that in mind: it is all false pretenses. Everything you believe in is nothing more than a myth, a fabulous tale that someone else thought up in a book. You must believe me. None of it is true. You must open your eyes."

The Sage insisted in a louder voice.

"Open your eyes!"

Mohammed could not understand what the oldster was trying to imply with these enigmatic words. The Prophet's gaze was visibly vacant and incomprehension reigned on his face.

The Sage's blue eyes suddenly grew savage with a murderous determination.

"If you cannot open your eyes," murmured the elderly man in a voice heavy with regret, "I shall have to close them for ever, before it is really too late."

He stretched out his arm and took the saber from among the cushions. He slowly slipped the black leather scabbard off the weapon. The razor-sharp blade appeared in all its metallic beauty, cold and lethal. It rested gently on Mohammed's shoulder. Then, snake-like, it crept slowly up to the base of the motionless neck. The steel tooth of the cutting edge sank gently into the skin, letting the reddish tincture out of the wounded flesh.

At that precise moment Aisha came into the tent.

The frail figure, entirely covered in a dark veil, began screaming with fright at the sight of the Prophet covered in blood and at the mercy of that saber.

Her cries were like an antidote to the poison which was paralyzing all of him. His senses suddenly restored to full functioning, Mohammed's hand vigorously thrust away the blade

covered with his own blood. He leaped to his feet and rushed out of the tent, pushing Aisha to one side so forcefully that she fell on her back outside.

In a daze, his hand on his neck to staunch the bleeding, the Prophet ran zig-zag between the various white canvas tents of the encampment. Aisha's shrill cries continued to provide an accompaniment to her husband's headlong flight. He crashed into a mountain of muscles.

"What is happening?" asked Omar in a growling, worried voice.

As his sole response, Mohammed grabbed the immense sword that his friend wore hanging from his belt. Seizing the hilt in both hands, the Prophet turned around and hastened back toward his tent. Aisha was there, sitting on the ground, still yelling blue murder.

With the point of the sword preceding him, Mohammed charged into the tent. The Sage of Mecca had taken advantage of the general confusion to run off and disappear. With a little thought, the Prophet grasped that his murderer must have had accomplices among the Submitters to help him get in and out of the camp with such ease. This matter must be hushed up as quickly as possible to avoid arousing any suspicions among the troops.

Furious at having had such a close shave in the attempted murder, Mohammed promised himself revenge. He would be God's avenger as well, for all the blasphemous words uttered by that spawn of Satan. However, to find him among the population and inflict capital punishment on him, he would first of all have to find out who that old man was, or at least learn who his parents had been, his affiliations or in what city he dwelt.

So, day and night, one question never ceased to haunt the Prophet.

*Who is the Sage of Mecca in reality?*

## 24

### Emptiness

Sitting at the table opposite Charlie, in a luxurious suite painted in a faint blue, Tom put down the dessert spoon on his empty plate. With a silk napkin, he meticulously wiped his black beard, then turned his shaven head to the left. Through the bay window near him, he began contemplating the view down from the hotel where he was staying.

Down below, shining with twinkling lights under a crescent moon, the Kaaba appeared to be nothing more than a tiny square of dark chocolate, floating on a creamy mousse of humanity swirling round on itself. Like thousands of white ants, the pilgrims in their milk-white robes were making their crazy circuits around Mecca's holy monument.

Tom thoughtfully raised his eyes toward the starry sky.

Was there some heavenly architect up there in the firmament, observing these misguided souls desperately seeking their imaginary Paradise, just as Tom was watching them? Was there some primal intelligence looking down at these insects of flesh vainly living and dying in its name?

From time to time, a divine flame of virus still stirred in Tom, whispering to him the unreal idea that there could be no mechanism to the universes unless there was a cosmic clock-smith to assemble its cogs. Nonetheless, even if that superior being existed, it certainly had nothing to do with Yahve, God or Allah. Their supposed earthly emissaries, Moses, Jesus and Mohammed, were no more than a myth, a false pretense or a human scam. That

truth must be accepted, and it was just as necessary to acknowledge the fact that Paradise was only a mental construct, a protective reaction against death. Above all, there was a need to recognize the fact that no creator had ever contacted any of those pretentious men, no more than such a being had got in touch with ants or other of the insignificant creatures that struggled to survive on this tiny grain of sand that was called Earth, lost among the infinite beaches that were galaxies.

Tom looked once again at the Kaaba. As he saw the pilgrims pathologically wandering around it, a feeling of melancholy overcame him.

As he had written in his novel *The Sage of Mecca*, a normal response to an aggression threatening our liberty was the opposite of love, in other words, hatred. That was a legitimate reaction to the guru Mohammed and his sectarian doctrine. However, no hatred should be felt toward the victims of the Islamic God Virus. Only sad empathy for these Moslems, prisoners of a tyrant from another age, should be found in the hearts of those who were not poisoned by his evil writings.

Tom remembered how he had been trying to get his book issued and had rung a major publishing house. The director had quoted the synopsis, and said he was afraid of the consequences of putting such a work onto the market. First of all, his fear was there might be a law suit brought by Moslem associations alleging racism. They could easily sue for incitation to racial or religious hatred.

Tom had responded that there was no hatred or racism against anyone, but especially not against those Moslem victims who were a motley mix of folk contaminated by the God Virus. Some were black, some white, some yellow. With a deadpan tone, Tom had added that it was more a case of non-Moslems having a good case to sue, since the Koran claimed in one of its chapters that Moslems were superior to other people. More seriously, Tom had explained that the great majority of humankind were unfortunately infected without knowing it, and had urgent need of a literary vaccine against the epidemic of religion, especially Koranic belief. His novel merely recounted the historical facts about the creation of the Koran, the foundation of Islamic laws. It

also revealed the true face of Mohammed and the empire he bequeathed, together with the bloodthirsty methods that this man who became an emperor after his death had used to reduce men to submission.

To avoid mentioning the massacres Mohammed perpetrated would be much the same as forbidding history from speaking of the death toll arising from Bonaparte's campaigns, for fear of shocking the French, who base their laws on the Napoleonic Code, as others do on the Koran. Keeping quiet about the Napoleon's wars in case the French sued for incitation to racial hatred against their beloved homeland would be ridiculous.

However ludicrous it was, it was still the ultimate weapon of those who did not want the truth about Islam to come out into the light of day. There was a need to stand up against this crowd of crazies, not to be cowed by them.

"You seem to be daydreaming," Charlie said. "What're you thinking about?"

Tom turned to face his companion, the top of whose head was completely shaven. Thanks to that his emerald-green eyes seemed all the more striking in the jewel-case of his head.

"I'm thinking about all those false Moslems in the Kabul market who Allah punished by our hand. I'm dreaming that his wrath will soon be unleashed on worse criminals."

"Like who?" Charlie asked.

Tom paused for a heartbeat before answering, "Like the American criminals."

Before putting his napkin down on the table, Charlie quickly wiped his mouth and short beard.

"Don't worry yourself about the Americans, the Great Satan will pay for his crimes. The day after tomorrow, the ire of Allah will burst forth!"

Tom's eyebrows wrinkled in a frown.

"In two days' time? This Friday? That would be Friday thirteenth."

Charlie agreed.

"Yes, this Friday thirteenth. The world will never again forget that date."

In a few sentences, Charlie described the coming attack.

Not allowing anything to appear in his expression, Tom was nonetheless thunderstruck by the extent of Charlie's plan. He was going to set loose a planetary cataclysm that even the most inventive scriptwriters in Hollywood would have been hard put to it to imagine. Tens of thousands of people were destined to die, and not all of them in the United States.

"But that's not all," Charlie went on. "If Allah permits, my hope is that will trigger a third world war after the day is over, to exterminate all the unbelievers of the Earth."

The entrance door opened suddenly and Jawad came into the luxurious hotel suite. Dressed all in white, his head completely shaven, the newcomer shut the door after him and came to sit at the table next to Charlie.

Readjusting his pilgrim garb, Tom took advantage of this arrival to stand up.

"I need to pay a call," he excused himself. "I think the dessert was a little too rich for my stomach."

He headed off to the restrooms, returning five minutes later.

Once Tom had taken his seat again, Jawad started staring at him in silence. Under his red-framed eyeglasses with their round tinted lenses, his small dark eyes were not clearly visible to Tom. Worried, he wondered whether the man that was sitting opposite him had any inkling of what he had just done in secret during his visit to the bathroom.

"Do you know this man?" Jawad finally asked in an inquisitorial tone.

He pulled out his cell phone and brought up on the screen an identity photograph from a passport.

Tom immediately recognized the person in question. What should he do? Lie? However, with Jawad it was best not to tempt fate.

"Yes, that's Patrick. His a college professor who's a bit of a looney tune. He phoned me when I was in France to tell me that the Prophet never really existed."

Charlie burst out laughing.

“He’s completely crazy! That kind of atheist must be so mad with rage to see us destined for Paradise and him to Hell that he’ll spread around any kind of nonsense!”

Jawad agreed.

“Yes, and when he was interrogated he said once again that Mohammed is a myth!”

“Has he been arrested?” Tom asked. “Where did that happen?”

“In Medina. During the night he tried to sneak into the tomb of the Prophet, *salla Allah ‘alayhi wa salam*. He had a faked certificate of conversion to Islam.”

Tom nodded gravely.

In Medina and in Mecca, only Moslems were allowed. To go there, you had to establish your credentials. Mosques issued certificates of inoculation with the Islamic God Virus that had to be shown by foreigners. Those who had Arab names were excused, as they were supposed to have been appropriately contaminated as soon as they were born.

So, in this holy land, in God’s asylum, only the sick were admitted, and no healthy doctor was allowed. It was as if these demented patients were afraid of such a presence among them, as if they were subconsciously frightened of a doctor diagnosing their craziness.

“This Patrick has been handed over to the secret police,” Jawad went on. “He’ll be beheaded for the crime he’s committed against Allah and His Prophet, *salla Allah ‘alayhi wa salam*. But because the United Nations and unbeliever so-called humanitarian associations often put pressure on the authorities of the land, the sentence will not be carried out in the full light of day. Nonetheless, Allah will see that his commandment is respected in the heart of his kingdom and the criminal’s disappearance will go unnoticed.”

“How do you know all this?” Tom queried.

“I have a very good friend who works for the secret police. He was the one who called me to ask who Thomas Anderson is. Just imagine, this Patrick called you moments before he was arrested. My friend checked out the phone, and found your name

in the contacts list. He also discovered you were in the database of arrivals at the airport. He saw that I'd been in the same private jet as you. That's how I know all this."

Jawad leaned forward.

"What I want to know in return is why that unbeliever called you. We must find out why. You're going to interrogate him, because we must discover if he knows anything about us."

"And then?" Tom asked.

"Then ..."

Jawad slowly moved the side of his hand across his neck.

"You'll have the privilege of cutting off his head!"

His look vacant, Tom nodded in silence.

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WW3.

That was the inscription that Tom had written in print characters.

Alan could not take his single eye off those three letters that appeared on the screen of the smartphone he held in his hand.

The Third World War.

The Mossad agent asked himself once again whether Charlie was really able to trigger such a conflict. Once again he reached the same conclusion: Charlie was perfectly capable of carrying out his threat, as long as he had the technical means available.

If only the Americans had not lied by omission, if only they had revealed the real job Charlie had had in the Air Force, Alan could long since have sorted out the problem of this traitor with a bullet through his head.

It was now too late to liquidate Charlie, because there had been time for his knowledge to be passed on to someone else, or even programmed. The sole alternative open to him was to let Tom get on with his mission, so that he could communicate the exact position of the operations room that Charlie would orchestrate his offensive from. Then a well-placed American

missile would put an abrupt halt to the projects of Sultan and his hitmen, the third world war would not happen and the Friday thirteenth attacks would be dead before they were born.

Alan put down his phone beside him.

He took a metal box out of the inside pocket of his dark suit coat and extracted a cheroot, which he lit. Under the beams of the halogen bulb of a floor lamp, the swirls of smoke rose above the sofa where the tall figure of the man was sitting. He stretched his legs out onto the small mahogany pedestal table, and contemplated one of the old master paintings hanging on the cream-colored wall.

However, even the sight of his favorite mascot of a painting was not enough to calm the anger that boiled in him.

Using a cell phone he had filched from one of the hotel staffers, Tom had been able to send texts to Alan. He had messaged him with the places planned for the attacks on Friday thirteenth, and Israel was not to be spared, unfortunately. Nonetheless, even being aware of the date, and knowing the means to be used and exact place where the attack would fall in Jerusalem, Alan could do nothing to stop the devastating fury that would lash down on his holy city, not any more than he could prevent the atrocities that were going to be unleashed on other cities.

He was completely powerless, and that situation was making him crazy with rage.

From this point, as Alan had just told Tom, it was on Tom's shoulders that the fate of the free world rested. Alan could not even communicate with him. On security grounds, he had ordered his undercover agent to flush the cell phone down the pan in the restroom.

Alan gave a sigh of exasperation.

People trotted out tales of supposed Jewish plots to dominate the world. However, no-one ever mentioned the very real plot of the salamalaikums to take over the whole Earth by trickery or by lies, just like their "prophet" who over and again had resorted to deception and ruses to spread his filthy cult.

In his novel *The Sage of Mecca*, Tom had given a perfect depiction of those forces of darkness that worked hypocritically in

the full light of day to spread around lies that were maliciously disguised with half-truths. He had quoted the instance of those media imams who appear on the television and who hook the credulous by giving the impression that Islam is a very hospitable religion.

For this purpose, these imams, or more exactly these fifth columnists in the media, distorted a Koranic verse.

*And if anyone of the idolaters seeketh thy protection, then protect him .*

This extract from the chapter “Repentance” is, naturally, cut off in full flow. The rest of the verse goes on to make it clear that the protection in question is exclusively for the purpose of conversion to Islam, so that the protected may hear the word of Allah and escape from their ignorance.

Even though he was more than ready to use force in imposing his religion, Mohammed had always had an interest in getting the maximum possible number of people to convert of their own free will. Volunteer prisoners would not try to open the cage in which their brains had chosen to house them. Free spirits, on the other hand, posed a risk of flying off at the slightest chance, as soon as the saber was not at their throats.

To avoid just that sort of defection, Mohammed had ordered the execution of all those who ceased to believe in his lying children’s stories, falser than Santa Claus. Without this death penalty for apostasy, no civilized country would ever have heard tell of Islam, because that demented religion would have faded away, being replaced by Christianity.

Sadly for humankind, Islam was a sect that had survived thanks to the capital punishment enshrined in its commandments. It continued to maintain itself by this law in totalitarian States.

Throughout the world, if any salamalaikums lost their faith on finding out about the lies that filled the Koran and the true personality of their guru, they kept this fact very quiet, for fear of that death sentence, or of the family scandal and disgrace it would bring. The result was that the submissive and obedient masses were not aware of those legions of renegades within their own community, and they lived under the delusion that all the faithful

believed without any problems, this reinforcing in them the certainty they were on the true path.

Alan angrily stubbed out his cheroot in an ashtray that lay on the small mahogany table. He picked up his telephone once again from where it lay beside him.

Any salamalaikums who indulged in thinking were salamalaikums who were fated to die. Either they became apostates and were murdered by their own people, or they turned into kamikazes with the hope of reaching the Seventh Heaven. In this second case, it was Alan's job to send them off to the next world before they could perpetrate their attacks.

Alan had a whole slew of people like that who he was just itching to pulverize with a missile.

With his thumb he punched a number into his telephone.

"This is Ali," he said in Arabic. "Prepare the plane. We'll take off in an hour."

He ended the call.

Now all he had to do was to wait patiently for the coordinates of the operations room from where Charlie would command his attacks.

As only fate could have made it happen, the destiny of humanity was going to hang by a thread.

And that thread was called Thomas Anderson.

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The tires of the dark Mercedes squealed on the cement floor of the underground parking.

Under the light of white fluorescents, the sedan with tinted windows went down to the very lowest level. It finally parked alongside the only two other vehicles present.

The doors opened, and the driver and his front-seat passenger climbed out. With fierce eyes and severe mustaches, looking military despite their dark suits, the two Saudis mechanically glanced around the empty floor, as if to make sure that no stranger's eye was looking at them.

The driver gave a signal with his hand and Tom alighted from the Mercedes in his turn. Wearing a pilgrim's white tunic, he began to follow the two government agents who escorted him to a gray metal door, situated a score of paces away from the cars. With his powerful fist, the driver knocked on the door, which opened a crack for an instant, then gaped wide.

Perfect clones of the first escort, two other men in black took their place. They led Tom along an interminable corridor, narrow and badly lit, all along which ran piping and electrical cabling, all covered in dust.

The threesome arrived in front of a battered metal door painted green. As if it was automatic, it seemed to open by itself.

The escort remained in the corridor, while Tom went on into a large, unfurnished room, brightly lit. The door closed after him. He found himself in the presence of five other agents with fierce faces, three of them armed with assault rifles.

"Here's the executioner at last!" a voice exclaimed in English, in a facetious tone.

Tom turned around.

Jawad was there, in front of the ramshackle green door. The broad smile on his lips revealed his rotten teeth. He was covered in blood. His white tunic was splattered with it, and his face and his eyeglasses with their tinted lenses were speckled with red blobs.

However, it was not his own blood.

"I thought it best to get things going before you arrived," chuckled Jawad. "I've tried to get him to talk, but the old man has said nothing of interest, apart from a few lies about the Prophet, *salla Allah 'alayhi wa salam.*"

Jawad lifted his bloodstained hand and pointed with his forefinger to the wall opposite, in which there was a rusty door.

"He's back of that door. It's your inning now. He knows you, so play the good cop with him. A little kindness and attention, and he'll sing like a canary. You know what you have to do after that. Get a move on, though. The plane's waiting for us."

One of the men from the secret police slid back the bolt. Tom went into the room beyond. It measured some twenty-five

feet by fifteen, and was lit by glaring fluorescent tubes. The rusty door clanged shut.

Patrick was there, stripped naked, and hanging in the air. He was dangling from a rope tied to a ringbolt set in the ceiling, with his wrists tied above his head, which was slumped unconscious onto his chest. For a moment, Tom almost did not recognize the sixty-year-old, so covered was his body with blood. His thumbs had been cut right off with the aid of small garden shears, and the blood had run down his arms, chest and legs, leaving streaks as if painted by a macabre artist's brush. Jawad seemed to have amused himself by smearing paint all over Patrick's wrinkled face with his hand. Patrick's head with its bald patch and the long white hair around it were colored with his lifeblood's lethal tint. Dangling eight or ten inches above the cement floor, his feet had had their nails torn out, and red drops were still dripping into a crimson pool.

To attempt to avoid looking at this horrible sight, Tom turned to his glance to the left, where it alighted on a table pushed up against the gray wall. A range of instruments that had been used in the torture lay there, tools for cutting, slicing and beating. However, his disgusted eyes also moved away from that table. In the center of it, the two thumbs and the nails that had been torn off had been neatly lined up.

Tom closed his eyes briefly.

He had to act as quickly as possible to end the sufferings of his friend.

If Jawad found fault with that, Tom would lie to him, saying that Patrick had insulted Mohammed. Naturally, he had not been able to hold back his anger, so he had dealt him a deadly blow.

Disregarding as best he could the hacked off digits, Tom went up to the table and selected a long kitchen knife. He would have preferred a pistol. A bullet in the head, and Patrick would have felt nothing before going into an everlasting sleep. With a knife, more adroitness was needed. It had to be thrust upward quickly into the nape of the neck so as to destroy the brain stem and cerebellum in an instant. Luckily, Patrick was unconscious and would not move.

“Thomas, is that you?” The words were in French, the voice barely audible.

Knife in hand, Tom turned and faced the frail hanging body.

From the face smeared in blood, Patrick’s big blue eyes shone out with an air of astonishment.

For several seconds, Tom remained frozen, not knowing what to say or to do.

“Untie me,” Patrick begged. “Untie me.”

The supplicating voice stirred Tom’s conscience back into action. He could not leave his friend to suffer like a martyr. He walked toward him, clasped his left hand around the battered chest and cut the rope.

Dropping the knife on the floor, Tom carried the elderly man’s frail body to the table. A wooden chair was pushed under it. Tom pushed it around toward him with his foot, and Patrick collapsed onto it, leaning his right arm on the edge of the table.

The noose that had been constricting his tied wrists slid off, and the blood started flowing again from the amputation sites. Tom picked the knife and piece of rope back up, and cut two short sections. He kneeled and with expert moves he put tourniquets on both of Patrick’s forearms. Then he improvised bandages by tearing off the sleeves of his white tunic and swathed the bloodied hands.

“Thank you,” Patrick murmured grimacing with pain. “Thank you for coming to save me.”

Not knowing what response to give, Tom stood up, smiling sadly.

“That other one interrogated me about you,” Patrick continued in a hoarse but slightly more vigorous voice, but I told him absolutely nothing!”

Tom nodded, laying a friendly hand on the bare shoulder.

“It’ll be okay now,” he said. “It’ll be okay, everything’s over.”

Patrick looked up at Tom and the long locks of hair sticky with blood swung around the bald patch as he shook his head.

“No, wait! There’s something you must know before we get out of here.”

Patrick paused to select the right words.

“I tried to call and tell you. I’ve seen it, I’ve seen it with my own eyes.”

“What did you see?” Tom asked softly.

“Nothing,” he chuckled. “I didn’t see anything, not anything at all.”

Tom wondered whether the oldster had lost his mind because of the torture he had undergone, or if he was in a daze, his brain anesthetized by the adrenalin his organism had produced. Seeing this query on Tom’s face, Patrick shook his head again.

“No,” he said with a grimace, “I haven’t gone out of my head. Let me just explain everything from the start. If I happen to die as we try to escape, there has to be at least one person who knows the truth and can pass it on. It’s essential. Listen, it won’t take more than ten minutes at most. Then, we can go, okay?”

Tom turned his eyes away, not daring to meet the sixty-year-old’s gaze. He was disgusted with himself for what he would have to do next. He hated himself for leaving Patrick his false hopes of safety.

Tom went silently to collect another chair that was set against the opposite wall. He brought it across and sat facing his friend. Tom suddenly had the strange sensation that he was closeted with the Devil in person. Patrick’s head and body were dyed with his own blood, and gave him the air of a vile red demon, straight out of a horror film.

Except that in this place, for Tom, the only real foul Devil was himself.

“As I told you the last time I phoned, I started having doubts about the historical reality of Mohammed as I researched the inconsistencies in his life story. As you well know, any lie, however perfect it may be, is always betrayed by tiny imperfect details. The first little detail that caught my attention is the name “Mohammed” itself, a name that no-one had ever used in the region before he came along. It’s a word that means “the glorified one” or perhaps “the beloved one”. It’s not really a name, more of

a title, and it's strangely similar to the way that the Christian God speaks of Jesus in the Bible."

Patrick seemed to be gathering his memories together.

"That made me ask myself a string of questions and they have never stopped bothering my mind. How was it possible for Mohammed to have been illiterate when all the people around him knew how to read and write? Another thing, how can a man foretell the future? It's not possible, and yet Mohammed did it. When he was in Mecca, before the Hegira in 622, in his chapter called "Byzantium", he predicted that the Eastern Roman Empire would be victorious some years later in 629, and that they would retake Jerusalem which they had lost to the Persians in 614. Surprising, don't you think?"

Patrick's bloodstained eyebrows wiggled.

"What also surprised me when I took a closer look is that Mohammed ought to have been the father of dozens and dozens of children, especially with his crowd of wives and his harem of sex slaves. But no, no descendants. What is also strange, is that the six children he is supposed to have had with Khadijah all died before he did, and his last surviving daughter likewise passed away in the year of his decease. A very odd coincidence. Not one child, legitimate or illegitimate, to carry on the father's work."

Tom nodded and signaled to Patrick to continue.

"I have no time to list all of the inconsistencies in the life of Mohammed, but I must tell you that I found dozens and dozens. It's the oddity of his marriage to Aisha which was the last pointer that opened my eyes completely, a marriage consummated when she was just nine years old! Doesn't that seem weird to you? It did to me, and it was this minor item, this tiny piece of thread that wasn't neatly tucked into the reel of historical lies that made me realize that history has been playing tricks from the very start."

As if to pass on a secret, Patrick leaned slightly forward.

"And now, this is how the real history began. As always with monotheistic religions, the birthplace is Jerusalem. In 614, the Persians conquered the Holy City which at that time was in the hands of the Christians of the Eastern Roman Empire. During that conquest, the Persians were helped by Jewish troops, but also by an Arab tribe, the Quraysh. After the euphoria of victory, there

was a great disappointment for that Arab tribe, because it was to the Jews that the Persians handed over the task of governing Palestine and the Holy City. The Jews finally drove the Quraysh tribe out of Palestine. The Arabs from the coalition with the Persians had to go off to Yathrib and settle there. Among the Arabs who had taken part in the storming of Jerusalem, there was Abu Bakr. He grasped the reason why control over Jerusalem had not been entrusted to his people. He understood why it had not been one of his folk crowned in Jerusalem, why the Persians excluded them from power and why they preferred to put the Jews at the helm. They were not the chosen people, the folk selected by God as the Jews had been. It was certain that in the eyes of the docile crowds and of the manipulative Persians Jerusalem should go to those who had a legitimate title deed, the Torah, a document proving their rights to claim the Holy City, a divine certificate validated by God through the intermediary of a Messenger.”

Enthused by his account, Patrick was in a trance, no longer feeling the pain of his hacked-off thumbs.

“Above all, Abu Bakr grasped that what his people needed was a prophet who was one of their own. With a “Messenger of God” at his side, Abu Bakr could legitimately conquer, not just Jerusalem, but also to quench his thirst to change the map of the world. He had in mind that he could create an empire like the powerful Romans. Jews and Christians spoke of an Almighty God, and the Arabs’ deity could not be one whit less. Abu Bakr decided that the God of the Arabs would be the God in the Bible. He had information gathered about this Judeo-Christian God and ordered his scribes and poets to compose the recitations for the Koran in accordance with the needs of the moment. When everything was ready, a new prophet was able to emerge from the desert. That is how the figure of Mohammed was born, straight out of Abu Bakr’s imagination. It was certainly under the influence of a Christian sect in the region that he was named “Mohammed”, because this name Mohammed is in fact no more than a cut and paste of what is in the Bible. Initially, he was more of a copy of Moses than anything else, with an eye to enticing the Jews and bringing them over to his side. He was also a good and merciful creature so as to attract the Christians. However, Abu Bakr was just a mercenary

thirsty for power and money, and a bandit is always a bandit. That's why there's mafia doublespeak in the Koran, with extortion of funds under the pretext of charity. Then there was a change in the situation. The scribes and poets working for Abu Bakr were not familiar with the correct Christian and Jewish texts, so they made mistakes relating to both Old and New Testament, the result being rejection. It didn't matter much, as Abu Bakr decided to go over to using force, the force of the sword, and his Mohammed became a potential killer. Abu Bakr also decided to make the Arab nation into the new chosen people to the detriment of the Jews, so he imposed veneration for Abraham, rather than for Moses."

Tom raised his hand to interrupt the flow of his friend's account.

"How could believers follow the orders of a prophet they had never seen?"

Patrick's red face shone under the fluorescent lights.

"Isn't that just what happens today with Moslems? They've never seen Mohammed and yet they blindly follow his orders! At the time, it was enough to have a handful of actors, professional story-tellers who recited the verses supposedly dictated to them by Mohammed a few hours before and that was that. Besides, I'm sure Abu Bakr must have hired an actor to play the part of Mohammed to put on a show. He probably had his face covered with a veil and that would have been enough in the early days. Later, no-one was authorized to see him any more, other than his close companions. Only those who are mafia members get to see the face of the godfather. Everyone speaks about him, no-one sees him. He's like an octopus whose tentacles reach out everywhere, having the power of life and death over everyone. Yet no-one really knows his identity. It was the same for the real godfather of Medina. Abu Bakr played ducks and drakes with history."

Tom nodded and Patrick continued his explanations.

"While Mohammed's mythical life was a copy of Moses', historically, his biography was a clone of Abu Bakr's. All the murders and all the battles are what Abu Bakr did. He was the one who dominated hearts and minds by ruse, saber and terror. He invented the status of martyr along with promises of spoils and

slaves, and the Islamic steamroller he created crushed everything it found in its way. He was the, as well, who imposed veils on women to keep them safe from rape by men, that being the only method he could find to hold back the ardor of the wild beasts that he let loose into the world. He forbade alcohol so that none of his men would dare defy his authority in public, and above all to prevent tongues being loosened by drunkenness. The secret of the myth of Mohammed had to be kept quiet by everyone. Abu Bakr had a panicky dread that his hoax might fall apart, and a paranoid worry that his imposture would be found out, and these fears are reflected in many verses. So, as soon as he had finished converting the Arabs to his Islamic cult, he rapidly killed off Mohammed, so that the secret of this great lie would be definitively buried with him in his tomb.”

His eyes shining, Patrick paused briefly before continuing with his account.

“In 632, Abu Bakr killed off the figure of Mohammed without any descendants. Of course, according to the legend, during his lifetime Mohammed had never ceased showering praise on Abu Bakr, who was declared to be his worthy and legitimate successor. Abu Bakr became the “Caliph”, the one and only “lieutenant of the Messenger of God”. That led to rebellion on the part of several Arab tribes whose leaders were fully in the know about the facts of the myth of Mohammed. These leaders were none too pleased at finding the Caliphate being foisted on them as a done deal, and especially at having to hand over one-fifth of the spoils of war to Abu Bakr. Up till then, all the league of bandits had been able to enjoy their plunder without paying the share that in theory fell to Mohammed. After all, you can’t give a share to someone who doesn’t exist. However, Abu Bakr had worked patiently to prepare his future and produced a verse that stipulated one-fifth of any loot went to the Prophet. Since Abu Bakr was his legitimate heir and was very much alive, he claimed this lion’s share, and probably also the share of the spoils from the previous decade that should by rights have gone to the “Messenger of God” or now to his “lieutenant”.

Patrick ran his tongue over his dry lips.

“Abu Bakr accused everyone who refused to pay him his share of being apostates and he massacred them in a total bloodbath. The Arab leaders tried to put a spoke in Abu Bakr’s wheel, attempting to explain that the myth of Mohammed was a fraud, but no-one believed them. So many legends had been told about Mohammed that everyone believed they had seen him someplace. There was always someone willing to claim that they had met him personally in Yathrib, on camel-back on a battlefield or in some oasis lost in the desert. These false memories became rooted in the minds of believers, and those who had never seen Mohammed were certainly the ones who defended his historical reality with the greatest conviction. They were convinced that they knew him as intimately as if he was a close relative. You know all this very well, Thomas, the trick of creating that sort of false memory. Remember, it was you who explained to me how it works.”

Tom agreed with a small nod.

The previous year, they had had a long discussion about the various manipulation techniques for deliberately implanting in someone’s memory the recollection of events that had never actually happened. Tom had told him about two experiments on the topic carried out at a university where he had been able to be present and watch what went on.

The first involved borrowing photos taken out of the family albums of the parents of several different students. The original image had been photo-shopped to create a new photograph. The child in the picture was now shown on board of a hot-air balloon. The students were then asked to think back over their childhood and explain the pictures in the album they were presented with. When they saw the faked photos, some of them suddenly remembered the trip in the balloon, even though it had never taken place. The strangest thing was that they often gave all sorts of details about it.

This “instant” experiment recorded that about one-quarter of the students tested fell into the trap. When it was a matter of letting the imagination roam over a longer period, no-one seemed safe from long-term false memories.

Tom had been able to confirm this by participating as an accomplice in another experiment. Students had been asked to attend a cinema session so that they could write reviews of several short films. A couple of months later, they had been invited to a reception. On that occasion, Tom had told them a made-up story about what supposedly had happened during a break between films. He got them to believe that his daughter Lucy had been there with him that day, and had spilt coffee on his pants. To root these lies in their memories, Tom had sent the students a photomontage during the summer, where young Lucy could be seen among them in the vestibule of the movie theater. In the fall, the students had been invited to talk about the short films, and any events or people present when they had watched them. As incredible as it may seem, almost every single student was convinced they had seen Lucy. Although some of them did not particularly recall the incident of the spilled coffee, they had built up very precise phantom recollections of the young girl, down details of what Lucy had done that day, and even descriptions of her personality.

When Tom had told them that they had been the victims of a hoax, and that there was no such person as Lucy, they had not known what to believe, or how to separate out what was truth and what was fiction. They had the distinct impression that their memories of Lucy were real. In vain Tom told them that it was all false, but they were not convinced by it, because they still had the image of the little girl engraved in their heads.

The fact was that recollections of imaginary events were often clearer and more complete than those of what really happened. To the even greater delight of manipulators, it was impossible to distinguish a true memory from a false. No-one was safe from false recollections, and our memories are sure to be full of them.

“Abu Bakr was finally the only captain on the ship,” Patrick went on, his voice hoarse. “He thought he was invulnerable, and the absolute master. He had no inkling that among his warriors three in particular were coveting his position, a trio of bandits wanted to become Caliph in place of the Caliph. This threesome put the same simple strategy into operation so as to

take over the godfather's job: assassination. Omar was a close henchman of Abu Bakr's. Officially, he waited patiently for Abu Bakr to die before succeeding to his position. Reading between the lines, I'm convinced that he poisoned him, with the cause of his death being passed off as an illness. Omar was a top-flight manipulator, and he manipulated Abu Bakr into designating him as the new Caliph on his death. As soon as Omar came to power, he invented a tale of a marriage between his daughter and Mohammed. That made him into the Prophet's father-in-law, bolstering his legitimacy as the second "lieutenant of the Messenger of God". If Abu Bakr had been Mohammed's favorite, and in addition the first man, outside the fictional family of Mohammed, to accept Islam, Omar had to go one better. He invented the fable that he was the very first man to make a public announcement of his conversion to Islam! All he had to do was click his fingers, and reciters would go around telling any lies he required, or even would insert them into a chapter. In those days the Koran was transmitted orally by master reciters, and an extra verse or two could be chanted as they saw fit, since nothing was fixed. All the various Caliphs need to say was that it was a former verse that had been lost, but rediscovered thanks to the grace of Allah and the memory of one of Mohammed's companions. Some verses had been written down by Moslems, and Omar wanted to get them all into his hands so as to be able to produce a cleaned-up version that said what he wanted it to. Omar was a crafty type and planned his sting well, having all these bits of writing collected up without exception while Abu Bakr was still alive. He found an excuse for doing this in the death of three hundred master reciters during a battle. Thereupon, he gathered up all the Koranic writings in order not to lose the so-called word of God. That allowed him to destroy some pieces that he did not like, forbidding their recitation under the penalties for blasphemy. He also was able to invent and spread around verses that worked in his personal interests, like those on divorce or inheritances. It must surely have been him who produced the chapter called "Byzantium" to impress the inhabitants of Jerusalem in the year 637, when the city was finally taken by the Moslems. Omar produced that prophecy after the event so as to make people believe in the "supernatural" powers of the Prophet of Islam, a prophet able to read the future!"

Patrick sighed.

“You’re well aware, Thomas, that the winners always rewrite history, including what history is to be found in the Koran. This is what Othman, the third Caliph, did. He had Omar assassinated by a Persian, and was then able to take over power calmly. He was able to remove verses that upset him, erasing from people’s memories certain verses invented by his two predecessors. He was the greatest falsifier of the Koran. He didn’t just revise and correct it, composing it from whatever pieces he liked, but he also made up new verses to serve his own ends. For example, as he needed legitimacy, he presented himself as a two-fold son-in-law of Mohammed. He invented the chapter “Palm Fibers” about Abu Lahab which is like a fly in the soup of the Koran, a chapter of total incoherence and irrelevance that comes almost at the end of the Koran. Othman added that layer of lies, making up a fable about an Uncle Abu Lahab who opposed his nephew Mohammed. You know the “official” story: this chapter was a consequence of the divorces of two imaginary daughters of the Prophet who supposedly had been married to the sons of that uncle, so that Othman could boast of having married both of them later, even if they were claimed to have died a good while before. If Othman had been able to claim marriage with all the daughters Mohammed is said to have had, he’d have done so without hesitation.”

Patrick grinned before going on.

“That’s one of the numerous inconsistencies you find in the Koran, but in fact are just the visible part of the iceberg hiding the myth of Mohammed. Another thing is that Othman did away with all the Koranic scriptures he had in his possession. How could anyone destroy such precious originals? If the Koran is true, if it is the word of God, how could anyone dare to obliterate even the slightest of God’s sayings that came from the days of Mohammed? They surely would have been piously and carefully preserved. That destruction is the proof of Othman’s fraud, but Moslems see in it just fire, the fire of Hell, you might say!”

He began to laugh all alone.

“Othman finally realized that spoken words fly away, but written words remain. That’s why he decided to set the Koran

down on paper, but also why he made a bonfire of all the old scriptures he possessed, because these writings might contradict his new written Koran. To cover up as best he could all the inconsistencies between Koranic verses and hide the different layers in which the myth had been built up, he mixed all the verses together. That led to a work that was deliberately confusing, without any logical beginning or end, a book which in fact has neither head nor tail to it. Later on, Ali became the fourth Caliph. He worked in secret to get Othman assassinated, and once he was in power he claimed to be the cousin and son-in-law of Mohammed. He was also able to put his own mark on the written Koran in accordance with his own personal interests. In fact, the Koran was never a definitive work, being the plaything of four Caliphs over decades. It wasn't "standardized" until much later. When I was doing my research, it was often hard for me to assemble the different pieces in the jigsaw puzzle of the myth, and to work out exactly what each of those four criminals had done in the building up of the lies of the Koran."

Patrick fell silent, as if lost in his thoughts.

"Where was Aisha in all this?" Tom finally asked. "Was she an invention of one of those Caliphs? A myth?"

"No, not at all!" Patrick exclaimed. "Aisha is just as real as you or me! She was the daughter of the first Caliph, Abu Bakr. When he died, she became Omar's courtesan. She wanted to keep her rank as an Arab princess, who'd been her father's favorite. She made up a story to paint herself in rosy colors, saying she had been Mohammed's wife in his days in Mecca. She must have realized too late that before the Hegira she was still only a child. That didn't matter much, as what had been said was said, so she pressed on with her lies by claiming to have been married at the age of six. Omar let her say this, because it added a point to the myth of Mohammed. Omar even succumbed to the delights and whims of Aisha by making up a verse that forbade marriage with Mohammed's former wives. That allowed Aisha to keep her independence from the Caliph. Other influential women must have played a similar trick, so Mohammed ended up supposedly married to a dozen women! Because of Aisha, Omar stuck his finger into the works of the lie machine, and to make sure the myth device did

not seize up later on, in the end he had to put a rule into the Koran granting Mohammed special rights about the number of wives he could have.”

Patrick lowered his head and wiggled his stiff, battered feet.

“I searched for proof about this myth,” he said, raising his head, “and I finally realized that the proof I needed had been made into a sacred monument, a proof where millions of Moslems come every year to prostrate themselves and worship a phantom.”

At last grasping the nature of the proof his friend had spoken to him about, Tom interrupted him.

“So, you tried to get into Mohammed’s tomb, in order to find evidence supporting what you claim. But you were arrested before you could enter it.”

“No, no, you’re mistaken! When I was arrested, I wasn’t trying to get into Mohammed’s tomb, I was trying to get out. You see what I mean?”

“You went into Mohammed’s tomb?” Tom asked in surprise.

“Yes, and what I saw, I saw with my own eyes: that tomb is empty!”

“Empty?” Tom asked, his gaze vacant.

“Yes, it’s empty!” Patrick repeated. “Empty. You know what that means?”

Tom had the feeling he had been hit by a thunderbolt.

Empty, Mohammed’s tomb was empty. He suddenly felt like screaming, shouting out his anger at himself for being so gullible for so long, letting himself be lulled by false beliefs for such a time. The castle of his convictions was no more than a fragile house of cards that a human’s breath had blown far away. He had listened to Patrick’s account without really wanting to believe it. However, he now had to accept the truth: Mohammed had never existed. Because of that, Patrick’s life had become the most important of all. He had to be protected, extracted from this hornet’s nest, and taken safe and sound to the media where he could speak out and open the eyes of millions of Moslems. Patrick from now on was the one true key to the Koranic padlock, the future liberator of imprisoned minds, so his testimony was worth

more than Fort Knox. He could eradicate the Islamic God Virus, he was the antidote that had to be presented on television news, the vaccine for sick minds.

“Thomas, it’s time, we’d better be going.”

With a grimace, Patrick hauled himself up out of his chair.

Tom thoughtfully stood up too. He stared at his friend in silence, then pointed at the rusty door with his arm.

“Go and listen at the door,” he ordered. “There are armed men back of it. Tell me if you can hear anything.”

Patrick agreed and hobbled painfully across to press his ear against the door.

“I can’t hear a thing,” Patrick whispered after a few seconds. “By the way, how did you ...”

They were his last words.

Patrick slumped to the ground.

Tom watched the blood running out of his friend’s head. He was holding in his hand the hammer with which he had just shattered his skull, leaving Patrick dead on the spot.

For an instant, Tom closed his eyes so as not to see the red demon lying at his feet.

No, Patrick was no antidote against the Islamic God Virus. There was not, and never would be, any vaccine capable of curing Moslems. They would never accept the truth, never believe that Mohammed could be a myth. Their minds were irretrievably contaminated, and they would blame the Devil for having spirited away the body of their Prophet. Others would take the opposite line and proclaim that Allah had performed a miracle that explained the absence of a body in the tomb. Even if a time machine could show the world the true story, Moslems would cry out that it was the Devil’s work.

The Koran said that God put veils on the hearts of those who believe not lest they should understand the truth. In reality, that veil had long since fallen over the eyes of those who do believe, and no truth could remove it. The God Virus was too deeply rooted in them, so no cure was possible now.

Moreover, Tom had little doubt that, as soon as they learned of the intrusion, the authorities in Medina would quietly

put a skeleton into Mohammed's tomb. That would cover up the myth for ever.

Tom opened his eyes again and looked at Patrick's bloody body.

Even though his conscience was protesting, Tom had had no choice. Escape was impossible, Patrick and he could never have got out of the country alive. Why, they would not even have been able to make it out of the underground parking lot before being killed.

So why attempt the impossible?

Above all, Tom could not blow his cover and allow the planned attacks to take place. He could not let a third world war break out after the apocalyptic Friday thirteenth.

The fate of humankind depended on it.

Tom dropped the hammer and went to the table, where he picked up a machete.

When he knocked with his fist on the rusty door and it opened, Jawad was waiting for him. His face blossomed into a broad smile when he saw Patrick's decapitated head, which Tom was brandishing in his hand.

*"Allahu akbar,"* Tom said contentedly. *"Allahu akbar."*

His sight suddenly turned blurry and a strange sensation came over him.

A sensation he had seen all this before.



## **Third Commandment: Thou Shalt Remember Memento**

Two thousand years after Jesus is supposed to have been born, another tale came to life that is just as worrying and allows various complex interpretations. It is to be found in the movie “Memento”.

The first scene starts in an old abandoned house. Trusting only to a note scrawled on the back of a Polaroid photo that tells him to kill him, Leonard dispatches Teddy with a bullet through the brain. Yet he was the only person that Leonard might have been able to see as his friend, if only he had been capable of remembering him.

Why did he commit this murder? What was he doing in that house? Who is the man lying dead at his feet?

That is the sort of question that Leonard constantly asks himself every time he “comes round” into present time. The only immediate answers he finds to these queries are tattooed on different parts of his body. He must find the criminal who raped and killed his wife.

That is Leonard’s quest. He must revenge the death of his spouse.

Nevertheless, the hunt for this mysterious killer is made almost impossible by the fact that Leonard is suffering from a rare and incurable form of amnesia after an injury to his head. Although he can remember details of his past, and especially the tragic events surrounding his wife’s death, he is incapable

of recalling what he has just done in the previous quarter of an hour, where he is, where he is going and why. His short-term memory has been wiped out, and can no longer take in information or memories from the present. Everything is cyclically erased from his memory and Leonard restarts his life from zero. So, he “wakes up” at intervals in unknown places and among people who are total strangers, who think he is some sort of weird alien or who make fun of him.

So as never to lose sight of his objective, and to find his Holy Grail, Leonard has structured his life by means of record cards, notes, photos, written facts that he tattoos or gets tattooed on his body. This is what keeps him in touch with his mission, helps him retain information and follow a track, having some notion of space and time. To live, Leonard has no choice but to trust his mementos blindly, over and again choosing what he should remember or forget.

At the end of the film, Leonard finally “wakes up” in a house as he is killing a man that he thinks is the murderer of his wife. Teddy, who is a policeman, has given him the information and set up the fatal meeting. Nevertheless, Leonard has a doubt, a detail which does not fit and he asks Teddy for explanations. Teddy tells him the truth, since he knows that Leonard will have forgotten it anyway in just a few seconds. A year ago, Leonard had already found the real murderer of his wife and had taken revenge by killing him, but had forgotten everything. Since then, Teddy has been manipulating Leonard by giving him false information, pointing out new targets for him to do away with, criminals on the run that he wants to eliminate and that he passes off as the mysterious killer that Leonard is seeking. Leonard himself muddies the waters by holding false memories in a way that creates an insoluble puzzle, in such a way that he still has his one true reason for living. He wants to find and kill a murderer who is already dead.

Leonard cannot not accept this truth that in the end he will forget. To put a halt to this endless loop, he writes down a note to be tattooed, the details of Teddy’s license plate, but indicating that the car’s owner is his wife’s murderer. Leonard ends by shooting Teddy, thinking he has achieved his

ultimate Holy Grail and can finally live in peace. Nevertheless, it seems he may want to let himself forget this ending. He may still wish to continue the chase for an imaginary man so as to fill up the emptiness of his life which has no sense because of his memory handicap. He may refuse to acknowledge reality so as to start again with another puzzle and pursue a revenge that is never sated and always erased.

For Leonard, the end is of little importance, only the quest really motivates him.

Remember that from fiction to fact there is just a step, and that some believers are potential Leonards, on a quest for the Holy Grail of Paradise. To get there, they put blind trust in their sacred verses ordering them to kill designated guilty parties. They forget to remember the falsification they are the victims of, and they keep on believing in written legends that they take for undeniable facts.

Remember that their Holy Grail of Paradise is not as strong a motivation for them as their quest, or conquest. Their triumph would be to impose their false memories on all humankind.

Remember that, just as Leonard tattooed false facts on his skin, the Koran has stamped falsehoods into memories. It has turned a part of humankind into amnesiacs, bereft of true history, and causing them to suffer the Memento syndrome. They invent a present that they cling to fervently, forgetful or unaware of the original mystification concocted in the past so as to create that future.

Remember.

*Extract from the novel "The Sage of Mecca" by Thomas Anderson.*



## 26

# Victory

Mohammed was asleep.

To be more exact, he was half-way between sleeping and waking. A voice in the distance that he recognized as his own was telling him to wake up. It was muttering to him that all this story was untrue and had no real existence. It was declaring to him that this reality was unreal, that he was the plaything of a being that toyed with him without his noticing, that someone, so near but so far, was writing the words that brought him to life and enlivened his truncated reality, which was in fact unreal. The voice was a constant echo in the background, telling him “Open your eyes, remember, open your eyes.”

Mohammed opened his eyes.

In the soft light of a new day filtering through the canvas of his tent, he took a few seconds to work out where he really was. His mouth was pasty as he propped himself up on his elbows.

*What a strange dream.*

With the slowness of an elderly man the small of whose back was painful, he sat down cross-legged, reflecting on the memorable day that was about to start. High dignitaries from Mecca were going to come and sign a peace treaty with him.

This triumph was God’s work.

Through Gabriel, the Almighty had sent a vision to Mohammed as he dreamed. The image was of the Prophet entering Mecca without meeting any resistance. The angel of

revelation had then ordered him to send Othman as ambassador to the Meccans so as to sign an agreement putting an end to the war.

Of course, this peace proposal was nothing but a ruse. His aim was to deceive Satan and win final victory over the enemies of God, but to every thing there is a season. He first had to concede a fake truce to the Meccans who would foolishly accept it. They had been in trouble since their defeat in the battle of the trench, with the various groups in their coalition progressively abandoning them and joining the Submitters. This had left them in an almost untenable military position, and the rich merchants of the city would be very happy to see the attacks on their caravans come to an end.

So Othman, the good Jinn, had headed off to Mecca to undertake secret discussions. He had been able to ward off the spells of the evil Jinns living in the town and had obtained the promise of a peace deal. However, the Meccan leaders insisted that the Prophet himself come to ratify the document at the gates of Mecca.

Was it a trap? No-one knew. Out of prudence, so as to avoid any unpleasant surprises, it had been decided that the pretext of carrying out a pilgrimage would be used to explain away the presence of a large force. With swords hidden under their pilgrim robes, and just a few visible in their sheaths, Submitters and Ansar Helpers had humbly set off with animals for sacrificing and other offerings, playing their role as innocent worshipers to the hilt. Hoping to impress by force of numbers, Mohammed had invited the Arab tribes that were his new allies to accompany him. Not knowing about the negotiations under way that were being kept secret, they had refused this offer, seeing no interest in taking part in a pious journey that gave no chance of plunder.

Despite this, the troop that had started out on the way to Mecca was still over a thousand men strong. As they got closer, a scout had warned Mohammed of the presence of Meccan cavalry that was intending to ambush him. They wanted to prevent the pilgrimage to the glory of the one God so as not to stir up the anger of the true gods. In fact, they were a dissident fringe group among the Meccans who followed the Devil's orders and had no wish to see the proposed peace. So as to steer clear of any clash that might

undermine the initial project, the “pilgrims” had taken a different route, a way that was harder to travel. In these mountain gorges, the Prophet’s she-camel had stopped and refused to budge.

“She is old and tired!” had been the shout from a few of the Helpers, setting off loud guffaws from some of the troops.

The Messenger had made no answer for the moment. He had reflected upon the meaning of this halt. Might it not be the hand of God giving him a sign that he should not continue along a bad route? Perfectly acquainted with the region, Mohammed suddenly recalled the image of a place called Hudaybiyya where there was a small pond that often seemed almost empty of water, but in fact had large quantities in its depths. That vision had been God’s way of signifying that the Prophet should go there.

“He who stopped my she-camel is none other than he who stopped the elephant!” had been his exclamation. This was a reference to the battle that had taken place when he was born.

He had given his mount a push and she had got up. Then he had altered course and gone to camp at the end of Hudaybiyya. An arrow from his bow had served to pierce a hole in the bottom of the pond, and water had surged out as if by a miracle, to the great astonishment of the Submitters.

Once the camp had been established in this valley near Mecca, Mohammed had sent a messenger on camel-back to invite the city’s representatives to come to him. Nonetheless, this emissary’s mount had been wounded in the legs, and the rider had fallen into the hands of the dissidents. They had sent back a spokesman, who had uttered highly arrogant and threatening words. The Prophet had had no choice but to send Othman off as far as Mecca, because this good Jinn had been a member of the Meccan nobility before his conversion to Submission, so in fact no-one dared to interrupt his passage there. Nonetheless, a rumor had started to go the rounds in the town: Othman had been assassinated. When he heard this news, Mohammed had sworn an oath, shaking his companions’ hands on it, that he would avenge him. Othman had finally come back to silence the false rumor and announce the imminent arrival of high Meccan dignitaries for the peace negotiations.

“Messenger of God!” exclaimed a voice outside the tent.  
“The Meccans are here!”

Images of the previous days flew out of Mohammed’s mind and he focused on the here and now.

*They are already here.*

The Prophet rose to welcome Suhayl, the representative of the Meccans.

For many a long hour, the negotiations taking place under a large tent proved particularly tense. However, Mohammed made all the concessions needed to meet Suhayl’s demands, and the peace treaty, drawn up by Ali, could finally take shape. So as to put no obstacle in the way of its ratification, in the face of Suhayl’s disdainful attitude, the Prophet even went so far as to omit his status as “Messenger of God” that Ali had originally written on the official document. Mohammed was simply designated by his name, without any glorious title. Seeing the jailbird faces of the Helpers, the Meccan emissary had not been taken in about the true nature of these “pilgrims” with their swords hidden away as best they could be under their robes. Suhayl achieved the cancelation of this supposedly religious masquerade, while granting the Submitters the right to a real pilgrimage the following year to the heart of Mecca, on condition they bore no weapons other than those clearly visible in their sheaths.

Mohammed was particularly happy about the truce attained at Hodaybiyya. The two sides were able to take leave of each other with a calm mind.

The Prophet was in the midst of the Submitters, explaining the terms of the treaty to them, when Omar rushed into the camp like a wrathful lion. His eyes were bloodshot and his thick mustache was wiggling up and down. He had not been present at the negotiations because he was seeing to the security of the camp perimeter. He thought Mohammed had allowed himself to be tricked by their enemies. The treaty sounded more like a defeat than a victory, and he saw Suhayl’s demands as a belittling humiliation.

“Are you not God’s Messenger?” growled the angry man.

“Of course I am the Messenger of God,” replied Mohammed in surprise.

“Are you not right, and are our not enemies wrong?”

Mohammed nodded agreement and Omar went on.

“Our dead go to Paradise and their dead go to Hell, is that not so?”

“Of course they do!” was the Prophet’s reply.

“In that case, why have you dishonored us?” demanded Omar, swaying slightly on his feet.

Mohammed stared at Omar. The giant man’s questions did not seem to follow any logic and irritation was apparently making him ramble. The Prophet chose his words to calm his friend down.

“As God’s Messenger, I cannot disobey God. God is my strength and my shield.”

Omar interrupted.

“Did you not tell the Submitters that we should visit the Kaaba, and make the sacred circuits around it?”

“I did! But did I say we should be do that this very year?”

“Well ... no...”

Omar’s mind was all at sea, and his gaze seemed to be affected by an ocean of wine and its fumes. Without thinking, or even really realizing what he was doing, Omar asked Abu Bakr the same questions he had put to Mohammed. Abu Bakr’s fiery eyes flared up in the depths of their sockets.

“The Messenger of God will never disobey God,” said he, “and God will never allow his Messenger to go astray! Can you understand that?”

Ali walked firmly over and took Omar by the arm, leading him to a tent away from indiscreet listeners. Mohammed and Abu Bakr followed them in.

*Some creature must have stung Omar. Its poison is clouding his mind and his senses.*

Omar tugged himself loose from Ali’s grip and started scolding Abu Bakr.

“We had almost won the war! So why have we signed a ten-year peace with our enemies! Do you not realize that in ten years you or I could easily be dead?”

“This peace will not last ten years,” interrupted Ali in his sing-song voice. “God will take care of that and I have...”

“God?” cut in Omar with a foolish grin.

Under his long black beard, anger reddened Ali’s dull skin. However, he continued calmly.

“I have secretly brought an Arab clan over to the Submitter cause, but the clan will officially take the side of the Meccans. When God decides the moment had come to bring this peace with our enemies to an end, I shall give the order to the clan to attack one of our allied tribes. Thanks to the effect of alliances, the peace we have signed will be null and void. And everyone will think that the Meccans are to blame for breaking their oath and attacking us indirectly through the clan that I have inveigled into their ranks.”

“That is God’s genius!” added Abu Bakr’s sharp voice enthusiastically. “During this truce, we can attack the Jews in Khaybar without the Meccans interfering. God will make sure to grant us their riches for the good cause.”

These last words seemed to get through to Omar who smiled contentedly.

“Naturally,” continued Abu Bakr, “we shall attack the Jews as soon as we can, before they can ally themselves officially to the Meccans. In that way, we shall not be breaking the truce. And although you have not yet noticed them, this truce has very great advantages for us.”

“Advantages?” queried Omar doubtfully, lifting his white turban to scratch at the reddish patches on his bald head. “We cannot attack the Meccans’ rich caravans, and furthermore any Meccans who convert to Submission now cannot come and join our forces. Where are the advantages?”

Omar was alluding to a clause in the treaty stipulating that henceforth any Meccans converting to Submission would not be allowed to go to Yathrib. They would be obliged to stay in Mecca under careful surveillance. If such new Submitters, or any other Meccan deserters, ran off to join the ranks of those living in Yathrib, Mohammed was required to expel them. In the contrary case, the clause stated that if Submitters abjured their religion by fleeing from the City of the Prophet, they could take refuge in Mecca without the city having to expel them.

“You are mistaken!” smiled Mohammed. “We are the real winners from this treaty. Let me explain why. First of all, hypocrites from our city who renege on Submission will be unmasked in the full light of day. Such traitors can run away calmly and take refuge in Mecca as much as they like, we shall settle the score with them later, when we capture that city. Secondly, we have gained equal status with Meccans. All the Submitters in Mecca are now finally going to be able to declare themselves openly in the town. They will be able to spread God’s religion openly, along with the other Submitters we can send to them. They can take over minds in every house, conquer every street, one after another, if needful by arranging collective prayers. In perfect safety, they can exhort the idolators to convert by gradually spreading around God’s recitation. It is all to the best if they cannot leave Mecca. They can gnaw away at it from within, like a little mouse creeping into an elephant’s trunk. We are going to be that little mouse that will multiply to become thousands and will nibble away at the Meccan elephant from the inside. Submission will extend even faster than ever.”

The Prophet’s gentle smile grew broader and his tongue was like a whiplash as he spoke.

“Thirdly, anyone who runs away from Mecca will be hidden in our city, naturally. It is completely out of the question to expel a Submitter into the hands of God’s enemies. Better still, we can give orders to some Submitters to flee from Mecca in broad daylight. Obviously, so as to respect our commitments in the peace treaty, they cannot come and take refuge with us. But they can go down to the coast and continue to attack Meccan caravans from there. We cannot be held responsible for what they do, since these fugitives will be new converts we have no official pact to link us to them.”

Omar started laughing with contentment.

“So, if I have this right, we carry on attacking their caravans without getting punished?”

Ali nodded agreement and began to speak.

“Yes, because all the loot we take will allow us to expand our army and God’s dominion over the Earth. That is how this

peace treaty is a victory for us, for Submitters and for God. I am sure that God will confirm this victory in the Mother of Books.”

Mohammed agreed.

“Yes, this is a victory. We can worship God in the holy place of prayer, the Kaaba.”

“But do we still have to shave our heads?” asked Omar.

In a secret committee of a very limited number, it had been decided to have some clearly distinctive emblem when they entered Mecca. If the Meccans authorized the intended pilgrimage to go as far as the center of the town, to avoid any last-minute traps, it would be better to be able to recognize Submitters and Helpers at a glance, so as to form up in defensive ranks against any enemy attacks at high speed. The white tunics of the “pilgrims” were too similar to those worn by the townsfolk, so it had been decided to shave the troops’ heads. At first, the Ansar Helper chiefs had refused: their attractive hair was one of their prides, so there could be no question of shearing it off like sheep’s wool. In the end, after quite a palaver, a compromise had been found: those who were unwilling to have their heads shaven could simply have their hair cut short.

“I think it is best to continue doing so,” Ali replied. “Even if it is not this year that we shall enter Mecca, we can return next year, and there will be a need to shave our heads as a precaution, in case the Meccans decide to play some treacherous trick, as it makes it easy to distinguish who is who in a fight. Let us accustom ourselves to it now, otherwise the Helpers will shilly-shally and even go back on their word. Let us slaughter the animals that we brought to sacrifice, too, so they do not hamper us on our way home”

His three friends approved.

So it was a triumphant troop, although without any animal offerings and with no hair to be blown by the wind, that headed back to the City of the Prophet. Once there, Mohammed received a new recitation from Gabriel confirming the brilliant victory won over the idolators at Hudaybiyya.

The Almighty also ordered them to set out to make war on the evil Jinns that had seized possession of the Jews’ bodies and taken refuge in the Khaybar valley. In this new battle against

God's enemies, as he took fort after fort, Mohammed went from one surprise to another. Indeed, with his good Jinn's vision, Othman detected almost no Jinns in the pay of Satan among the Jewish prisoners. After their consternation had eased, they had to accept the obvious. The evil Jinns had died in the fighting or had left the bodies of the Jews to escape before they were captured. Othman put forward the idea that they might well have taken possession of some animal, such as a snake, so as to get away unbeknownst to all.

Faced with this unparalleled situation, Mohammed was confronted with another equally dramatic fact that Othman explained to him. The captured Jews were no longer themselves, they had no awareness of having been under the control of evil Jinns, but had fallen into a stupor. That meant that they were no longer contaminated humans, but a sort of subhuman suffering irreversible mental after-effects.

*Sub-humans no better than animals.*

With God's guidance, Mohammed and his four friends decided to be merciful to these creatures who had become less than men, their sad condition non-human and denatured. Although aware that a day would come when it would be necessary to expel these deficient creatures that the Jews of Khaybar had become, the Prophet allowed those who wished to stay to keep and work their lands, in exchange for half of the crops they raised. They also had to pay tribute so that the Submitters' sabers would protect them, just as poor animals are protected against attacks by wolves.

Of course, this matter had to be kept secret, so as not to trouble the local populations, for fear they might flee from these accursed places.

While the evil Jinns had been able to escape, not all of them had had that luck. One of their chief leaders had been captured. Mohammed had him tortured before going on to see his head rolling at his feet. This was to give him a foretaste of the Hell where he would end up, and also to get him to confess where the hidden treasure of the Jews had been concealed. Once found, this was rapidly shared out among the various allied Arab clans. They had been disappointed by the Hudaybiyya peace treaty, but the fine compensation provided by the valuable spoils from Khaybar

calmed the agitated spirits of all those who had been counting on plundering Mecca rapidly.

This fresh victory at Khaybar greatly enhanced the Prophet's prestige among the local idolator tribes. Seeing his power, and that of God through his Messenger, they decided to swear allegiance to him and convert to Submission. The treasure and weapons captured from the Jews allowed yet another exponential increase in the strength of his army. Mohammed realized that within a year he would be militarily ready to order the final assault against the Meccans.

For the moment, because one year had gone by since the signing at Hudaibiyya, Mecca opened its gates to the Submitters as promised, so that they could perform the scheduled pilgrimage. Wanting to keep the peace at all costs, the Meccans deliberately ignored the massacres perpetrated in Khaybar, and welcomed these new pilgrims with great respect mingled with fear.

The work of the Submitters who lived in Mecca had been a year of rodent gnawing away at the minds of the inhabitants, with the effect of bringing them closer to conversion. Could that man who claimed he was the Messenger of the highest of the gods in fact be telling the truth? Did his strange recitation, his undeniable victories and unquestionable miracles not seem to bear witness to this? Some idolators also wondered whether a deity more powerful than the others could have gained the upper hand over them and annihilated them so as to have sole dominion over the world. So what use would it be to venerate idols that had died, at the risk of triggering the wrath of the new King of Heaven, and being punished in this life and the next? The younger generations were much more open to that sort of discussion than the Elders, whose minds were locked shut to such heretical statements. In fact, conflict was brewing in every home between father and son, mother and daughter, splitting families apart in endless arguments.

In that city where the smallest religious spark could set light to the forest of divine upheavals, as God had shown him in a vision, Mohammed entered Mecca without meeting the slightest resistance. All the Meccans had left their homes and set up camp on the heights around their city. From there they watched the pilgrimage which lasted three days. They constantly wondered

whether they would really end up in Hell if they did not join the crowds of Submitters parading up and down in the distance.

After these pilgrims of a new kind departed, minds were still in turmoil. Thanks to the spies he had in place, Mohammed realized that Mecca would now fall without putting up much resistance. So, once enough Arab tribes had taken the side of Submission, the Prophet activated Ali's plan. The clan he had infiltrated as double agents, who had signed an alliance with the Meccans, finally received the order to attack a tribe under the protection of the Submitters, for form's sake. In the dark of night, knife blades spilled the blood out of sleeping throats. When Mohammed learned that twenty men had been murdered during this night operation that should not have had any victims, he was upset. His orders had been exceeded, and Ali promised that he himself would punish those responsible.

It was true that the harm had been done, but it allowed consciences to be stirred up and the last reluctant tribes to be united against Mecca. This city was pointed out as the sole guilty party in these atrocious murders, which had thus broken the peace treaty with the Prophet.

The Meccans immediately sent a selected mediator to Mohammed to try to stave off the crisis. This was Abu Sufyan, one of the most eminent of Mecca's leaders. The Prophet gave a cold reception to this elderly cousin of his, who had been a fierce opponent from the start. He would not listen to any of the pleas of this white-bearded oldster and drove him out of the City of the Prophet.

In the greatest secrecy, the army of Submitters and Helpers marched forth. The effect of surprise was essential if the enemy were to be taken by surprise. So, the Prophet never stopped praying over and over again to the Almighty.

*My God, close the eyes of the Meccans, so that they will not see until it is too late.*

As the expeditionary force moved further away from the City of the Prophet, its ranks swelled thanks to the flood of allied Arab tribes joining it, and the warriors in arms grew quickly to a total of more than ten thousand heading for Mecca.

Having spotted the military preparations going on when he met Mohammed, old Abu Sufyan suspected that war with the Submitters was imminent. He set out with two companions to keep watch over the road leading to his town. He was taken prisoner there by Mohammed's advance guard. His hands tied and blindfolded, he was taken to a large tent where the Prophet was waiting with his high command.

"Is it not time for you to admit that there is no God but God and that I am his Messenger?" asked Mohammed as Abu Sufyan's blindfold was removed.

His face haughty, the prisoner shrugged his thin shoulders covered in a black cape.

"I still have doubts of that!" said he, in a tone that attempted to be firm.

A saber was put against his neck.

"Convert," said a voice to his rear, "and utter the two attestations before I cut off your head."

Fear in his entrails, and having no other choice, Abu Sufyan whispered the words that saved his life."

"There is no god but Allah and Mohammed is his Messenger."

The bonds holding him prisoner were cut at once. After a long interview with the Prophet, he was taken to see the army of God which was marching through a defile. When he saw in the light of the setting sun the menacing shadows of ten thousand soldiers extending as far as the eye could see, Abu Sufyan realized that Mecca had no chance of winning the coming battle.

The Prophet had guaranteed to him that protection and safety for the Meccans were certain if they stayed in their homes and did not take up arms against the Submitters. Mohammed had even promised a general amnesty if his most bitter opponents copied Abu Sufyan and converted to Submission.

Abu Sufyan grasped that if he wanted to preserve Mecca from pillage and the sword, he would have to convince his fellow citizens not to stand in the way of this force, the like of which had never been seen. As he was now a Submitter he was free to go and

went straight to his town to announce the imminent arrival of the Prophet and God's army.

When this force penetrated into the city through its various gates, it met no more than sporadic resistance, causing just a few deaths. Thanks to the surprise and relief arising from the general amnesty proposed by Mohammed, the townsfolk bowed to him as he went by, whether with enthusiasm or in fear, and most of the population hastened to swear an oath of allegiance to him, also converting so as to avoid having their homes pillaged by armed troops.

However, the Prophet had given strict orders concerning pillage. This would not be allowed on this glorious day when God was taking possession of the city that he had chosen to honor Him. Seeing the black looks on the faces of those whose sole purpose in being here was to gather loot, Mohammed had given a speech.

"I have received the commandment to combat men until they attest that there is no other deity but God and that I am God's Messenger. They must also say their prayers and pay the tribute. If they do this, then they will save from me their blood and their goods. The day of clemency is come, not the day of mourning and of slaughter, for today God shall be honored in the Kaaba. You will receive a part of the tribute because of your glorious acts, and I promise you that other, even richer cities will be laid at your feet, in other climes and in the near future."

No exactions thus took place in Mecca. The Submitters simply removed all the idols from the holy sanctuary. As promised, no head that had bowed was cut off, except those of six men and four women.

During the talks leading to the peace treaty signed at Hodaybiyya, the good Jinn Othman had identified in the heart of Mecca ten evil Jinns in the pay of Satan who were using their supernatural powers to influence the group of high Meccan dignitaries. Once these ten were decapitated, the Devil would no longer have any dominion over the city, so that there could be a general amnesty offered to all the townsfolk. To that list of ten names drawn up by Othman, Mohammed had added an eleventh: the Sage of Mecca.

However, despite all the efforts made and countless searches, it proved impossible to lay hands on the white-bearded fugitive who had tried to kill the Prophet with his own saber under his own tent. Mohammed was very vexed by this, all the more so because as he drew closer to Mecca, the image of his assassin had never stopped haunting him each night. In his dreams, Mohammed saw him over and over again emerging from a huge mirror, where the dark reflection left only a troubling emptiness. His desire for vengeance unsatisfied, spoiling the delightful taste of final victory, the Prophet consoled himself by thinking that it was only a matter of time before his soldiers found the man who called himself the Sage of Mecca.

*It is no good for you to run away, by God's grace, we shall meet again. That day, you will see death staring you in the eye."*

## 27

### Friday Thirteenth

Heavy rain had been falling since the early morning. It had not let up right through the day. Toward midday, thunder had begun to rumble in the valley, and streaks of white lightning had split the carpet of gray clouds that were rolling along in the somber sky. Over the top of the mountain where Sultan had his eyrie, the storm had cast a thick mist out of which from time to time appeared ghostly figures bearing weapons as they did their rounds of the sumptuous palace.

Tom stood looking out of the windowpanes of his top-floor room, not really seeing the drops of water as they spattered against the glass. He was lost in his thoughts as the voice of his friend Patrick was still echoing a single word throughout his head.

“Empty,” Tom muttered to himself. “The tomb in Medina is empty.”

So, Mohammed did not exist, but was just a myth. In the same way Moses was the fabulous invention of King Josias, Mohammed was a creature conjured up by Abu Bakr. The Prophet of Islam was a fictional character taken from a book, part of whose legends had been copied from the myths of Moses. The world believed in the existence of the latter and similarly had faith in the historical reality of Mohammed because of similar mental constructions, since he was assigned adventures adorned with precise dates, facts and real places.

His life resembled history in many ways, but he was only the imaginary friend, an invisible comrade in arms who had

supposedly fought alongside Abu Bakr. Later on, the other three Caliphs had been perfectly aware of how to get full advantage from this rich lode of fantasy.

In fact, the legend of Mohammed had not been put together in one day. It had been made up over decades, indeed over centuries, since the oldest extant copy of the Koran, more or less complete, dated from the 800s. All the various tyrants that had succeeded one another in power had been able to revise the myth and tweak it to fit their political needs. The Koran had thus been rehashed over and again, each recasting one that added some personal lie to the Koranic edifice. Of course, these despotic additions had not pleased all the true believers, but they had had no chance to speak out. In the past, as in the present, any honest querying of Koran, any telling of the truth led to immediate death, by the sword formerly, by Kalashnikov nowadays.

These falsifications explained the dissensions that had arisen within Islam, the schisms that had split the Moslem religion into various sects, and numbers of opposing trends. The supposed authenticity of the Koran was no more than fraud and humbug, just like the biographies of Mohammed. The very first had been written more than a hundred years after the Prophet's "death", and it had been rewritten over a century later. Since they had never met Mohammed, for obvious reasons, his biographers had drawn on the common source of tales invented by storytellers and dream merchants. To make their accounts seem more credible, for they had a reputation to keep up, these biographers had added dates, localities, exact names, every sort of information that might make the fable more plausible, creating a marvelous Prophet out of an idealized view of the past. If they had been able to, they would have had his portrait painted on the covers of their books to make them even more legitimate and unquestionable. However, the Caliphs had formally prohibited the representation of Mohammed, for a totally practical reason: it is hard to provide an image of someone who has never existed.

Tom sighed.

After distancing himself from what he had formerly believed were certain truths, Tom noticed all the tiny details that he

had not paid particular attention to, and yet which revealed that something was a myth.

Mohammed's name was a striking instance.

This chimerical figure had no external proof, outside the Koran, to show that he was legitimate as a prophet. In a vicious circle, like a snake biting its own tale, Mohammed was the sole witness for the truth of the Koran and the Koran was the sole witness for the truth of Mohammed. The result was that the faith of a thousand million Moslems was based only on the testimony that an ordinary man provided in his own favor. To dress up this unpleasant reality, the Koran claimed that its emissary had been prophesied in the Torah and that an announcement of his arrival had been given because the exact name of Mohammed was written in black and white in the New Testament. Until a few days back, Tom had thought that Moslems were playing with words by twisting the Greek version of the Gospel of Saint John, which announced the future arrival of the "parakletos". This was a term with the sense of "consoler" or "comforter" and designated the Holy Spirit. Moslems, he thought, had replaced it with "periklytos", meaning "the glorious one" in order to refer to the Arab name Ahmad, an alternative form for Mohammed in the Koran. Now, with hindsight, Tom understood that Abu Bakr had carefully chosen the name of his straw man so that it would match the long-awaited Messiah. The first Caliph of Islam had also taken care to splice the fable of Mohammed into the various Jewish and Christian accounts, particularly the reference in the Old Testament that read: *I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.* That sounded quite like the idea that Mohammed retransmitted what was dictated to him by the archangel Gabriel.

Tom was angry with himself for having missed evidence for the myth for such a while. The immensity of the lie was such that it would arouse deep anger at having been so crudely cheated, and even being deceived by his own mind. He felt guilty of having fallen for the same Ikea effect that he had so often decried himself.

This biased judgment owed its name to the famous Swedish corporation selling furniture in kit form for assembly and a

psychological experiment associated with it. People had been asked to estimate the price of a small piece of furniture shown to them either in fully assembled form, or as a kit requiring assembly. The people who had had to put the pieces together for themselves quoted a cost that was double what had been estimated by the customers who had received the piece already fully assembled. Even though the two items were perfectly identical, an extra value was added by the effort that they had had to put in.

Another ramification of this sort of Ikea effect was seen at public auctions. If potential buyers had had a chance to touch an object on sale, they put in higher bids than people who had not touched the item. As soon as we touch something, however lightly, it seems as if it already belongs to us, like a part of us even, and we cannot abandon what belongs to us. The same happened with some homeowners who refused to lower the price of the house where they had lived for years. What they had spent such a time building or improving had gained a great deal of value for them, even if no rational future purchaser would think the place worth so much.

Through this Ikea effect, we tend to overestimate the value of an idea we have had for ourselves. The accuracy of what we have spent a long while building up in our mind seems certain, and it is hard to abandon one's own views, even if mistaken.

A tune rang out.

Tom pulled the telephone that he had been given by Jawad out of the pocket of his long white tunic. It was Jawad himself who was calling.

“No, I’m not in the reception room now,” Tom replied to his caller’s question. “I’m up in my bedroom. Fine, I’ll be waiting for you.”

Tom ended the call and mechanically checked the time, which was displayed on the screen.

Yet again, he felt surprised that he was still in Sultan’s palace. That same morning, Charlie had promised him a front-row seat for watching divine wrath come down from Heaven. However, hours had gone by and Tom still had not left to join Charlie. Charlie had disappeared after breakfast, leaving Tom and Jawad together for the rest of the day.

Tom thoughtfully reviewed the situation.

For the moment he did not know where the secret base was located which Charlie would use when controlling the attacks on Friday thirteenth. If Tom and Jawad would be taking a car to get there, that meant it could not be too far away from Sultan's eagle's nest. Then again, they might be going to join Charlie by helicopter. Such an aircraft was standing on one of the lawns this very minute. Nonetheless, the weather conditions were appalling, and not at all suitable for a whirlybird to take off.

Tom looked up through the window to the gray rainy sky.

Up there, with thousands of hostages, hundreds of kamikazes must now be ready to swoop down on their targets.

Tom remembered a conversation he had had with Alan in Jerusalem, before heading off on his infiltration mission. He had asked the Mossad agent about his protocol for negotiating with Islamic kamikazes who took Jewish hostages after a mass killing, for instance in a shopping mall. Alan had answered that it was impossible to negotiate with kamikazes, because they were seeking confrontation and death. There was no possibility of dialogue to get hostages freed when faced with Allah's madmen. All that could be done was to distract their attention, making a diversion when entering contact with them, so as to win a few precious minutes while the SWAT team prepared to unleash an assault. Intervention took priority over negotiation, as speed was essential in neutralizing the terrorists before they could kill anyone or place explosives at the entrances to the shopping mall. Negotiation was no more than a secondary fallback, since only an ultra-rapid intervention was of any use in preventing the hostage taking turning inevitably into a massacre.

Tom had said nothing, not wanting to contradict Alan who was past master at negotiating. However, Tom thought that his friend was wrong. Unlike him, he believed the opposite: that dialogue with a kamikaze was possible and could lead to freeing hostages unharmed.

To do this, it was like talking to a schizophrenic. You had to get inside their madness, their senseless, cold and fanatical logic. Just like a kamikaze, Tom knew the Koran by heart. In that way, there was a bond that could be set up between them, a

religious boundary that seemed uncrossable, but might be traversed all the same.

Through his mastery of their sacred texts, Tom would be able to put forward arguments, and explaining that the verse conceding the right to the Seventh Heaven was a clause with one of God's stipulations. It read: *Whoso fighteth in the way of Allah, be he slain or be he victorious, on him We shall bestow a vast reward.*

So, whether or not he was the winner, a kamikaze would go to Paradise.

Their initial killings, or even simply attempting to kill, was enough to get to the highest of the Heavens. So, there was no obligation to murder all of the hostages. Tom could put forward that clause stipulated by God so as to guarantee to the terrorist he would already be going to join the Prophet thanks to his glorious action. The consequence was that he could humbly free the hostages, since this manifestation of the greatness of his soul would cost him nothing, certainly not his place beside Allah.

On the contrary, God would be touched by this human mercy. After all, Allah was himself "The Merciful".

It was enough for the martyr to go out, weapon in hand and firing at the police so that they would return the fire. That would send him off at once to the promised houris awaiting him. He would be killed by a bullet through the head, would feel nothing and would instantly awake in Paradise.

Tom was sure that he could make an impact with this kind of argument. Kamikazes were often borderliners, not psychopaths having no empathy for their victims, who they depersonalize.

If he argued that hostages should be wiped out because they were unbelievers, Tom could counter this by stating that disbelievers would go to Hell sooner or later. By being magnanimous, the kamikaze would be giving them a short respite on Earth before they were confronted with the tortures of the next world. Besides, their confrontation with death would lead these *kuffar* to become aware of the futility of their existence. They would finally understand the truth about Allah and convert to Islam, if that was God's will. Thanks to the kamikaze, just as the Prophet had long ago opened the eyes of the polytheistic Arabs,

these converted hostages would join him in Paradise. They would be eternally grateful to him, and sing his praises for having been capable of guiding them into God's way, safe from the horrors of the Gehenna of fire. He was a merciful hero and everyone would see him as such, on Earth as in Heaven.

It was with that kind of crazy dialogue that you might be able to get inside the lunatic rationality of Islamic suicide warriors and manage to set hostages free.

His gaze vacant, Tom stared at the cloud cover.

However, this type of negotiation with the hundreds of kamikazes currently in the sky would come to nothing. There was no way of negotiating with men who were simultaneously terrorists and hostages.

*Knock, knock, knock.*

Jawad was at the door.

Tom went and opened up. Jawad's face was now beardless and his head shaven. He was dressed in a white tunic. Under their tinted lenses, his small dark eyes stared at Tom's.

"Give me your phone," he ordered. "Where we're going, no electronic devices are allowed."

Tom nodded and handed over the phone that he had in his hand. Jawad slipped it into his pocket.

"Let's go," he said in his deep voice. "The hour of Allah's wrath has chimed!"

Walking swiftly, Tom followed Jawad into the broad corridor of white marble that was illuminated with subdued lighting. They walked as far as the golden door of an elevator. The little cab was waiting at their floor, and the two men stepped in.

Jawad pushed the button for street level. When the elevator began its descent, he opened a tiny flap in its wall just below the control panel. He punched in four numbers on the numeric keypad inside.

0 9 1 1.

Watchfully, Tom had observed how he had entered on the pad the date of the September eleven attacks. For a moment, he was puzzled about what the reason could be. An instant later, his

puzzlement became astonishment: the elevator car had not stopped at the first floor. It carried on down into the heart of the mountain. When it finally stopped, Tom estimated that he was at least a hundred fifty feet below Sultan's palace.

The elevator door slid open onto a large, well-lit room, its floor and walls painted blood red. With a smiling face, a guard armed with the Kalashnikov was waiting in front of the two newcomers. Jawad handed over to him the telephones he had in his pocket. He then walked toward a big silvery door in the middle of which there was a black wheel. He turned this to open the locking mechanism, and used his shoulder to nudge the heavy armored block back against the well. He gestured with his hand for Tom to go ahead of him into the half-light of the endless corridor that had appeared, whose pale shimmering flooring blocks led down into the depths of the rock. The next minute the two reached an automatic air-lock with tinted glass doors.

As these slid aside with a cold, quiet hiss, Tom felt as if he had leaped into another world. So, the secret base he had been looking for had been hidden beneath his feet since the very beginning. Sultan had certainly not stinted on its construction. It was a dome fifty feet high with a diameter of two hundred. An inner sphere was split into three giant curving screens, each one showing a satellite view of part of the Earth. One displayed the United States, another Europe and a large part of Russia, and the third Asia and Australasia.

As in a warship, the dome was lit by a faint red light that gave the people present the look of demons. There were quite a few of them: Tom counted at least forty men, mostly Asians, sitting at computer desks that were aligned in an arc, and set six feet or so back from the giant screens. Headphones over their ears, they were busy with their consoles or keyboards, viewing satellite images, flight trajectories or lines of computer code in greenish lettering. The almost religious silence was broken only by the hum of the air conditioning and Sultan's high-pitched voice.

This came from the center of the dome.

Sitting on a sort of raised throne of black leather, Sultan had a panoramic view of the three giant screens. At his feet, a display-screen table twenty feet by twelve showed a map of the

world. Standing around it, a dozen Saudis with a knowing air were listening to him talk. Charlie was with them. Like a devilish monarch addressing a satanic court, all dressed in long robes that gleamed red in the dim light, topped off with traditional Arab headcloths, Sultan was discussing matters with them in his Arabic mother tongue.

Jawad took Tom by the arm. He led him to Charlie.

“Ah, there you are!” Charlie exclaimed. “I’m glad to see you.”

As if to convey some secret, he leaned toward Tom.

“Forgive me, in the heat of action I forgot about you! I had so many things to prepare that having you brought here completely slipped my mind. Sultan reminded me. He thinks a lot of you, you know.”

From the other side of the table, Sultan just then gave them a small friendly nod, then went on talking to a Saudi who was standing next to him. Charlie leaned on his left arm on the edge of the display screen table and pointed to it with his right forefinger.

“Look, Tom. The little green dots that you can see flashing are the airplanes we already have under our control. When they’re orange, they’re waiting for us to take them over whenever we want. The red dots are planes without devices.”

“Devices?” Tom inquired.

“Yes. When we were in Mecca, I told you that I’d take over control of commercial airliners from a distance but I didn’t tell you how. This is my little secret.”

From the pocket of his tunic, he took out a black box the size of a pack of cigarettes out of which came three yellow wires ending in crocodile clips.

“This is the device that allows long-distance control of airplanes. I can turn them into drones as soon as the crew go over to autopilot. A device like this was fixed in over a thousand aircraft while they were getting maintenance on the ground. It was as easy as stealing candy from a baby.”

“You’re a real genius,” Tom flattered him.

“Oh, it’s nothing much, you know. I was working on this sort of system when I was back home in the States. I was in a

specialist branch of the Air Force, the specialty being computer hacking. I worked for many a month on a program for getting control over Russian or Chinese satellites from a distance, and even combat aircraft. What's ironic is that now I've managed to hack into American satellites without being detected, not to mention a big part of their defense networks. That's how I found out the flight plan for the C.I.A. agents who were parachuted in, you know, the ones who tried to keep you prisoner in that mountain village where our soldiers found you. By the grace of Allah, that was how I thwarted the unbelievers' plan."

He fell silent for a brief moment, then continued.

"The U.S.A. haven't missed anything by waiting. With our team of Chinese hirelings, we're about to be able to set loose nuclear strikes and trigger a third world war."

"A third world war?" Tom echoed.

"Yes, we can release nuclear strikes from Russian and American submarines. We're on the brink of hacking into their authentication systems. False codes but real missile launches!"

Charlie's emerald-green eyes seemed to light up with a bloodthirsty glow.

"That'll come later. For the moment, divine wrath is about to fall on all those perverted Western cities."

Tom frowned.

"Won't the Americans try to intercept the airliners we've taken control of?"

Charlie smiled.

"Yes, they truly will. But as soon as they give orders to shoot down one of the planes we're controlling, I'll hack into their message systems and direct them against a different airliner that isn't one with our control device on it. The unbelievers will kill each other, there's the genius of Allah!"

Tom nodded.

So Charlie had foreseen everything. Not only had he gotten his hands on commercial pilots, turning them into unwitting kamikazes and hostages, but he also could manipulate any temporary safeguards by hacking into military defenses.

In the sky and on the ground, any minute now, total chaos would spread in a deluge of fire.

“The very first target will be Jerusalem,” Charlie announced. “A plane is already on its approach to strike those who have earned the anger of Allah.”

On Charlie’s face, Tom could read his hatred of the Jews. Like all religious fanatics, Charlie need an enemy who he could pin every catastrophe on, needing to believe that anything negative that might happen to him was a plot. Every time that even the slightest thing went wrong for him, it had to be because of the Jews.

Over the course of history, this people had never been very numerous, and nowadays they were just a drop in the human ocean, in comparison with the thousand million Moslems. However, they triggered a completely disproportionate mental, or even an allergic, reaction in the believers who are incapable of getting them out of their heads. In their daily prayers, Moslems kept up this paranoid fixation on the children of Israel by reciting over and again in a sickly fashion the first chapter of their holy book. From its very first page, the Koran set the tone by stigmatizing the Jews. They were described as those who earn the anger of God, which naturally stirred up spurning and animosity toward them.

Worse still, in later chapters there were verses treating them as animals, calling them “apes” and even “swine”. The Koran dehumanized Jews and other disbelievers, degrading them to the level of sub-humans by calling them “the worst of beasts”. By turning them into animals and dehumanizing them, Islam lulled consciences and took away their right to exist, making it easy to exterminate them. Men have little empathy for the animals they slaughter. Besides, how could there be any compassion for these Jewish beasts, since Allah the Merciful Himself intended to cast them into the fires of Hell?

In his day, Hitler had taken up this Koranic animalization of the Jews for his own purposes. He had called them vermin, cockroaches or rats, and had them caricatured in Nazi publications as filthy mice. In that way, he had been able to wipe out those millions of human beings in the gas chambers, considering them as

inferior beings, like cattle in a slaughterhouse, burning them in crematorium ovens as a foretaste of the promised Gehenna.

In forcing the Jews to wear a yellow star and in his other anti-Semitic laws, Hitler had taken calm inspiration from Islam in its origins. That creed forced Jews and Christians to wear special marks or distinctive clothing so as to make sure Moslems could pick them out. They wore badges, belts or a special hairstyle. They also had to mark their houses, which could not be higher than Moslem dwellings, and they were forbidden to build churches or synagogues. They could not ride horses or carry weapons, and they always had to yield to Moslems.

That was the sort of segregationist law that came from the very origins of Islam.

If Hitler had copied features from those traditions of Islam which had greatly influenced him, it was because that religious dogma and Nazism shared an ideology: world domination by those they saw as superior. Among their followers, both Islam and Nazism stressed the idea that they had been chosen, and were people far superior to the rest of humanity. In the Koran, since they were in addition God's representatives on Earth, a verse stated that Moslems were the most excellent people among men, just as Hitler had decreed that the German nation were the representatives of a master race.

The Führer had been aware that Islam was not merely a religion, but also a political ideology, the Prophet of which played the part of Statesman, General of the Army, judge and policeman. Hitler had realized that if Nazism was to triumph as Islam had previously, it could not be just a simple political movement. It had to be a sort of lay religion, with an infallible leader infallible having access to a unique truth, and owed absolute obedience by one and all.

Imitating the mythical figure of Mohammed, Hitler had awarded himself the backing of the divine will by having the military slogan *Gott mit uns* [God with us] engraved on the belt buckles of his soldiers. Having God with him, he had discreetly plagiarized the Koranic religion. The result was that the similarities between Nazism and Islam were numerous.

The most striking of these resemblances was the idea of combat, *Kampf* in German and *Jihad* in Arabic. It was not a case of fighting to live, but of living to fight. Combat in was an end in itself, and not merely a means of attaining political goals. It was glorified in the same way death was glorified, because life and the individual no longer counted. Only the nation or religion should be of any importance in the eyes of the stupid faithful. In the meantime, high-ranking Nazi dignitaries became personally wealthy by despoiling the Jews, pillaging the gold of conquered countries or stealing works of art, as Hermann Göring did, for instance. This was just what had been done in earlier days by the band of brigands surrounding the puppet Mohammed, stripping the wealth from a devastated world.

Another point in common was the idea of external and internal enemies. For the Nazis, the external enemy was the West, while the internal enemy was the Jews and left-wing political groups. For Islamists, it was everyone else but them. There had first been Jews, Christians or unbelievers, then Crusaders, Colonialists and now the modern world as a whole. History was seen as a single straight line, with the enemy always remaining unchanged. For fanatics, the West was the changeless incarnation of evil, unalterable. With time, they were certain to dominate over it in the end.

If Hitler had failed to win, it was because it was impossible for any of his victims to join this German's murderous cause: they could not acquire the status of a superior being, because you either were it by birth or could never be it. Driven into a corner, the victims of Nazism had fought back, unlike those of Islam who had a way out through submission. Under Islam, whether white, yellow or black, any individual who converted became one of God's elect, a superior being, but also changed into a devout soldier raising arms to Heaven.

"Look back there," Charlie said, nudging Tom with his elbow.

The two men turned round to look at the giant screen that until then had been displaying the satellite view of Europe. Now it was showing a direct video signal from a camera on an airliner,

mounted on the tail fin. It showed how the white plane was diving straight down at the city of Jerusalem.

Thirty seconds later, in a ball of fire, the airplane smashed into its programmed target.

The Weeping Wall.

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The Mossad agent was not keen on this situation. Things were far too calm for his liking.

Alan instinctively knew that it was the calm before the storm. However, the terrorist storm did not seem to be ready to break. No warning message about aircraft hijackings had reached the C.I.A. command center. No airplane had suddenly changed course and no pilot alert message had been received.

Everything was absolutely normal as if on an ordinary day.

In the great white room with its brilliant lighting set deep in the bowels of the Earth, around a dozen operators were busy at their computer consoles. They were analyzing the images that “God”, their satellite group in geostationary orbits, was sending to their screens, along with the flight trajectories directly transmitted by commercial airliners.

On the giant screen, Alan’s one good eye was staring at the world map displayed there and showing the position of aircraft in real time. Like swarms of bees around hives, tiny yellow airplane symbols were thronging over various zones of the Earth, with some continents almost invisible because of the intensity of air traffic.

“Are you still sure about your information?” a voice asked in a Texan accent.

Alan turned to look the regional director of the C.I.A. in the eye. This Afro-American fifty-something with his shaven head gave an uncomfortable smile, revealing white teeth.

“Mike, the attacks are definitely planned for today,” Alan retorted.

Mike's slim figure, all of six foot eight tall, slumped slightly, as if giving an apology for questioning Alan's intelligence reports.

"But the attacks may have been rescheduled for another day," Mike said. "Because for now we have nothing tangible. Unless God's been kind to us and your undercover agent has somehow managed to destroy their control installations. If that hasn't happened, wouldn't he long since have sent you the coordinates for Sultan's base? I don't want to be pessimistic, but his silence is worrying."

"Sir!" he was interrupted by the operator with thick-lensed eyeglasses that showed he was short-sighted. "A plane just crashed on Jerusalem!"

"Fuck!" Mike swore. "Give me an analysis of its flight plan."

He nervously tugged at the sleeve of his dark suit, which was a touch too tight for him.

"The plane never left its route," the operator announced after twenty seconds. "It was flying over the region when it suddenly crashed down on Jerusalem. The pilot didn't send any distress call. It's probably some kind of an accident."

The Afro-American slapped his palm against his forehead.

"Are you an idiot or what?" his voice lashed out. "Do you really believe in that kind of a coincidence? That smells of a terrorist attack from a mile off! Check all the other aircraft trajectories. If even one goes off course, even if it's by just a few feet, I want to know at once!"

"Very good, sir."

Mike went off, leaving Alan alone in front of the giant screen. Plunged in thought, he closed his eyes briefly.

So the Friday thirteenth attacks had definitely just started, and his country was the first target hit. With hindsight, shouldn't he have forbidden overflying of Israel? Maybe even forbidden all commercial flights from taking off? However, it was impossible to keep all the aircraft in the world idle on the ground, all the more so because he had no idea of what secret system Charlie would use to get control of them. Such a system would be bound to report back

how it was operating, so any forced immobilizations would have thrown suspicions on Tom. His infiltration would have been irreparably compromised. That was why it had been necessary to be discreet and wait until those damned salamalaikums set their battle plan in motion. Now only Tom could strike a blow against this assault wave that had barely started.

Stealth bombers of the latest model were already airborne. All they needed were the co-ordinates for Sultan's headquarters so as to fire deep penetration missiles. Alan supposed Sultan would have constructed his base deep underground somewhere in the mountains of Afghanistan or in the regions bordering on it. However, without a message from Tom, the war seemed to be lost in advance.

Alan was raging inwardly.

The salamalaikums were all too good at warfare, especially with the Koran as a guide. This military manual prescribed two strategies for conquering the world. Plan A was put in play when the salamalaikums had the advantage of numbers. In that case, they first asked their enemies nicely to convert, then in a second phase, when the unbelievers refused conversion, Jihad broke out, with war being decreed because it was a religious obligation ordered by Allah in the chapter "Repentance". When the salamalaikums were the weaker party, they used Plan B, based on dissimulation or *taqiya*. They presented Islam as a religion of tolerance and peace, they asked the non-Moslems for protection and friendship, and swore by all that is holy that they loved atheists, Jews and even homosexuals. They covered up their maneuvers with cunning lies, while waiting, for decades if necessary, for it to be possible to put Plan A into operation.

They inevitably managed to attain superiority in numbers, through marriages with their obligation for conversion, by colonization or simply by filling wombs, willing or unwilling.

The fact that the Jews had taken over a few small territories around Israel was endlessly chewed over, but no-one ever spoke out about the salamalaikums who were ceaselessly colonizing the entire planet through emigration. This was a holy duty included in the chapter "Women", an absolute necessity punished by Hell if they refused to perform this. They thus had no choice but to go off

and conquer fresh nations so as to propagate Islam. The outcome was waves of migrants heading to every continent, contaminating every locality with their mental sickness, with no land being spared. They left their homeland with joy in their hearts, because the Koran promised them the comforts of Paradise as a reward for this exodus. In the democratic countries they brought slowly but steadily under their sway, there was the added advantage of a standard of earthly living and comfort far higher than any bastion of the Islamic gangrene could offer them.

Nonetheless, in the new countries that had given them shelter and offered them a pleasant social life, they would not accept the laws, because they were made by humans. They had no time for democracies and laws voted upon by men, as the law already existed, the law of the Koran, the law of God, superseding all others. They wanted to apply this law to the letter so as not to suffer the torments of Hell for their disobedience.

Islam was therefore totally incompatible with any form of democracy, just as Christianity or Judaism were in their way, because these religions' concept of God was merely that of a tyrannical law-maker with views rigidly fixed in a long-ago period that no longer existed. Democracy implied equality of all men, but Islam rejected out of hand this prime human principle by defining clear-cut classes. The salamalaikums were in the first class, Christians and Jews were in a very poor second class, and atheists had no right to any class at all.

“Sir!” the bespectacled operator cried out. “A plane has just deviated from course.”

Mike walked up to the giant screen.

“Display its trajectory,” he ordered.

The world map was replaced by a large-scale plan of the Paris region, with dozens of yellow airplane symbols indicating flights approaching or leaving the French capital.

“It’s an Air France flight,” the operator explained. “It was supposed to land at one of the airports in Paris, but it suddenly changed course and altitude. It’s heading straight for the heart of the city. Just a moment. The control tower is trying to re-establish contact.”

He paused to listen to the conversation between the air traffic controller and the plane's pilot in his earphone.

"What are they saying?" Mike finally asked.

"The pilot has confirmed that everything is normal, and there's just been a simple navigational error. But there's something strange."

Mike went up to the operator's position and growled.

"Strange? What's strange?"

"My data show that the lead pilot is a woman. But it was a man who answered the control tower radio call. It could be the co-pilot that was answering, I suppose."

Mike shook his head.

"No, they must have hacked into the communications systems as well."

On the giant screen they all watched helplessly as the yellow plane symbol detached itself from the stream of other aircraft and headed straight for the center of Paris.

A minute later, the plane disappeared off the radar.

"It's crashed," the operator reported.

"Do we know where exactly?" Alan queried. "Which district of the city?"

Over the shoulder of his subordinate with the thick-lenses eyeglasses, Mike read the information reaching the screen of the computer.

"No, not for the moment," he replied. "Our European section is repositioning its satellite over Paris. We'll have an aerial view of the extent of the damage in a moment or two."

Images of the French capital finally came up on the giant screen. The crash site left Alan speechless.

Pillars of black smoke seemed to be coming out of a colossal oil drilling rig. The plane had hit one of the four legs of the Eiffel Tower, between the first and the second platform levels. Under the impact the metal structures had broken at the point of contact. The upper part of the structure, more than seven hundred fifty feet of it, had tipped through ninety degrees and fallen like a felled tree, ending its shattering fall on the shore of the river.

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Tom clenched his teeth.

Although he did not want to let any inkling of what he felt be visible and was wearing an appropriate smile, he was inwardly fuming with rage at the spectacle he was witnessing.

A plane had crashed down on Paris, and Charlie had exploded with joy, as had Sultan and his Saudi guests.

In the dome that was bathed in dim red light, shadowy demons seemed to be jiggling and joggling in a sort of party-like trance.

“Did you see that?” Charlie exclaimed to Tom. “And this is just the beginning!”

On the table display showing the map of the world, he pointed his forefinger at the United States.

“In less than a quarter-hour, it will be the turn of the Great Satan!”

Tom approved with a broad smile.

“I’m keen to see that!” he exclaimed joyously.

Giving him a conspiratorial wink, Charlie went off to sit at one of the computer positions that was unoccupied, between two Chinese hackers who were tapping away rapidly on their keyboards like two master musicians playing a complex score.

Tom’s mind raced.

He had to use this opportunity to get out of the dome and call Alan to tell him where he was, letting him know the secret position from where the attacks of this Friday thirteenth were being commanded. The Mossad agent could have the underground installation bombed so as to put an end to Charlie’s murderous activities. As Tom saw it, he was beyond help and had fallen into an Islamist madness from which there was no possible return. From this point, with his team of hackers trying hard to start a third world war, Charlie represented the greatest threat humanity had ever known.

Tom had no choice, time was short, and he could not save Charlie from himself as he had nonetheless promised himself in memory of Camilla.

“You look worried,” Jawad said, coming up to him. “Do you have a problem?”

Tom grimaced.

“Yes, my stomach is aching. Are there any restrooms here?”

The lenses of his eyeglasses reflecting the reddish light, Jawad looked at him for a moment before answering.

“Over there on the right, alongside the entry airlock.”

Tom conveyed his thanks with a gesture and walked off slowly. When he reached the restroom door, he put his hand on the handle, giving a quick backward glance. Jawad’s back was turned to him, his attention monopolized by the giant screen. It was displaying video from a camera installed in an airliner overflying American soil.

Tom let go the door-handle and slipped discreetly out through the automatic airlock. There was a cold silent gust of air as he waited for the tinted glass doors to close before he set out into the half-light of the corridor with its pale shimmering floor. When he reached the silvery door with the black wheel in its center, he turned the wheel and pulled the heavy armored block toward him.

Tom cursed.

He had expected to find the guard that Jawad had given their telephones. However, the man on duty was no longer in that large, well-lit room with its walls and floor painted blood-red.

Walking toward the elevator door, Tom pushed the call button. The elevator car arrived and he went back up to street level. Sultan’s home seemed to be abandoned, so, hoping to find a telephone, Tom wandered along the long white marble corridors with their silver columns supporting gold arches inlaid with a thousand emeralds.

The music of the opening sequence of a science fiction film could be heard.

There were people in one of the larger rooms of the palace. Tom headed toward it and entered through the opening in the shape of a rounded arch cut through the white wall.

As he walked in, twenty surprised gazes focused on him.

Under their black niqabs, sitting cross-legged on a thick fluffy carpet or on davenport, some of the women from Sultan's harem started chuckling at this intrusion.

Tom bowed politely and left immediately.

At the end of the corridor the door that led out of the residence could be seen. Increasing his pace, Tom headed for this exit. Outside, in the wan light of the day, he found himself under a long porch held up by pillars with arabesque motifs.

Lined up one alongside another, thirty or so cars were parked there out of the rain that was still falling on the luxuriant gardens, lost in the thick mist.

Tom went to open the door of a white Mercedes standing among these vehicles, but came to a halt. Voices could be heard and two shadows came out of the mist.

Crouching, Tom moved to hide himself at the rear of the car. A few moments later, the armed guards disappeared and Tom cautiously straightened up.

Thirty feet away, a black silhouette stood, seemingly looking for him. When she saw him, she made a little sign with her gloved hand.

Tom realized it was Fatima. When he had gone into the lounge, she must have been among those women wearing niqabs. He gestured with his arm for her to join him. Together, they kneeled behind the Mercedes.

"Do you have a telephone?" Tom whispered in French, knowing that Fatima was an Algerian and spoke that language.

"A telephone?" Fatima asked in a barely perceptible voice. "What would that be for?"

"I have to contact Alan."

"Alan? What Alan is that?"

Tom was surprised at the innocence of the question.

"Alan, the Mossad agent!" he replied somewhat more forcefully

“Your Mossad friend in Jerusalem?” Fatima murmured.  
“But what’s the reason?”

Tom stared into the dark eyes that were staring at him in bewilderment.

“Don’t you understand?” Sultan’s headquarters is under our feet. He’s built a bunker under this mountain. We have to call Alan to tell him to fire a missile at it, before it’s too late. Charlie is down there in the control room and he’s the one directing operations.”

“You want to kill Charlie?” Fatima muttered, looking panicky and distraught.

This whispered conversation was leading to nothing but misunderstandings on both sides, so they had to go someplace where they could discuss things more calmly. Tom took the woman by the arm.

“Follow me,” he said in a hushed tone.

They climbed into the rear seat of the white Mercedes.

Fatima shut the door with its tinted window quietly after her. In a scolding voice, Tom insisted.

“Don’t you understand what I just told you? Charlie is below our feet and is directing terrorist attacks from the bunker. If Alan can’t blow it up quickly, there are going to be thousands of deaths?”

Fatima put her gloved hand on Tom’s arm, and her dark eyes blazed with anger.

“So, you came here just to kill Charlie?”

Tom’s blood froze.

He had just recognized that voice which seemed to come from beyond the grave.

His hands trembling, Tom pulled off the black veil that hid Fatima’s face.

Saying nothing, she let him proceed.

When the mask fell, a thousand sabers ran Tom through. Time stood still in a dimension beyond reality.

## Second Commandment: Thou Shalt Watch over the Future

Philip K. Dick was a visionary novelist. His mind seemed to have a sort of window opening onto our future reality, as if he could see in his present the future that was awaiting all of us tomorrow.

With what I see as prophetic overtones, one of his most remarkable works is called *Shell Game*.

The tale begins on a lost planet far from Earth, where the survivors of the crash of a spaceship accidentally hit by a meteorite are living. In an unhealthy atmosphere, the hundred or so men, women and children have survived for five years on this alien soil. They all seem to have just one obsession in their minds, wanting to put back into commission their craft which has sunk in the marshes so that they can head back into space.

However, this task proves complicated.

Ever since their accident, the survivors have been undergoing continual attacks from the Terrans. These latter have sent shock troops and military spies, individuals perfectly trained for subversion and sabotage, agents with such well-honed infiltration skills that the survivors have never been able to capture or kill one, or indeed even simply see one. In contrast, they have been heard at night among the other nocturnal noises as they sneak toward installations so as to poison the water, release deadly gases or attempt to place bombs. Thanks to the drastic protective measures taken by the

besieged, Terran agents have not succeeded in harming them, except for the death of six men when a bridge was sabotaged.

This daily suffering appears to be about to end. The survivors manage to recover the spacecraft. However, what the find in the pilot's cockpit leaves them in total perplexity.

They had considered themselves as mutants "superior" to the Terrans who they insultingly called "apes". They are confronted by a harsh reality, the recordings they find on board. They learn that they are in no way superior beings, but simply sick Terrans, psychotics being transported by an automatically piloted craft to a hospital planet. In an old audio recording, a doctor reports that these patients are all paranoid, but if you keep away from the complex that they are suffering from, they can act logically, rationally, even with brilliance. You can talk with them, they can speak about themselves and are conscious of the outside world to which their thoughts are actively turned. If they differ from individuals considered normal, it is because of a certain number of fixed ideas, erroneous concepts from which they tirelessly build up a particularly elaborate belief system that is not lacking in internal coherence relative to the crazy first principle. Paranoids have a totally rigid personality, and their fixations are unshakable and condition their whole life. They interpret everything they see or hear, so as to distort reality into conformity with their view of the world. These creatures are convinced that the entire world is plotting against them, because they are people of vital importance and endowed with capacities as a consequence, which makes them the target of endless machinations.

#### **Consternation.**

Are the besieged just a bunch of loonies, a shipload of nutcases with failing memories and a forgotten past? Are all the attacks that they have suffered for so many years just hallucinations taking place only inside their heads? Was the sabotaged bridge that killed six of them, in the end, no more than a commonplace accident caused by poor construction?

These are the questions the nine leaders of the besieged now ask themselves.

They then realize that a whole society can easily be mistaken and adopt any old myth, transmitting it down through the generations. For centuries, Earthlings thought their planet was flat, and believed in gods, fairies, and witches. Just because people believe things, this does not make them true. It may be that none of all this exists. The only problem is how to prove so. If the besieged are all mad, how can they know? Among them there is no-one who is not a paranoid, no uncontaminated person allowing normality to be compared to their lunacy.

One of the leaders has an idea for learning if they are really crazy or not. Using analytic instruments, each will in turn compare two samples labeled A and B, one supposed to contain lethal gas taken from the site of the last attack by the Terrans, and the other holding simply air from the room where they are. If the samples both yield the same result, they must be psychotic. If one reads positive, the other negative, then the attackers are real, and the besieged are mentally healthy and perfectly rational.

After the analyses, the nine leaders realize with stupefaction that five of them have designated sample B as lethal, the four others sample A. These different positives prove that they are paranoid and see malevolence where there is none.

Now what should they do? Should they hand themselves over to the hospital authorities? Are they a danger for the rest of humanity? In the future, if their children reach Earth territories, they will fight because of their fixed ideas, clinging to their false beliefs, and they will win because they are more relentless and fanatical.

This prediction proves correct. The leaders kill one another, those who saw sample B as being poisoned massacring those who had designated sample A. They accuse them of having lied, and of having forged fake audio recordings and hidden them away in the spaceship. Through the complexity of their machinations, the ape-men of Earth have attempted once again to stifle at birth the superior race, destined to supplant them.

For just one of the besieged is worth a million Terran apes.

When I read this short story written in the last millennium, I realized that, strangely, what was said about the besieged could be transferred to Islamists without distorting the author's work. The similarities with their modern stance are striking. They think they are superior because an ancestral verse claims this, superior to the human "apes", which is what the Koran calls us. They cry out that there are plots against them, when they are the ones plotting against humanity to supplant it. They invade our space and pour out their mental sickness, infecting people by force or ruse.

The sole defense available for us, we who are truly the "besieged", the only weapon we have against the spread of their viral fanaticism is truth. Alas, even if the true nature of the Koranic poison or the falsehood of their certainties were proved to the uttermost, step by step, the believers would never accept this.

During the coming decade, I am sure to write a sequel to this novel, a science-fiction story like those so dear to Philip K. Dick. I will recount my view of the future: a monolithic society where the God Virus has contaminated the whole of humankind without exception, an entirely religious world, naturally quarantined by extraterrestrial civilizations who are looking to the future. For fear that the "superior" beings will bombard the universe with fanatical false beliefs, our Earth has been condemned to be no more than a vast lunatic asylum, lost in the vastnesses of space.

*Extract from the novel "The Sage of Mecca" by Thomas Anderson.*

## 29

# Death

*Death.*

Death was there.

Mohammed could feel it within him. It was flowing in the blood of his veins, into the deepest corners of his elderly, feverish body.

Wearing a white robe with narrow gray vertical stripes, with one hand under the nape of his neck, the Prophet was lying on a low couch, barely above the turquoise tiled floor. His thoughtful gaze was looking without really seeing at the room where he would draw his last breath. Twelve feet by ten, the room was silent and empty. Only the Prophet's saber decorated the sober white walls, hanging in a black leather scabbard above the closed door, a keepsake of glorious moments in the heights of Heaven.

With his free hand, Mohammed stroked his black beard: Aisha had dyed it the day before, as also his long hair. With his rejuvenated appearance, the Prophet felt he was presentable for going humbly off to meet the Creator in the Seventh Heaven.

A slight breeze blew, just enough to ripple slightly the heavy green curtain over the open window. Outside, breaking in on the quiet of the place, a new day had brought with it the uproar of light-hearted children playing in the distance in the streets of the City. Wooden swords in their hands, they ran after elusive enemies who did not exist anywhere but in their imagination.

A terrible twinge of pain in his head caused the Prophet's eyes to shut for a moment.

*Poison.*

He knew he had been poisoned. His instincts did not deceive him. There was a still, small voice inside him that grumbled out that fateful truth to him, ceaselessly posing the same question.

*Who poisoned me?*

The wise little voice knew that he had been the victim, in the past, of an attempted poisoning. That episode had occurred after the battle of Khaybar. A Jewess had put poison on a joint of lamb that she had cooked for him and his friend. She had taken care to put a good dose of the poison in the shoulder of the beast, the Prophet's favorite cut. However, as he had noticed a strange and pungent flavor, Mohammed had spat out the meat, while his friend who had swallowed it down had died from the effects.

*Was it that poison which I had in my mouth that has contaminated my blood?*

Mohammed was not completely sure. He was haunted by a doubt. This was all the stronger because one evening he had surprised Maria the Copt putting some mysterious substance into his tea. It was true that she had been disconcerted and had blushed as she murmured to him that it was a medicinal powder from her own country, with rejuvenating and aphrodisiac properties. Was that really the case? In these hours when his end was nigh, the Prophet was more and more doubtful of it.

When he had seen Maria tipping the product into his tea, he had not for a single second thought that this might be an attempt at poisoning. He had drunk it with enjoyment, feeling that this remedy might be able to correct his vision, removing the dark veil that blurred the exotic beauty and sublime smile of Maria, or of any other attractive woman.

That evening, he should have been with Hafsa, because it was that wife's turn to spend the night with him. However, Hafsa had gone off to visit her father, Omar. She had returned unexpectedly and had been furious on surprising Mohammed in bed with Maria. Seeing Hafsa's black rage, the Prophet had feared that she might take revenge by proclaiming to the four winds the shameful secret of his sexual impotence. To avoid any unfortunate

word slipping out, Mohammed had sworn to her that he would no longer go near Maria.

Incapable of keeping this story to herself, Hafsa had been unable to hold her tongue. The news had spread at lightning speed around the harem, by word of mouth, triggering collective jealousy. The Prophet had very quickly found himself kept at arm's length by his own wives. However, God in person had intervened to sort out this family conflict. He had ordered the promise made to Hafsa to be taken back and his Messenger allowed back into the Copt's arms for as long as he might desire. The angel Gabriel had thus whispered a new recitation to Mohammed which reprimanded his wives for their insubordination, threatening them he would send them away and replace them with much better spouses.

Mohammed had appreciated this help from God.

So, for very nearly thirty nights in a row he had remained in the chamber of the Coptic woman, believing the claims she whispered to him that her remedy must finally have an effect. Unfortunately, all these hopes had come to nothing. After a month spent exclusively with her, drinking cup after cup of her brew, the Prophet had had to face up to the fact that the miraculous medicine promised by Maria was not working and never would.

*Has that remedy by chance accidentally poisoned my blood? Or is it Maria who has deliberately been poisoning me?*

Mohammed grimaced with pain.

How could he have trust in Maria, how could he believe a woman who claimed loud and often that she had borne his child, when they had never had intercourse together?

*What was he to believe?*

Another voice, stronger and more reassuring, echoed in his head. It asked him if in the end it mattered much if his death was from accidental causes or intentional. In truth it did not, it was of no great importance. Only God knew, and if God had told him nothing, it would be because the answer to all these questions was no more than futile. Moreover, Mohammed was now tired of this life, and wanted to join as quickly as he could his wife Khadijah who was waiting for him in Paradise. His work on Earth was now fully finished and his coming death was no bad thing in itself. It

was just a liberation, a reward for all that the Prophet had accomplished for men.

This thought drove away his doubts and the little voice grumbling in his head. Pleasant images took their place before his vacant gaze: those of his last pilgrimage to Mecca. All these places where his ancestors had prostrated themselves, all the idolatrous rites that Mohammed had performed in his youth, though without the whistling, the clapping, or the walking around naked, were now the standard practice in Submission. In the heart of the immense crowd he had been fervently carried shoulder high, and those cries from the past brought warmth back to his shivering barefoot body. That had been the triumphal journey of an ageing Messenger, worn out by years of persecution and endless struggle. He had been surrounded by an aura of splendor, as if a great circle of light had slowly grown less bright, embracing the world of mortals with its calming glow.

*Mecca.*

Henceforth, to mark the end of idolatry, God would no longer tolerate the presence there of any man not a Submitter. He had stipulated this in the Mother of Books. Submission was now firmly established there. In coming years it would grow, like a great tree, its branches yet more numerous crowds that would in their turn clasp with their friendly hands the beneficial shade of the Almighty. These new hands would join the ranks of the army of God that would have to exterminate all the disbelievers.

The war was far from over.

While the Devil had suffered defeat, while Satan could no longer hope to be venerated in this region, he continued have worshipers elsewhere in the world. The age of ignorance must be brought to a close, and Truth must triumph everywhere that the Submitters could set their feet on new lands.

For endless seconds, a terrible migraine froze the Prophet's thoughts. When he came to himself once again, he realized that death was striding quickly toward him.

As if he needed to reassure himself in the face of this fateful event, Mohammed felt a need to take stock of his life briefly.

*On the day of the Last Judgment.*

He had always worked to God's will, and he felt enormous joy at having sacrificed his life for this just cause. From his couch, dreamingly, he contemplated the fruits of his efforts by floating across a sea of faces that proclaimed as with a single voice the oneness of God, who prostrated themselves before the true religion of God, overflowing with floods of love and fervor. In these smiling faces of men and women, he saw the image of their children, and the children of their children who would succeed them, and he hoped that he could make sure that Truth would reach down to them across the ages. He had taught them to pray, to fast and to pay the tribute so that Submission would shine forth. He had rid Mecca of its idols and of the Devil, he had re-established the purity of the Kaaba in order that Submitters could honor God in the temple that Abraham in person had rebuilt with his own hands. He fondly recalled the thirst in the desert, the long wearying marches, the humiliation of mockery, and the suffering of oppression. He had overcome all these terrible trials, all his awful doubts and all his painful losses, with flying colors. In the end, he had accomplished the task Gabriel had given him perfectly. The recitation rang out from every throat, the Mother of Books now dwelled in every head, and God finally commanded the minds of men. Mohammed was now ready to set down his heavy burden of being the Messenger and to set off for the highest of Heavens.

*Paradise*

The Prophet's heart began beating more swiftly as an effect of his excitement. He saw once again the rivers of Paradise, all the infinite delights to be found there, ready to welcome him with open arms, as was his adored wife Khadijah.

*Nothing on the Earth is as valuable as Paradise!*

During His Messenger's life, God had offered him all possible and imaginable earthly treasures. Mohammed had humbly refused them for himself, giving them to the needy. Greatly disconcerting some of his wives, he had distributed his fortune to the poor, throughout his career as Prophet. In fact, at this moment Mohammed had nothing to leave behind him, apart from his white mare, his saber and a plot of land that he was happily bequeathing to travelers.

*No-one can take treasure beyond the tomb.*

Thinking of his tomb, the Prophet unconsciously clenched his fists. He hated the Jews and Christians who had changed the graves of their prophets into sacred prayer houses, worshipping them as much as God.

*Blasphemy!*

At the recommendation of the angel Gabriel, Mohammed had formally forbidden Submitters from considering his tomb as a place of worship. The Prophet must not become the subject of the sort of idolatry that he had combatted all his life. To avoid any temptation to venerate him on the part of Submitters, God had ordered Mohammed to live and to die far from Mecca. The prayers of the faithful should be addressed exclusively to God and in the direction of his House, and they absolutely must not be diverted toward Mohammed in person or toward his dead body. He would thus be buried in the City of the Prophet.

“To die far from Mecca,” murmured the Messenger. “If such is God’s will...”

Coming from nowhere and everywhere at the same time an attractive, deep voice rang out.

“Hence you will die here in Yathrib! Do you not find it strange that God wishes you to end your days in this rat hole? A place so far from Mecca where you were born, where all your ancestors and family died? God really does not seem to appreciate you at all, after everything you did for him and the Kaaba!”

Faint laughter began to echo through the room.

In alarm, Mohammed raised himself on his elbows.

*What voice is that?*

When his haggard eyes finally turned slowly toward the open window and identified through its embrasure the sight of an old man with pearly-white teeth, the Prophet leaped up. He rushed to the door so as to seize his saber that was hanging above it. Weapon in hand, he faced the Sage of Mecca.

It was indeed the elderly man with his white beard and long milky hair who was standing outside the house. With one arm he had pushed aside the thick green curtain, which had fallen over the back of his white tunic. He had leaned one elbow on the wooden

windowsill. With laughter in his blue eyes, he stared boldly at Mohammed.

“What an ungrateful father that God is!” he chuckled. “Or should I say what an ungrateful son? Good question! Besides, tales of fathers and of sons are always complicated, as in any good family.”

The Sage smiled broadly.

“Hence you will die here, because your God has decided that? You know, I often say to myself that if God really exists, we are truly unlucky to have as our creator and father such a perverse assassin, who loves devouring his own children with fire, and enjoys seeing them suffer in Hell or even here on Earth. However, I suppose that it is true, as in your case, that children cannot choose their father. Thus is life!”

The oldster’s eyelids trembled.

“Do you not find it strange that God needs a Messenger like you to pass on his revelations as written in the Mother of Books, when he is omnipotent and almighty, and hence could just as easily make your recitation appear in every man’s mind by simply clicking his fingers? To tell the truth, what do these revelations actually say? God commands us to do this: you must recognize me as your only God and you must obey me. In exchange, I shall protect you, that is, I shall protect you from me and my Hell. To tell the truth, that heavenly father sounds much like a desert bandit demanding our money or our life, while knowing full well he will get our money whatever happens. Hence, thanks to your saber, your God gives us a choice between death, which means the loss of all we have, or life, naturally on condition we pay tribute and lick his thief’s boots. Hence, without any real choice, all those who’ve bowed before the saber you are holding have opted for life, but a life of paying tribute and prostrating themselves. However, in their turn, they want compensation, an immediate reimbursement, a rapid return on their investment, just like a merchant, rather than wait for the Paradise they’re promised. Hence, they attack all those who are not Submitters in order to steal their wealth.”

With a sad look, he shook his head.

“God has forbidden all pillage against other Submitters. They can thus rob only unbelievers. Thanks to that order, tribal

wars will come to an end, and the Arabs will turn outward. You know, a quest for plunder is a powerful motivation for waging wars of conquest. Submission will be propagated for one single real reason: money. Yesterday's enemies will necessarily become the friendly armed hands of tomorrow, the ones that will take the saber in their grasp to recover what your God stole from them. Those robbed in the past will become the robbers of the future in an endless cycle, like the serpent eating its tail. That will continue until there is nothing left to steal, to rape, to kill, or to reduce to slavery on the whole wretched Earth."

His eyes closed, the Sage sighed.

"Your religion is an obsession with the opulence of the next world, the wealth to be found there, but also with the riches that your Submitters can take here and now, by right, from all unbelievers. Plunder becomes the main aim in their lives, well ahead of Paradise. In your recitation, there is a total infatuation with money. That fascination will become the slogan of your Submitters in the future. As they are under an obligation to migrate to new lands to propagate Submission, your Submitters will find themselves isolated. In the places where your Submitters cannot manage to impose themselves in power, the consequence will be submerged generations. Some will passively wait for their lives to end so as to gain access to the luxuries of Paradise. Others will face nothing but frustration, largely because of their own mental and physical idleness, which will lead them to have a total lack of money and women in their lives. Obviously, they will put the blame on others, and not on themselves, or even Submission. They will accuse rich unbelievers of all the ills that beset them. They will start robbing them, since according to your recitation that is perfectly licit and has been since the battle of Badr. Yes, they will steal the property of that society, the "enemy of God", which welcomed them, or which even was their birthplace, and yet they will claim to be the victims, supposed victims who will constantly accuse others of causing all their troubles. Then, when their banditry does not bring them the fortune they hoped for, they will try to destroy the smiles and joy of the society hosting them, through acts of terror, in order to buy their place in the highest of Heavens, weapons in hand."

As if turned to stone, Mohammed listened to the long monologue of the Sage as it went on.

“Yes, those future generations will see things solely in terms of money. They will want to have a life of total leisure as promised in their luxurious Paradise, to receive without making the least effort, to do nothing but to receive everything in return. They will dream of having powerful horses and attractive women to mount during their life. When these Submitters cannot attain these deceptive dreams of wealth, the love which all humans have in their hearts will turn into implacable hatred of all the unbelievers. They will call them selfish and wicked, responsible for the ills of the world. These Submitters will generate hatred in themselves against other humans. Such Submitters will then consider them as no more than valueless objects, whose life can be taken without remorse, since it has not been possible to take their property.”

In the window embrasure, the Sage raised one arm to the sky.

“Your God.”

“You poisoned me!” broke in Mohammed suddenly. “Yes, it must have been you that poisoned me the day we met! What poison did you put in the tea you made me drink that day?”

The Sage leaned forward slightly.

“As always, you hear but you do not listen. As always, you look but you do not see. And as always, you have thoughts but you do not think. Of course you have been poisoned! The poison is secretly circulating in your blood, but it was not I who poisoned you. To tell the truth, I am the only person protecting you. I am the only real friend you have here.”

“You tried to slit my throat with this very saber!”

“I had no choice, because you were refusing to open your eyes. You are like your Submitters: a blind man walking toward a precipice with an endless fall. Your Submitters are totally blinded by your victories, which in their eyes demonstrate the relevance of your recitation. The trouble is that you cannot even see that you are making them march against stronger nations than you. It is true that you will inflict defeats initially, but they will end by taking their revenge. They will reduce you to slaves or vassals. In particular these Jews you attacked: their descendants will reduce

Submitters to servitude. Believe me when I tell you this: those who sow a wind of sabers will reap a desert storm. What you have made the Jews suffer, one day for sure, they will turn back on you, because they also think they have an alliance with a vengeful God, and even exclusivity in this, whatever you may say. The Jews will take revenge, and they will subjugate you in the same way you have subjugated them. Yes, there is no denying it, the Jews whom the Romans drove out of their lands will come back to the country that your Submitters are soon going to colonize with ease. These Jews will drive you out because they too are fanatics worshiping a murderous God, and believe in holy books whose texts are as fallacious as your recitation. When these Jews, being just a tiny minority, rout your vast coalition of Submitter armies, then you will understand that God is not on your side, no more than He is on the side of the Jews. When that defeat occurs in your lands, it will not be a trial sent by God to test believers: it will be the proof that your God does not exist.”

“You are crazy!” broke in Mohammed again. “God exists, I have seen him in ...”

“Moreover what about the Christian Empire that you are attacking!” interrupted the oldster in his turn in a scolding tone. “The Christians will not lag behind. It was not a religion of love that Jesus put on Earth, but a religion as warlike and conquering as yours. In his Gospels, Jesus says that he came not to bring peace on Earth, but a sword. He also orders that his enemies, who did not wish him to reign over them, be brought, and slain before him. He tells his followers go and teach all nations to observe all things he had commanded, saying that those who do not believe shall be damned. Your God assumed that the God of the Christians was just a shepherd for sheep, a God of peace and love. However, your God was mistaken. The God of the Christians is as deadly a warrior as yours. They will fight in wars of religions, they will massacre each other through the intermediary of their believers, in the name of a God that does not exist and has never existed except as an imagination in men’s heads.”

“You are wrong,” growled Mohammed. “There is just one single God.”

“If there is just one God, He has many a face other than your version. Yes, human faces, like mine, which you know.”

“You had better get out of here, before one of the faces I do know comes and finds you here!”

The Sage of Mecca smiled sardonically.

“A face you know?” chuckled the elderly man. “Do you mean Omar, the bloodthirsty killer? Or Othman, the mysterious Jinn? Or maybe Abu Bakr, the sly and devious shadow of God? Or perhaps even Ali, the apprentice puppeteer?”

The old man burst out into a laughter whose peals were like arrows fired into the Prophet’s heart and inflicting grievous wounds. Before he could make any response, the Sage posed a new question.

“Let me guess: you are thinking of Abu Bakr, is that no so? Just imagine, you have even named him your successor! How rash you are!”

Mohammed frowned.

*How did he guess about Abu Bakr? Can he read my thoughts?*

The Prophet had indeed just surmised that Abu Bakr might easily arrive at any minute to ask how he was. All the more so since Mohammed had sent his daughter Aisha away from the house an hour earlier. He had not wanted her to be at his side in the last moments of his life, not wishing her to be present at the sad spectacle of his death and preferring to remain alone at that delicate moment.

A worrying question suddenly came into his mind.

*How can he know that I have named Abu Bakr as my successor, for that matter?*

Mohammed had held a secret meeting with his four friends and designated as successor Abu Bakr. This choice came from his heart, but was also the option indicated to him by the angel Gabriel in one last revelation. For the moment, apart from his friends no-one knew of that decision, which would be officially ratified after his burial by election in a gathering of Submitters and Ansar Helpers.

*So how can he know?*

Mohammed started thinking rapidly. He realized that the Sage of Mecca must certainly have been around in the preceding few days, spying on him. The old man must have seen that the seriously ill Prophet had recommended Abu Bakr for leading prayers in his absence. Mohammed had also publicly praised his friend, implicitly suggesting that he would be the successor to the Messenger of God.

*So all this time the Sage has never stopped spying on me.*

The old man nodded.

“You chose Abu Bakr because he is also the father of your little Aisha. She is your favorite, naturally! Besides, you are in his house, which is where you have chosen to die.”

With his mocking smile, the Sage revealed his white teeth.

“In fact, just where is Aisha? Already in some other man’s arms? Or perhaps I should rather say, yet again in another man’s arms?”

Wrath seized the Prophet in its grasp.

With a roar, he thrust the saber forward to run the insolent man through. The blade met nothing but emptiness and left a hole in the thick green curtain.

Laughter rang out behind the Prophet’s back. He swung round rapidly. The Sage was there, in a corner of the room, looking at him with a mocking smile.

His gaze bewildered, Mohammed could not understand how such a trick could be possible.

*The fever is giving me hallucinations. Or perhaps I am dreaming. None of this can be true. I will awake from this nightmare.*

“You cannot awake from this nightmare, because it is your reality,” chortled the Sage. “The reality of lies that has been built up all around you.”

The Prophet roared again as he rushed at the oldster. Once again, the saber met nothing but emptiness. Its blade plunged an inch or so into the white wall.

“You cannot kill me,” said the Sage back of him. “At least, not while you are still alive.”

Mohammed slowly turned round, leaving the saber stuck in the wall.

“You are the Devil, are you not?” asked his trembling voice.

Two yards away, his arms folded, the Sage shook his head.

“No, far from it, I am not the Devil.”

His hand quivering, the Prophet raised a questioning finger toward him.

“If you are not the Devil, who then are you?”

As if the Sage of Mecca was hesitant to reveal his true name, he remained silent for what seemed interminable seconds.

“You wish to know who I truly am?” he finally asked. “Well then, tell yourself who I am.”

From the old man’s mouth, two syllables sounded forth like thunder, echoing long in the Prophet’s mind.

*hallah...hallah...hallah...*



## 30

# Apocalypse

Two shadows loomed out of the thick mist.

A thin, icy rain continued to fall on the faces of the armed guards patrolling around Sultan's residence.

In the dim light of that misty day, they stopped to take shelter under the long porch supported by columns with Arabesque motifs. Not saying a word, each in turn lit up a cigarette and they smoked in short, quick puffs, admiring a brand-new red Ferrari parked among around thirty cars.

A commanding voice crackled out of a walkie-talkie.

One of the guards replied to the instructions given and the twosome regretfully left their shelter to disappear off into the gray surroundings that enveloped them in a damp mantle.

In the rear of the white Mercedes with tinted windows, Tom had not noticed the brief passage of the two guards.

For him, time had stopped still in its course. He stretched his neck so his blue eyes could stare into the dark eyes of the woman in a niqab sitting to his left. Tom was paralyzed by this sight of Fatima without her veil, her angry face framed by long blond curly hair.

Tom's mind was in a turmoil of various contradictory emotions.

Was it the joy of meeting again, fear of a ghost, or anger at having been deceived that would take the upper hand in his thoughts?

He needed to put a name to the feelings that were gripping him.

“Camilla,” he muttered. “Camilla.”

Because it really was Camilla back from the dead who was sitting next to Tom. She had dyed her long brown locks blond, and her green eyes were hidden by tinted contact lenses turning each iris almost black.

Like a dam suddenly bursting when hit by a surging wave, anger erupted in Tom.

“I put a bullet into my head because of you!” he grumbled.

He pointed to his temple where the black scab from the shot was still visible.

“Oh, yes?” Camilla replied in an aggressive tone. “Anyone might get the impression that you aren’t actually dead. Not like those innocent people that you slaughtered in the marketplace in Kabul. And now, you’ve come all the way here to kill my brother!”

“Your brother is a murderer.”

“And you’re not a murderer?” Camilla interrupted. “Go and tell that to the Afghan families who’re crying over their dead.”

She looked at him, daggers of bitterness in her eyes, and Tom lowered his gaze, touched to the quick. The images of the attack he had perpetrated came back to haunt his mind. The recollection of the little girl with one eye destroyed by a metal shaft wandering along holding her mother’s severed hand blurred his vision.

“I had no choice,” he muttered, as if trying to justify the unjustifiable.

Camilla grimaced.

“There’s always a choice,” she stated. “There’s always a choice.”

She was silent for a moment before speaking again in a voice laden with sadness and held back anger.

“At first, when you killed all those people, I thought that you’d gone crazy. Then, when I saw you here, I thought that you’d come for me, that you’d traced me and worked out that I wasn’t dead. I believed that you could help me to save Charlie. But I was

wrong, you didn't even know I was alive. You've come here just to kill Charlie."

"All the papers said you'd died," Tom protested. "I..."

"You trust newspapers now?" Camilla chipped in sarcastically.

Tom shook his head.

"I was at your funeral, and there was definitely a body in your casket!"

For an instant, Camilla rolled her eyes up toward the roof of the car.

"Yes of course there was a body in my casket! It had to be believable, but it was the body of an unidentified drowned woman. My father has a friend who's a coroner, and he helped us stage it all. He pretended to identify my body formally and the trick had been played. Everyone thought I was dead and buried.

"A death with no return possible."

"No, on the contrary, it wasn't a definitive death. My father had the intention of bringing me back to life when the moment came."

"How do you mean?" queried Tom.

Camilla let out a sigh of exasperation.

"The papers are going to love the story my father has cooked up. They'll be told my head hit the gunwale of my yacht so that I fell in the water and a merchant ship picked me up suffering from amnesia. I was hospitalized in France and I miraculously regained my memory. My father will say he was mistaken when he identified my body, because of the decomposition of the corpse. That's the marvelous Hollywood script we'll play, just the sort of story Americans love. You know very well that the bigger the lie, the better it goes down. It will be a sensation on the television news, especially coming just before the next elections."

Her gaze vacant, Camilla seemed to turn in on herself.

"If it hadn't been for the elections, everything would probably have gone differently."

Tom stared at her in silence.

"What do you mean?" he asked after a moment's pause.

Her dark eyes stared into his.

“Do you want to know what happened? I’ll tell you: you weren’t there when I needed you!”

Her face red, Camilla had shouted out these last few words. She turned her head away and looked down at her knees. For seconds that seemed ages to Tom, she stayed mute, as if lost in memories that she would have preferred to forget. In a wan voice, she finally let loose the thoughts that were tormenting her mind.

“When I was in that clinic where my father forced me to go, I was desperate. There was no way out. One day, he came and saw me in my prison. He had with him a letter from Charlie addressed to me. Charlie wrote me about his conversion to Islam, and the Devil that our father was. He asked me to come and join him as fast as I could, and convert to God’s true religion. He also told me about his mentor Sultan and the future combats he was going to wage against the United States. My father asked me to go and meet Charlie so as to bring him to see reason. He was afraid of the scandal if this got out. My father is going to throw his hat into the ring at the next party convention, and he’s aiming high.”

Camilla’s look wandered over her black-gloved hands.

“At first, I thought of refusing, but my father had too much control over me, and I wanted to get out of that prison. You weren’t there, I had only myself to rely on, and so I had to make my choice. Then again, I realized that I couldn’t just abandon my brother. I had to help him get out of his own prison, he had to be helped to break free of the sect whose clutches he’d fallen into. I didn’t want to come to meet him directly, because I was afraid that the meeting might not lead anywhere. I first of all had to find out why Charlie had become someone different. I took the name Fatima and sneaked in the back way to spy on him. When I saw him and heard him speaking, I realized there was no possible cure for his madness. Charlie is no longer the same person. He’s been brainwashed. But I didn’t want to abandon him, I still had hopes of some “miracle” cure, I hoped he’d become aware by himself of the lunacy of all this and that day I’d be there to help him run away. But the days went by, they became weeks and the weeks became months. The irony of the tale, is that I’ve found myself all alone back in another prison without bars.”

A lump in his throat, Tom nodded.

“Why did you fake your death?” he asked. “That didn’t make much sense.”

Camilla smiled sadly.

“If my death was faked, it was because of you. I realized you’d stop me meeting Charlie because it would be a risky business. I also knew that even if I told you nothing, you’d have ended up finding me, wherever I’d gone, and that could have put the whole plan for saving Charlie in jeopardy. I told my father you’d never stop looking for me unless I was dead. My father saw that a death like that would win him some sympathy from the electors and put him in the spotlight of the media when I came back to life. That’s why he organized my decease.”

Now she had put into words the troubles she had lived through Camilla’s initial anger had given way to a sort of fatalism mixed with bitterness. She remained silent for over a minute before turning a questioning gaze on Tom.

“What’s Charlie doing at this moment? You said something about an underground bunker.”

Tom explained the situation as Camilla listened attentively. He also told her about the infiltration mission assigned to him by Alan, he confided in her what had really happened during the bomb attack in Kabul, the choices he had had to make in order to get close to Charlie, so as to try to help him against everyone. He admitted that her twin brother could not be saved from himself, and was on a route from which there was no return. Tom then gave her full details of the attacks that Charlie was masterminding in the control room.

“Unfortunately, that’s not all,” he added as a conclusion, “He’s also got the means to set off a third world war if he’s not stopped.”

With regret, Camilla nodded her head slowly.

“You’re right,” she admitted. “We can’t let him go on. Too many lives are at stake.”

She thought quickly, then asked a question.

“Do you really believe that the only way of stopping all this is to have the bunker bombed?”

“Yes, it’s the only solution. I’ll call Alan and he’ll send a missile to this very spot.”

“But do you realize that the whole building will go up? Have you thought about the girls in the harem who are here? Then, too, I think we may still be able to save Charlie.”

Tom’s eyebrows wrinkled in a frown.

“How could that be?”

“There may be another solution,” Camilla proposed, “an alternative in which Charlie doesn’t die.”

With a confident voice, she quickly put forward her plan.

“I’ll go down into the bunker to get Charlie. He’ll be so surprised to see me that he’ll swallow any old lie that I care to tell him. Then I’ll bring him hear and you’ll knock him out. You’ll stick him in the trunk of the car, I’ll give the girls a discreet warning to get out of here, we’ll head for the hills ourselves and you can blow this wretched place to smithereens! What do you think?”

She hopefully cast a pleading gaze at Tom. He closed his eyes for an instant to visualize how feasible the script might be. At first sight, the daring plan seemed perfectly workable, as long as the women in the harem were given no warning. As for them, Tom should be able to convince Camilla at the last moment, when Charlie was in the trunk of the Mercedes. Naturally, Tom’s preference would have been to knock Camilla out, not Charlie, and to take her off unconscious far away from Sultan’s palace. Nevertheless, she would never forgive him for such treachery. In his mind, Tom was dreaming of a fresh start with Camilla, and he did not want Charlie’s death to spoil this new prospect for his love-life.

“Okay, this is what we’ll do, but you’ll have to be quick...”

He explained where the secret keypad for the elevator down to the bunker was. He gave her the details of the route she would have to follow in order to get all the way to Charlie.

“Right, understood,” she said in a determined tone. “I’ll be as fast as I can. I’ll pay attention to my limbic reactions when I’m lying to him, just as you taught me.”

She gave him a knowing wink. Tom smiled back.

When she had spoken about limbic reactions, Camilla was alluding to the art of detecting lies that Tom had taught her.

Taking long hours to make it all clear, he had told her that when people lie there is an internal conflict in the brain. This is made up of three distinct and separate systems: the reptilian brain for instincts, the limbic brain where memories meet, and the neocortex which is the base for intelligence. When someone lies the limbic brain sets off a chain of involuntary reactions, because this part of the brain where the memories of past events are stored feels uneasy about the difference between the information it is passing on to consciousness and the data being falsified and spoken by the liar's neocortex brain.

At this violation of memory, the limbic brain sends out an alarm signal that the reptilian brain interprets as a potential danger. The reptile brain prepares the body for flight through more or less visible physiological reactions, like a speeded up heart rate, sweating or cold hands caused by blood being drawn back from other extremities so as to provide a rapid abundant flow to the legs, thus permitting running.

To calm the limbic brain when memories were misused, the subconscious turned on a reassuring self-massage almost unnoticed by the conscious mind. This could take various forms: rubbing a part of the body, repeatedly touching the face or the hair with one hand, fiddling with some object or increasing the rate of blinking immediately after the lying words had been uttered.

When Camilla was telling tall stories, she tended to lick her lower lip with the tip of her tongue. Lying made her mouth dry, and she had an automatic need to hydrate it.

To detect lies, Tom had advised Camilla to give priority to observing such non-verbal behaviors, because people were more conscious of what they were saying than of what they were doing. He had told her to beware of the fear of the policeman that made honest people blush or lower their eyes, but also to take account of the sort of characteristics typical of liars. The positioning of arms or their movements were also a source of reliable information. If the liar did make any move, the upper limbs still tended to remain pressed against the side of the body or crossed. Moreover, an extravert moved the arms less when lying than when telling the

truth, while for an introvert the opposite was true. There were times when the only visible limbic reaction was a return to looking human and serene, because when lying the person turned into a sort of rigid robot with an unmoving face, reciting a text that was often improvised for the emergency.

It was sometimes difficult to decode the various self-massages that betrayed a lie, especially when every personality tended to include some individual nervous tic or another. People might easily have a habit of touching, say, their noses without for that reason being in the midst of telling untruths. To sort out which were tics and which limbic reactions, one good method was to ask some neutral question which would not elicit a lie. If tics appeared, these must be taken into account so as to distinguish them from any future self-messaging. Better still, if the correct answer was known to a question which the person was going to lie about, the non-verbal reaction that followed would be a limbic Achilles' heel that would unmask all the lies they told afterward.

When seeking the truth, Tom also liked to observe the eyes, because with one glance people could betray themselves.

He had explained to Camilla that the eyes reflected the making up of a lie in real time. It was like a short-circuit triggering a failure in an electrical system. Believing it could wander with impunity around its creative mind to build up a mythical story from odds and ends, the conscious mind set off a visual deviation that made the eyes swivel to the left. Similarly, when the conscious mind wanted to consult its memory accessed through the opposite hemisphere, the eyes inevitably moved to the right. This unmasked a probable lie, because someone who looked to the left was highly likely to be creating a fictional image, rather than remembering one. In contrast, there was some guarantee of truth if an individual looked rightward, as this indicated more chance they were remembering rather than inventing. That human characteristic was valid for the great majority of the right-handed, and it was very often inverted in left-handers.

Nonetheless, in this open book betraying the workings of thought, reading the eyes was not a precise science, since various factors could impede the decoding of this secret of sight.

Tom knew that invented stories inevitably ended up by being filed in the memory like a film seen in a movie theater. A liar's eyes would turn to the right to retrieve them as if they were memories and not inventions, when in fact they were simply lies prepared long in advance. To add to the confusion, the minds of some people could start by wandering around in their imaginations in order to set off the recall of memories without this meaning they were making up a lie. Just before they accessed the real images from their memories they could go to the imaginary, causing the eyes to swivel from right to left in the way typical of a liar.

Professional storytellers also knew how to guard themselves against the traps the brain laid for them. By turning their head to the left, it meant that someone opposite them would see their eyes looking fixedly to the right, allowing them invisible and unlimited access to their imagination. There was also a need to be distrustful of people staring us straight in the eyes. This was because when lying most people observed their victims carefully to see if they were swallowing their lies. A direct frank gaze was thus no pledge of sincerity, and it was necessary to make sure what was said was honest truth by asking appropriate and even unsettling questions so as to trigger revealing movements of the eyes.

"I'll be as quick as I can," Camilla said. "Keep your eyes peeled and be on the lookout, because the guards often come this way."

Her gloved hand stroked his long beard.

"I prefer you without it," she commented with a small smile.

Readjusting her veil over her face, she opened the door, moved out with cat-like agility and gently closed the Mercedes after her.

Tom would have liked to hug her and give her a lengthy kiss. Time was too short for that, unfortunately.

A strange thought suddenly came over him as if it were a timeless flash of light.

He had the feeling he had seen Camilla for the last time.

Tom shook his head to drive this unhealthy vision from his mind.

\*  
\*   \*   \*

A heavy silence reigned in the C.I.A. command center. Relayed through a central loudspeaker system, only the voices of broadcast newsreaders could be heard.

In the large room with its brightly lit whiteness, the dozen operators sat before their computer consoles, their faces all turned toward the giant screen. Just in front of it, Mike and Alan stood side by side. The Afro-American in his fifties was incessantly and anxiously stroking his shaven head with one hand. The Mossad agent in contrast seemed to have been turned to stone by the horrible spectacle being broadcast live on television.

After the “bombing” of Jerusalem and Paris, the news of an Islamic offensive, taking the form of a swarm of suicide aircraft, had spread like wildfire throughout television, radio and social networks. Foreseeing terrorist operations on a scale never before equaled, television channels all round the world had immediately deployed their troops of reporters and camera operators. There was no censorship while photos and video footage taken by professionals and amateurs of the attacks of that Friday thirteenth were repeatedly shown in news channels as they arrived at the various different editorial teams.

Reporters churned out information as fast as they received it through their earbuds or saw them on their Teleprompters, announcing in somber tones that in just thirty minutes, no fewer than fifteen aircraft had crashed onto major cities.

Rome had been the third city hit. The Pope’s headquarters was now no more than an open wound in the heart of the Eternal City. It was belching forth a thick black cloud of smoke that rose into the empty sky.

One minute later, London had been the fourth victim of these air strikes. A video filmed on a smartphone showed how a twin-engined jet flew overhead with a growing howl from its motors. Then came the terrible explosion drowning out the last

moments of noise from its jets as it crashed unopposed into the clock tower, now called Elizabeth Tower, of the Palace of Westminster. The fifteen tons or so of Big Ben would never again stir into motion to mark the passage of time.

Death had continued its inevitable progress in the shape of five Airbus planes that had come together in the skies over Moscow, then plunged as one onto their target in a deafening symphony of jet engines. The huge triangular fortress of the Kremlin where this squadron had crashed was now no more than a pile of rubble studded with red hot pieces of metal and releasing dense smoke. Its high towers had been destroyed, its wall was pierced by a gaping gap, and Saint Basil's Cathedral had been brought to the ground, the proud colored domes that had sparked the admiration of tourists were scattered in fragments all over Red Square. This, itself, now looked like a lava flow, where a burning mass mingled bits of debris and of people.

Way across the planet, the great power of America had not been spared, either. Skyscrapers had been the targets of a cloud of aircraft that had shattered their glass and metal superstructures, as well as the dreams of citizens, some of them still asleep, in the fading darkness of these great cities.

For the moment, fighters from the Air Force were crisscrossing the American skies to as to shoot down any commercial flight deviating from its course. Above Washington, according to reporters on site, combat planes were patrolling to protect the White House from any potential attack.

Nevertheless, to add confusion to the existing chaos, the air authorities in a good number of countries had given the order to all their aircraft to land at the nearest airport. This attempt at a remedy made matters worse, since almost all airplanes had turned aside from their initial planned route. In this great muddle that was bound to last for some hours, the time needed for all these various landings, it was impossible to know which planes had not been hijacked, and which were heading deliberately and unhindered toward civil or military targets.

Looking at the screen with a vacant stare, Alan was lost in his thoughts.

He was wondering if all the pilots in those hijacked planes were really helpless victims, or whether some of them were kamikazes who had been infiltrated and then patiently waited for their time to go over to the attack. Among them, there might be sleeper agents who had merged in with these unbeliever societies, authorized to adopt their vices. To go below the radar of the C.I.A., even though they really loved death more than life, they might have pretended to live life to the hilt by going out on the town in the company of disbeliever friends, on the arm of easy women, and at the wheel of luxury cars. Who could really be sure of this? The truth only came out into the light when they let fall the mask of the part they had been playing, and moved into the last act of the drama. The families of terrorists like these were never willing to believe this truth, not seeing that they had been taken in like everyone else by this artful dissimulation. They claimed that their angelic kamikazes were normal, enjoying sport and girls like any other kid on the block, and that they even drank alcohol. Their families said that they simply had to have gone crazy, without ever pointing the finger at the contents of the Koran which ordered the ruse of war called *taqiya*, applicable also to these families.

From his experience, Alan knew that any salamalaikum was potentially a sleeper agent adept at this *taqiya*, a practice recorded in the chapter “The Cow” that ordered duplicitous misrepresentation of true thoughts when in the presence of a non-Moslem. To attain final victory and see the triumph of an Islamic Earth, as long as the situation was not favorable for taking power, salamalaikums were thus authorized by God to use lying, cheating and even treachery. This *taqiya* gave them a “divine” right to pretend to follow the rules of institutions in the countries they were eating away from the inside, while waiting as they spread Islam slowly but surely by means of the wombs of their women and the childish brains conditioned into believing without reserve all in the Santa Claus tales in the Koran.

That *taqiya* was to be found in all layers of society, up to the very highest.

A recollection stirred in Alan’s memory.

A month back, when tracking an Islamic terrorist who seemed to have gone to ground in Paris, Alan had happened to

attend a government seminar on the prevention of radicalization. The first speaker had been given the task of presenting Islam to the audience. Alan had jumped in his seat as he heard all the lies that he had poured out.

The worst was the claim that no verse in the Koran ordered the killing of apostates, because this command was taken from hadiths not recognized by Islam, so that terrorists were going badly astray when they took it literally. Rather like a Roman Catholic making mock of Protestant dogmas, this salamalaikum had derided some Islamist certainties, without questioning his own beliefs at all. Employing the art of *taqiya* with verve, this speaker had even gone so far as to deny that the word “Islam” means “Submission”, and had given it a far more idyllic translation on the lines of “putting one’s trust in God”, or even “looking for God” or “being at peace with oneself”.

This covert agent of proselytism had used the word “revelation” rather than “meeting” when referring to the fable of the first contact between the Prophet and the angel Gabriel. Besides, he had invariably designated Mohammed by the term “Prophet”, thus revealing that he was a follower of the Islamic sect, a bit like an undercover Nazi spy betraying himself by systematically calling Adolf Hitler by his glorious title of “Führer”.

So as to reel in potential victims for con tricks with varying religious beliefs, this crypto salamalaikum had not hesitated to say that Buddha and even all the Greek philosophers could be considered by Islam as prophets in their own right. He then segued into the golden age of Islamic civilization with its eminent scholars like Averroes.

Alan knew that if science and philosophy had flourished on Moslem soil during the first half of the Middle Ages, it was not because of Islam. Quite the contrary, it was despite Islam. There was not one Moslem philosopher, not a single Moslem scholar who had escaped religious violence. During that period, persecution had been only a little stronger than the thirst for discoveries, and a rationalist tradition had still been alive. Islamic sciences had been based on the works of Greek Antiquity. Moslem scholars had simply had the merit of preserving and transmitting Greek or Hindu knowledge in spite of the contradictions in the

Koran, and this knowledge could well have been lost if they had not done so. Later, though, under the auspices of a flourishing Koran, intolerance and fanaticism had definitively retaken the top position, winning the battle in favor of obscurantism. It is true that the Catholic Church had also put immense difficulties in the way of science in the Middle Ages, but it had not strangled it completely to death, as Moslem theology had done. Giving Islam credit for Averroes and so many other illustrious thinkers, when they had had to spend most of their life in prison, in hiding or in disgrace, when their books had been burned and their writings pitilessly censored by the religious authorities was like trying to assign to the Inquisition the glory for Galileo's discoveries and all the scientific developments from them that it had been unable to suppress, despite its best efforts.

In the final analysis, for salamalaikums nothing of worth had been lost, since that science was of no use in the ultimate aim of Islam, which was to serve God. So, parents continued to teach religious Submission to their children, thinking they were handing on to them the greatest of inheritances and the most precious of treasures: Paradise. In his novel *The Sage of Mecca*, Tom had written that Moslems believed they were being good parents and were convinced they were saving their offspring from Hell thanks to Islam. In fact, they were passing on a poison that threw their children into an earthly Hell. It made miserable the one life they had by turning them into slaves at the service of the book composed by a depraved, manipulative and violent bandit.

Thanks to his Koran that orders the beating of disobedient mothers, when children sought guidelines from their parents they learned culturally that violence was the first solution for social problems, especially when they saw the all-powerful patriarch resort to his fists at the slightest occasion. When they grew up, believing they had heaven-sent truth, convinced they were entitled to all the rights of a dominant male, they too used this violence as a response to any difficulties they met, so there was a cycle of generations who were ultra-aggressive, particularly toward *kuffar* or women.

Women were, moreover, their first victims.

They suffered sexual aggressions which they eventually hid under a silken mask, hoping to protect themselves from their brutal menfolk. Using their faith as a pretext, they tried to hide the secret of the rapes they underwent under layers of deceptive clothing. Hiding the shame of this sexual abuse under a veil of religion that deceived only the ignorant, they were no more than armies of phantoms with tormented bellies, wandering spirits with a past branded with a red-hot iron.

His mind lost in a sea of thought, Alan remembered a Jewish friend of his that had been captured years before by an Islamist group. Once she had been freed, his friend told him that the leader of the group had abuses her sexually, and had told her that by raping her he was bringing himself closer to God. Who on Earth could spew out such a horrid thought unless he had read in the Koran the verses explaining that Allah gave his followers women and slaves as a gift? Who on Earth could believe he was acting legally in this way if he had not learned the religious dogmas that stated he had a legitimate right to do it?

Only religions could convince men they were doing good when committing monstrous acts.

Human barbarity, it is true, has always existed. Nevertheless, after the arrival of monotheistic religions, and especially Christianity, barbarity had been outrageously perpetrated in the name of God. People were tortured or murdered no longer for criminal reasons, but only for their own good, for their salvation, the supposed salvation of their souls. As for Islam, its fanatical believers did exactly the same through divine obligation, since Allah the All-Powerful Master of the Universe was unable to kill off infidels simply by giving them a heart attack at a distance, so he had delegated to his men the task of slaughtering other men, so that he himself could then roast them in Hell for all Eternity.

All of that was undeniably grotesque, but made perfect sense to the salamalaikums. As Tom had so accurately written in his book, Moslems had the logic of a schizophrenic, and just like those psychotics who did not realize that for other people they were madmen, the true believers did not know that they were dangerous for everyone else. Tom had written that when

schizophrenics' obsessions become a menace to society, when they start wanting to slit the throats of all those around them because they take them for demons in human shape, their liberty had to be restricted for the good of all. Even if the irrational lunacy of these believers might be covered by freedom of thought, that same freedom was not given to the crazy people shut up in lunatic asylums. Tom asked the question whether the same approach should be taken with religions. Should not their dangerous schizo-religious fanatics be prevented from wandering freely around in the streets of modern societies, so as to avoid a pandemic of the God Virus, that would turn healthy minds into the whipping boy of these demented extremists?

For Alan, the answer was obvious.

Their religion was a plague, a mental disease which made them proud and arrogant, leaving them impervious to any argument, any truth. They defended it tooth and nail, despite all the facts, and regardless of all proofs. There was no possibility of any sort of questioning it. That was the reason that they were particularly dangerous for people who were not suffering from their infection.

Sadly for humanity, it was these demented believers who had come out on top in the battle for true knowledge. They had seized the control of the world of reason and the doors of the lunatic asylums.

So, those who were the real crazies continued to wander around in the cities of the world, without their lunatic obsession with God ever coming to an end. They went on programming alarm calls on their telephones so that they would remember, not to take some treatment for their malady, but on the contrary a top-up dose of the infection through their five daily prayers. This kept the evil alive in them, leaving them with that mysterious little smile on the corner of their lips that seemed to brighten up their day.

Alan refocused on the giant screen where pictures from the television news were being relayed live.

If a kamikaze was at the controls of any of the hijacked aircraft, Alan would have been sure to recognize him immediately at a glance. In many cases of mass killers, despair was what drove them to act. In contrast, for the majority of Islamic terrorists it was

the hope of getting something better, something divine. They were not depressed when perpetrating their slaughters. Quite the contrary, they smiled as they killed, and that huge difference could be seen at once.

When working as a field agent, Alan had been present, a hood concealing his head, had been present a hundreds of searches in the homes of families of terrorists. For months Alan had been intrigued by the slight grins these salamalaikums always seemed to wear. Puzzled, he had finally interrogated a prisoner who had told him the reason for these smiles: Jews were all going to go to Hell, while Moslems would go to Paradise. Thus, they could put up with anything, a smile on their lips, since those harassing them would end up in a Gehenna of fire, tortured for the rest of Eternity, while they, the noble Submitter believers, would enjoy the Paradise of Allah, putting an end to the Hell on Earth of their lives.

“Oh God!”

Several operators had cried out in shock at the same time.

From New York, a television camera had just shown a Boeing crashing into the Statue of Liberty. The brief clip was being played as a loop on the giant screen. With a spurt of flame, the proud copper lady was chopped in two, the upper part disintegrating simultaneously with the airliner. Like a heavy rain in the dawn the assorted debris splattered down into the calm waters of the Hudson River, pock-marking its surface as if the end of the world had come.

As if hypnotized by this almost unreal vision, Mike mechanically put his powerful hand on Alan’s shoulder.

“Hasn’t your undercover agent called you yet?” the regional director of the C.I.A. inquired, his face grave and his jaw clenched.

“No, still no word,” Alan replied.

“So you really have no way of contacting Thomas Anderson?”

“No, I already explained that. Thomas doesn’t have a telephone so as not to risk blowing his cover. I can’t ...”

Alan paused in mid-sentence.

An idea had suddenly come to him.

Angry with himself, he saw how he had been stupid. Why had he not thought of it earlier? His fist clenched in annoyance with himself, he pulled his phone out of his pocket and rapidly punched in a number.

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With a worried air, Tom sat in the back of the white Mercedes, looking at the telephone he had found next to the gearshift. The thought of calling Alan bubbled up in his mind.

He knew that over two hundred planes from various different airlines were at this moment flying under Charlie's control. They were striking their primary or alternate targets with deadly force. So, by his estimate, every passing second meant that one more person died in the world because of his inaction.

Nonetheless, Tom had no choice. He could not contact Alan for the moment. He had to wait for Camilla to come back. Even if he had had to await her for a thousand years, seeing all of humankind destroyed one after another, second after second, he would have bided his time.

That was the decision he had taken a little earlier, the resolution of a soulless monster, but which any person with a heart would also have chosen.

Tom slipped the telephone into the ample pocket of his white tunic. Through the tinted window he stared at the outside world, where the mist was still veiling the daylight with its thick gray mantle.

What was Camilla doing? Why was she taking so long to come back with Charlie? Had everything gone as she had foreseen?

These questions with no answer jostled in his head and he began to feel anxious. He should not have let Camilla go on her own. It would have been more sensible to go with her to find Charlie, as he now realized. He had allowed the joy of getting her back to cloud his judgment, and that had been a mistake.

After a moment's reflection, Tom took another decision.

He could not just stay there doing nothing. He had to go to meet Camilla.

The moment he put his hand on the door handle to get out of the vehicle, a series of explosions and shots burst out in the distance.

Tom could not hold back a curse.

“*Scheiße.*”

He scrambled hastily out of the Mercedes and listened intently. The rattle of automatic weapons seemed to be coming from the main entrance to the residence. Tom ran toward the door leading into the palace, then continued sprinting along the lengthy, broad white marble corridor with its subdued lighting.

Reaching a T-shaped intersection, he turned right and found himself face to face with Jawad. On seeing him, Jawad’s face broke into a smile which attempted to be welcoming. Suddenly, this smile revealing his rotten teeth became a grimace of hatred as he shouted an order in English.

“Get down! Hit the deck!”

Tom instinctively threw himself to the floor, rolled over quickly and took cover behind a silver column to his left.

Jawad’s angry finger had just pressed the trigger of the Kalashnikov that he had been carrying slung over his shoulder. A flood of fire poured out of the icy muzzle. From the other end of the corridor, weapons replied, their bullets hissing past in a symphony intended to be mortal.

Jawad leaped to his left to take cover behind the column opposite Tom’s. Jawad resettled his round eyeglasses with their tinted lenses on his long, twisted nose, and tiny dark eyes stared at the bottom of his white tunic that was turning red. He put his hand to his belly for an instant, and when he took it away his bloodstained palm revealed that he had been seriously hit.

“It’s the end for me, my brother,” he murmured, turning his wan face toward Tom. “Carry on the fight in the name of the Prophet, *salla Allah ‘alayhi wa salam*. We’ll see each other in Paradise, *insh’Allah.*”

He threw the Kalashnikov to the floor, between himself and Tom.

“I surrender,” he shouted out in English. “Don’t shoot!”

From an inside pocket of his robe, he took out a grenade and pulled the pin. He raised one arm in the air. Hiding the bomb behind his back, he walked slowly along the corridor.

Tom risked a rapid glance.

Twenty paces away, in single file, there were five hooded men in light blue fatigues, wearing helmets and armored visors typical of Special Forces. They were aiming their assault rifles at Jawad.

Unexpectedly, he rushed toward them.

“*Allahu akbar!*” he shrieked. “*Allahu akbar.*”

In a rattle of shots, the elite police opened fire, and their bullets cut Jawad down. An instant later, a ball of fire swallowed up his body and the light was extinguished as the devastating blast wave of the grenade in such a confined space did its damage. A fire alarm was triggered and howled out deafening decibels.

In the half darkness, Tom rubbed his tortured ears. Before the cloud of dust enveloped him, he grabbed Jawad’s Kalashnikov and headed back off toward the elevator that led to the bunker.

Running at top speed, Tom managed to get some thirty paces along the corridor. He halted suddenly. Running in the opposite direction from the other end of the corridor where there was still lighting, two armed guards were heading toward him. They recognized Tom and gave him a friendly wave as they continued forward, weapons in hand.

To their left, the corridor had a branch heading off at a right angle. As they went past this opening, some fifteen feet wide, they paid no attention to what might be there, their sight blurred by the white cloud of smoke released by Jawad’s grenade.

That was their fatal mistake.

A short burst of bullets hit their legs, and they fell heavily to the floor. One of the guards screamed in pain, while the other tried to aim his Kalashnikov at these police that he had not spotted. They did not leave the threat unpunished: precise shots hit the heads of the two wounded men, which exploded, sending jets of blood back of them.

The howling of the fire alarm covered the sound of his steps as Tom cautiously approached the bifurcation where the guards had just met with their deaths. He glanced briefly around the angle of the wall to the right. Barely thirty feet away, along either side of the corridor, two files were advancing, five men in each. To halt their progress, Tom fired a burst in the air, and rain of plaster fell from the ceiling onto the corpses of the guards, dusting them with a white shroud.

He put his back to the wall, and took the seconds needful to analyze the situation, because it seemed particularly critical. Tom was stuck, being unable to get across without being fired at. What would now be the best tactical choice to get to the elevator quickly? Should he make a break for it, at the risk of being wounded, or should he head back so as to find another way through? On the horns of this dilemma, he stared at the cloud of dust that seemed to be settling a little. Tom did not see the arrival of the cat-like figure who was running along the same route as the dead guards.

“Tom!” cried a female voice. “Tom!”

He turned his head.

Wearing her black niqab, Camilla was standing fifteen feet from him, just at the opposite angle of the corridor, watching him with her dark eyes.

Relieved to see her safe and sound, Tom was on the point of telling her above all not to move an inch, when Camilla lifted her veil with her gloved hands.

His disappointment was evident on Tom’s face. Opposite him, it was not Camilla who had just called out his name, but Fatima the C.I.A. spy. She looked exactly like the photo of her that Alan had shown him in Jerusalem. The young woman, with her whitish skin and a deceptively Eurasian appearance, tapped the watch on her wrist.

“There are just ten minutes left!” she said loudly in French. “We must leave at once!”

“What are you talking about?” he asked, also shouting to be heard over the racket of the fire-alarm siren.

Fatima pointed a finger at the ceiling.

“Planes are coming. They’ll bomb everything. Alan rang me a moment ago to ask if I’d seen you. When I told him I’d seen you in the movie lounge, he realized that if you were still here this had to be where Charlie’s headquarters was to be found. Alan gave orders for everything to be flattened. We’ve barely time to get out.”

Tom hurriedly stuck his hand into the ample pocket of his tunic to get the telephone he had found in the Mercedes. He had to contact Alan to tell him to hold off the air attacks immediately. His hand met just emptiness.

Tom swore.

The phone must have fallen out when he had thrown himself to the ground.

“Call Alan,” he shouted to Fatima. “Tell him that there’s no need to bomb this place. The police are here already. I’ll take them to the bunker and that will be an end of it.”

Fatima shook her head.

“That won’t put a stop to things. The police and judges in this country are corrupt. Even if Sultan and Charlie are arrested now, they’ll let them escape from prison and start over, I know it. They can’t be allowed to live.”

As she had been shouting out her point of view, Fatima had begun to edge backward a few steps. She put her veil back over her face and suddenly turned round.

Tom watched that black ghost running away along the white corridor. That was the last thing he saw.

A stun grenade burst at his feet, and the blast of the explosion flung him to the ground. In his buzzing head, battered and bruised, time stopped still. When Tom more or less regathered his wits, he found himself in dark and noisy surroundings. He tried to talk, but no sound came from his mouth. After many seconds, he realized he was lying on the floor, tightly bound, blindfolded and with a strip of gaffer tape soundly sealing his mouth.

To try to free himself from his bonds, Tom wriggled in all directions. Appearing as if from nowhere, powerful hands held him immobile, so he could not make the slightest gesture. Paralyzed in this way, it was useless to try to shout out all his

annoyance or to try to give them a warning shout that their fate was coming close at supersonic speed. No-one was interested in what he might have to say. Not one enlightened agent seemed to want to understand the crucial knowledge that would make all the difference between life and death.

Powerless, Tom was no longer anything more than a deaf, blind, mute creature, half out of his mind because of the dreadful fate that he knew was about to strike them. His saving rage remained invisible to the eyes of the men busy around him.

Coming from nowhere and from everywhere at the same time, a still small voice rang out in Tom's mind, an almost child-like voice, quiet and reassuring. It muttered to him that he should stop resisting and just let himself go. Everything would soon be over and a new world would open up to him, a world where he would meet Camilla, a world no longer knowing hatred or sadness, where time would not be what it seemed any more. Intoxicated by that voice, Tom felt strangely well, and he ceased his inner struggle, as if already leaving that harsh, heavy body that had been his prison, in this world of the crazy. High on the euphoria-inducing adrenalin that his brain was triggering to mitigate the conflagration consuming him in the face of the lethal end that was coming, Tom did not see how death seized him. After the final countdown, he was instantaneously evaporated to fly away in the shape of dust carried by a cataclysm worthy of the end of days that was swallowing up everything it met in its way.

High above in the sky, a stealth bomber had soared over the veil of cloud to release the four deep-penetration "bunker buster" missiles that released the fires of the apocalypse on that unwitting ground.



## **First Commandment: Thou Shalt Immunize Thyself against the God Virus**

**In nature, biological viruses are made up of a fragment of genetic code. This acts as a parasite in a host cell and diverts its resources so as to make sure of its own propagation. In identical fashion, contained in “sacred books”, religious viruses are made up of a dogmatic code that acts as a parasite of societies and individuals so as to spread them as widely as possible in the shape of self-reproducing cultural entities.**

**Some biological viruses modify the behavior of their hosts, the better to make sure of their proliferation. For instance, the rabies virus causes dehydration in the infected animal to encourage it to bite, which allows direct transmission to others. Religious viruses do nothing different when in order to spread their madness to others they prescribe conversion through violent or suicidal measures.**

**Biological viruses undergo mutations from time to time, and exchange genetic material with other viruses. These mutations help them acquire enhanced virulence and resistances, so as to invade new bodies. In the self-same way, religious viruses build themselves up from fragments of other cults, undergoing mutations that heighten their virulence and capacity to propagate themselves. The One True God, clinically termed the “God Virus”, represents such a mutation from tribal cults. The virulence conferred by this mutation is**

that it gathers tribes into a vast army, capable of conquering new territories.

It is particularly difficult to immunize oneself against this God Virus, because for many among us it is extremely hard to admit that God does not exist. God is just a human invention, a scaffolding built up of successive impostures motivated by political projects, like those of King Josias or of Mohammed.

By their very nature, all religions are ignoble, as they consists of an exploitation of human weaknesses for partisan ends, under the pretense of helping men, or even of saving them from themselves. In reality, their God is nothing else but an egotistical parasite virus living on the lifeblood of people, reducing them to submissive slaves used to bolster its political power.

If the creation of such a political God may have had some usefulness in the past for the societies where it was a parasite, at the present day, it is completely obsolete, thanks to the invention of lay democracy. Having won independence from religions, human institutions can replace any sort of God to great advantage, because they can overthrow the taboos of blasphemy in favor of freedom of speech, can transform “divine” unchanging laws into laws that are voted on and can be annulled, and they convert obligatory superstitions into freedom of conscience.

Alas, institutions and politicians are also infected by the God Virus, so our representatives or our defenders can be contaminated, and turn themselves into judge, jury and prosecutor all in one. For the terrible blasphemy of having written this book, I am fully aware that they will allow me to be condemned by a deadly fatwa.

Nevertheless, do we not all die some day?

We can do as millions of people do, and wait for that death quietly in our beds, a blanket over our face to hide our fear of taking action. Nevertheless, for the future of our children we must get over such fears, and realize that the only life that makes any sense out of our death is a life of truth.

In that way, we can win healthy recognition from future free generations.

**Alas for humanity, such a tomorrow is uncertain. The God Virus dominates the world at present, and those working to provide a vaccine against it risk prison for crimes of sedition, treason or defamation, if indeed the punishment is not confinement in a psychiatric asylum or even burning at the stake. This is like the pressure put on Galileo for merely declaring that the Earth is a sphere that travels around the Sun and is full of sick people.**

*Extract from the novel "The Sage of Mecca" by Thomas Anderson.*



## 32

### hallah

*hallah...hallah...hallah...*

In Mohammed's mind this strange name resounded like thunder, raising an echo that seemed to have neither beginning nor ending.

“Those are the two syllables by which I make myself known by,” said the Sage of Mecca. “Moreover, you will understand the deep significance of the name quite shortly. For the moment, though, let me tell you a little story by opening up a part of you to yourself.”

The elderly man with his long tunic and white beard sat cross-legged on the floor covered in turquoise tiles. He gestured with his hand to the Prophet to sit as well. He hesitated for a few seconds. He briefly glanced back to where his saber was stuck in the white wall of the room.

*If I cannot kill him, I may as well hear the tale of this mysterious being.*

His body shivering, Mohammed sat facing the strange visitor, who gave him a friendly smile. With a deep, warm voice he began his tale.

“This little story that your God has concocted is the work of a man from Mecca, the work of a man from the desert. This man from the desert traveled to many countries. He saw a danger spreading wherever his legs took him: the Christians and their fascinating book. He realized that some day, sooner or later, the pilgrims that made Mecca prosperous would go exclusively to that

other Holy City, Jerusalem. That day would see the end of Mecca. However, what could the man from the desert do against the power of the God of the Christians? Nothing. At least, he believed that until ...”

The Sage turned his blue eyes for a moment toward the open window where the thick green curtain was flapping gently in the light breeze.

“One day, the Christian danger swooped brutally down upon Mecca, in the shape of an army that had come to destroy the sanctuary rivaling Jerusalem. That Christian army had elephants in its vanguard. A rain of rocks heated white hot poured down on that force which quickly retired in the face of these projectiles miraculously falling from the sky. It was claimed that birds had dropped those burning rocks. That is what the military leaders of Mecca had ordered proclaimed, in order to hide the fact that they had acquired a redoubtable weapon: a Roman catapult. The truth and even the existence of that hidden weapon were quickly forgotten, buried by passing time. The day of that battle, another truth had emerged out of that desert, in the shape of a work written in Latin. This ancient book had been written long before and it was the man from the desert that found it on the dead body of a Christian enemy. When he learned what it contained, the man from the desert understood how he now could counter the Christian menace that had tried to destroy his city. All he had to do was to invent a Messenger of God, a Messenger in the pay of the Arabs.”

“Who was that man from the desert?” muttered Mohammed, as if suddenly gripped by the Sage’s words.

“That man was your Uncle Abu Talib. In order never again to see our city attacked that way, he realized that he had to set Mecca up as being the New Jerusalem. He worked out that he could use a Messenger, to establish a religion with one true God, on the lines of the Jews and Christians. Better still, his Messenger would be the last representative of the People of the Book, in order to turn them aside from their places of worship and bring them to prostrate themselves at our feet. Hence, immediately after the battle, he laid the foundation stone on which he would build his edifice of lies. That first stone was laid on the very same day you were born. That stone was your name, Mohammed, a name your

uncle chose with great care. He also saw to it that you never learned to read, in order that you would never be able to have doubts about the new book he would make you learn, in order that you could never learn the truth from some other book like the one he had found on the body of his dead Christian foe. The new book that he would teach you was intended to take the place of all the books in the world and become the Mother of Books, written in the starry sky, a bookful of lies put into your mouth.”

“My uncle always forbade me to lie,” protested Mohammed gently. “He wanted ...”

“Of course he forbade you to lie!” interrupted the Sage brusquely. “In order that the future lies in your recitation would sound true in your mouth, you had to be the most upright and honest of young men. Your uncle brought you up that way, in order that never in your life would you utter a single lie, even before the great day. So, when that day arrived and you finally played your part of Messenger, your lies appeared so true and so exact. The best of liars is the liar unaware he is lying. He believes he is telling the truth, and his sincerity persuades and dupes even the sharpest-witted intellects. For the whole of your life as Messenger, believe me, you lied to us without even knowing it.”

Mohammed closed his eyes for an instant. When he opened them again, the Sage of Mecca had disappeared from his sight. However, his voice continued to reach him, as if the white-bearded oldster was still sitting facing him.

“The second stone in Abu Talib’s edifice of lies was to join with others in order to succeed. He had an urgent need for money in order to gather the poor to him by buying their religious faith, and to pay the poets that would compose your recitation for their work and for keeping quiet about it. Above all, he needed a spy. He managed to match all those requisites in the wealthiest person among the merchants of Mecca: Khadijah. It was for that reason that he played the go-between and she became your wife. She was easily able to spy on you and inform him of what you did, what you believed, about your most intimate thoughts and fantasies. Khadijah pretended she loved you. Believe that, Mohammed, when I tell you.”

“Lies!” cried the Prophet. “Khadijah loved me and I loved her with all my heart.”

Mohammed closed his eyes so as not to see the disconcerting emptiness that the Sage of Mecca’s voice was emerging from. Another voice began to murmur in the right ear of the Prophet: Khadijah’s.

“I never loved you. I never had any pleasure with you. How do you imagine that a woman could have an orgasm with a man who ejaculated at the first moment that his tiny penis was touched? Also, get it into your head that our children are not yours. Have you never wondered why they have no resemblance to you physically?”

Her small tinkling laugh pealed out like a tiny bell being rung.

“Can you be a little puppy again?” demanded Khadijah’s voice innocently.

His mind bewildered, Mohammed opened his eyes again. Facing him, the white-bearded oldster was sitting once more, holding a small bell in his hand.

“Your uncle used to use this bell to put you into a deep sleep. He conditioned you in order that you would obey him. He put a charm on you with his attractive blue eyes. It is called hypnosis. With the bell or a key phrase, your uncle triggered the conditioning. Then you became his little puppy. In front of Khadijah, he liked to make you go on all fours as a demonstration of the full strength of the hold he had over you. As for you, you forgot everything he made you do, everything that was said around you, if that was what your uncle wanted. Khadijah was able to tell you openly the truth about your children, as she knew your uncle would wipe it out of your memory whenever he wished. That amused her a great deal, it even made her laugh till she was in stitches.”

The Sage rang the small bell, and a painful spasm made the Prophet’s whole body rigid.

“Your uncle could make a public show of you. He could implant in you in advance what you had to do, what you had to say or how you had to say it. That is how he took possession of your

body, and that is how he taught you the recitation that his poets had composed for him.”

His mind unable to grasp them, floods of rapidly moving images jostled in Mohammed’s buzzing head, drowning his memory with a torrent of contradictory recollections.

“Yes, your mind is confused. Everything is muddled in you, dream and reality. You no longer know what is true from what is false. You are unable to tell an accurate memory from an imaginary one. Hence, let me tell you that you were not born already circumcised, and that the scar you that have on your chest is not the work of an angel who came to wash your heart clean. Those are just false memories your uncle implanted in you to serve his cause. The same is true of those premonitory dreams you thought you had. In fact, they were cunning manipulation by your uncle who made you see on one day what would happen on the next. For your hypnotized eyes, it was enough for him to wear an attractive blue tunic one evening, then come back the next morning still wearing it, telling you he had just bought it in the market. The sensation of having seen things before blossomed in you as a belief in premonitions. However, it was all just manipulation around you, around us, my friend.”

The old man’s blue gaze rose toward the ceiling. As if lost in his own reflections, he seemed to be talking to himself.

“Uncle Abu Talib liked women as much as men. For that matter, he enjoyed young girls as much as he enjoyed young boys. That is probably why he imposed the almost sexual position for Submitters’ prayers, in order to see their buttocks in the air offered up for his greedy sexual fantasies. Submitters do not know that in abasing themselves before God they are in fact offering themselves up to the perverted fantasizings of a bisexual who abused them. Did he also sexually abuse the young orphan you were? Did he make him forget these shameful abuses through his mesmerizing powers? Is that the origin of the black veil that came over your sight whenever you saw an angelic face?”

“No!” cried Mohammed. “Uncle Abu Talib never did me any harm, he never laid a hand on me!”

The Sage started laughing gently.

“Do you really believe that? Shut your eyes, Mohammed, and think back to that famous night on the mountain, when you met the angel of revelation. Whom do you think you saw?”

Fragile veils of flesh, the Prophet’s eyelids closed over his haggard eyes. In the shadows of his memory, he saw once again the luminous being floating over him, then seizing his neck with one shining hand and with the other waving a roll of cloth covered with signs. Progressively, this vision was wiped from his mind as it relinquished its place to the figure of Uncle Abu Talib kneeling before Mohammed’s recumbent body. He was grasping his nephew’s throat with one hand and had a roll of parchment in the other. A lantern slung on a cord across his white tunic lit the scene.

“Yes, it was indeed your uncle that you saw that famous night. He it was who played the role of the angel of revelation. He followed you that morning when you went to get food at Khadijah’s house. She had prepared a cake supposedly flavored with spices and some green tea. That is where the drug was. Your uncle was a great expert in medicinal plants, especially hallucinogens. Without your knowing, he made you take various different substances from day to day, according to what he needed for his manipulations. His favorite plant was what he called “Devil’s Breath”. It allowed him to take control over anyone that breathed its scent. That night, your uncle drugged you in order that your hallucinations would be suitable for his plans. He went a little too far in the staging of them, and you were particularly perturbed by those horrible visions. You even wanted to commit suicide because of them. That was due to the secondary effects of the drugs, which pushed you into a depressive state. Your uncle was aware of this and he conditioned you so you could not harm yourself. Every time you wished to throw yourself off the mountain, your mind produced an image and a message from the angel of revelation forbidding you to do it. That was the strength of your uncle’s control over you, even when he was not physically present.”

The Sage sighed.

“In order that you would never again attempt suicide, your uncle decided to put a fright into you by showing you where

people who deliberately kill themselves are supposed to end up: Hell. He controlled right down to the slightest aspect of the hypnotic dream into which he plunged you by means of carefully chosen drugs. He profited by it to show you the joys of Paradise, in order to motivate you in your role as Messenger of God. Then he took you off to Hell, showing you all the horrors he had thought up.”

“But my feet were burned,” murmured Mohammed. “How did he do that?”

“With a mixture extracted from stinging plants that he smeared over your feet, to implant the notion of Hell deep within you. For the notion of Paradise, your uncle played a musical instrument to your sleeping ears. He rocked you gently with a divine melody, like a snake charmer. Except that he was the snake. He twisted your mind and spat his venom into it in the shape of drugs in order to be able to play tricks on you. However, he was not the only one playing games with you. You fell into a nest of serpents where everyone play-acted around you. Like Waraqa the blind man, who made you believe he could see the little boy with long golden locks who played the part of the angel of revelation.”

Mohammed nodded mechanically.

“Who was that little boy?” he asked in a barely audible voice.

“A slave. Khadijah dyed his hair and eyebrows. If you think that the angel Gabriel could alter his childish face as he wished, you are wrong. That was your uncle taking care to rotate these little slaves at intervals, in order that you would not notice they were growing or changing physically from one year to the next, for fear you might discover that they were completely human, not heavenly. They are all dead now, thanks to you. They were murdered in the end, in order that they could never reveal their incredible secret to anyone.”

For at least a minute, there was an icy silence while Mohammed’s body shivered.

“Your uncle won,” continued the Sage finally. “The Meccans wanted to make you their King. It would have been enough if there had been a few small concessions relating to

Submission, such as including one or two minor deities who could intercede with God. If your uncle had just accepted that, everything would be different now. There would never have been all these deaths and massacres. However, your uncle was too stubborn and too greedy. He always wanted more, so he made you refuse the wise compromise proposed by the Meccans. In truth, he wanted to take over all the idols for himself alone. His intention was to move them to a secret sanctuary, and become the Master of the Gods. He dreamed of creating a secret society of Elders who would continue to worship the true Gods that he never ceased believing in, and that is why right down to his death he refused to convert to Submission. However, his dream took a different turning, a dramatic alteration of course, when the Meccans decided to expel you from your home town.”

Mohammed recalled that forced exile, living in a small area in one of the mountain gorges that ran down toward Mecca. For three long months, he and his clan had had to endure the cold of the nights, hunger and thirst. All those painful trials and tribulations had been too much for Uncle Abu Talib’s health.

“Do not imagine it was those privations that carried off your uncle,” revealed the mysterious oldster. “Hiding nothing, I shall tell you it was your wife Khadijah who killed him.”

Mohammed’s mouth gaped then moved as if to speak, but no sound came out, such was his astonishment and incomprehension.

“Yes, during that exile, Khadijah took her chance and killed your uncle.”

“Why?” Mohammed finally managed to stutter. “Why did she do that?”

“Because Khadijah was a black widow, as black as her soul. She had poisoned her previous husband in order to get hold of all his property. Your uncle knew that, and he threatened her with revealing the murder if she did not remarry, to you. Keep in mind that as time went by, Khadijah ended up by sharing your uncle’s dreams. She hoped to become a Queen in her own country, the most honored and most powerful woman in the world: the wife of the Messenger of God. She patiently waited hidden in the shadows, like a spider spinning its web. She bided her time,

making many large concessions, but dreaming of days of glory. She became your uncle's perfect accomplice. She it was who had the idea of imposing veils on all women. This was partly in order that you could preach your recitation tranquilly even to a female audience without fainting from arousal, and partly in order to hide from mocking onlookers her faded beauty with its thousand wrinkles. Her dreams of grandeur could not be stopped. The blind man Waraqa dared to cross her, because he was afraid of Heaven's anger for having lied about the child "Gabriel", and wanted to stop the show and tell you the truth. His heart suddenly stopped beating: Khadijah poisoned him. Just as she poisoned your uncle to avenge her stinging failure, to get revenge for the humiliating come-down of exile, and to get her hands firmly on the reins for her future life as a queen. Khadijah thought it was not too late and there was still time to achieve her aims. She cursed your uncle for having waited so many years before beginning to make you play the part of Messenger of God. You know, your uncle was very superstitious. He believed that as long as you had no white hairs in your black beard, he would not gain the favors of the Gods he believed in, and evil would befall him if he acted before it was time. That was your uncle: a subtle strategist, but paralyzed by the ridiculous superstitions of the Elders. Superstitions that he handed on to us in part in your recitation."

The Sage grimaced disdainfully.

"In fact, your God has a name, he is called Abu Talib. Of course, your recitation makes more sense when you replace the word "God" in it with the real name, Abu Talib. You get an even better grasp on its subtle meaning when you change "God" into the name of his son, using the name of his worthy successor: Ali."

"Ali, my son," murmured Mohammed.

"Yes, Ali, your adopted son, your adored son, the son of Abu Talib that you brought up as your own son. He is the one who took over from his beloved father. He is the one who continued to play the role of God. He is the one who was the avenging arm of Abu Talib. Your uncle realized he had been poisoned by Khadijah, and Ali took care to avenge him. He smothered your wife with her blanket when she was asleep. It was Ali, too, who found a way to have your expulsion from Mecca annulled. The

official document that was posted inside the Kaaba was covered with sugared water. Once the sheet had dried, ants enjoyed chewing away at the paper, except for a part smeared with a repellent substance where “In Thy Name, Oh God” was written. Superstitious minds feared the wrath of the gods, and you were all able to return to Mecca.”

The Sage’s voice slowed.

“Ali thought he could attract all the Meccans over to Submission once and for all. He believed it was enough to bring their superstitious minds face to face with an extraordinary and inexplicable event for them to submit to his growing power. Hence, Ali hired a merchant to lead a caravan to Mecca. At its head there was a white mare. Then you told everyone that you had flown over the caravan on a winged horse called Buraq, that you had seen the white mare, and even that you had spoken to the merchant to ask him for a drink. When that actor of a merchant confirmed all of this, stating that he had seen you riding a winged animal in the sky, and, even better, you were able to describe precisely the city of Jerusalem as if you had really flown over it like a bird, superstitious minds were on the brink of abandoning their idols.”

“But I did see Jerusalem from the sky,” murmured Mohammed. “I saw it with my very own eyes.”

“What you saw was not really Jerusalem. It was no more than a picture, a drawing of the city made from the top of a hill. It was a picture that Ali put in front of your eyes to make you believe you had traveled all the way to Jerusalem during the night.”

“How could Ali manage to make me see all those things that seemed so real?”

“He started by using a plant that puts you into a deep sleep, and he mixed it with other hallucinogenic plants that your uncle had used, plants that make you sweat profusely. That is how Ali was able to put you to sleep and take you to a small fort outside the city. That is where he woke you up, and of course you thought you were still in Mecca. With two accomplices, Ali then played the part of the angel of revelation, and before your delirious eyes he gave you the impression he was opening your chest and washing your heart. In fact, it was a sheep’s heart that he washed in a

golden basin. After that, Ali led you outside, next to a square building you took for the Kaaba. He introduced you to Buraq, a black donkey painted a silvery color and given a pair of big white wings, made of palm leaves and painted feathers. Once you had mounted the beast, you were tied on, and you and your donkey were lifted more than sixty feet into the air with the aid of a long rope running over a pulley on a post fixed on top of the square building. Ali also put on a pair of fake wings and was raised up to the same height as you with a second rope and pulley. Beneath you, a few twigs were lit in order to give the impression of huge fires seen from a great height, large buckets of water were moved underneath you, which in the moonlight you took for rivers or lakes. Your rope was moved to and fro, and the wind that blew that night gave you the sensation of flying rapidly on your donkey. Ali's hypnotic voice made you believe whatever he wanted you to. It was while you were hanging there that Ali showed you the picture of Jerusalem which printed itself deep on your memory. Once you were brought back down to the ground, the score of Helpers who were present played the part of Messengers of God for a collective prayer. Next, Ali made you swallow an even stronger drug, which you drank thirstily in a cup of milk. The Helpers sounded a trumpet, and also played the role of angels armed with swords that shone in the light of the lanterns. It was then that Ali made you climb a stairway, making you believe that at each step you were visiting the various different Heavens. Once you were at the landing you went into a room with a throne where Ali had seated himself. There you thought you heard God, but it was truly Ali, who was still playing games with you. He showed you a book supposed to be the Mother of Books. Next, you felt unwell and fainted away. You were taken out unconscious to Buraq and tied on him once again. When you came round and opened your eyes, the Helpers hoisted your donkey up above the ground, and your return journey started. Below you, they brought up the merchant with the white mare and his dromedaries. They lowered you next to him, and the merchant gave you water that in fact contained yet another hallucinogenic plant, a drug that detached you even more from your surroundings. Finally, Ali took the false wings off Buraq, and led you back to Mecca holding the

donkey by the bridle. Then he left you in the courtyard of the house. That is the whole story.”

In Mohammed’s disturbed mind, a question bubbled up.

“But I remember bumping into a jar with water for ablutions when I left hours earlier, and preventing it from falling when I returned hours later. How can that be?”

“No, you did not overturn the jar as you left. You collided with it on your return, and you had the reflex of stretching out your hand to stop it from falling. With all the drugs Ali had pumped into you, you had no sense of the present, no notion of time passing. You were completely dissociated from your time environment. You were like a sleepwalker moving between dream and reality. Those are the powers of drugs; that was the power of a puppet-master that Ali had over you. With this story of the caravan, he might well have been able to spread out his tentacular grasp over the whole city. His hand was like a puppeteer’s cross-brace, his fingers tugged on the strings of the marionette minds that bowed over at the call to the five prayers that he imposed to round out his absolute domination, since Submitter minds would no longer have time to think, or to live their own lives, and would thus have to obey only the will of “God”. Yes, that is undeniable, their captive minds in this way have no time for thinking things over outside these prayers which continually besiege them at all hours of the day, and turn them into happy sick. They no longer have the time to allow free thoughts to make them truly happy. Yet, strangely, that sad fact makes them glad.”

Lost in his thoughts, the Sage was silent for over a minute before restarting his narrative at a brisker pace.

“As I was saying, with that tale of the caravan, Ali might have succeeded in spreading Submission to the whole city, from then onward. Unfortunately for him, a witness had seen him leading your donkey on the way home. You were asleep on the back of the beast, and the witness recognized you formally. When you heard that testimony, you did not believe it, thinking it was an invention by your enemies to denigrate your meeting with God in the highest Heaven. Yet it was the truth, and that is what allowed the Meccans to have doubts about this story of a winged animal. It

permitted the Meccans not to fall into the trap Ali had thought up as a way of bringing superstitious minds over to Submission.”

The Sage pointed his forefinger at Mohammed.

“They wanted to put a stop to the religious menace Submission, and they wanted to get rid for ever of the one they thought was responsible for it all: the Messenger. Hence, Ali organized your escape to Yathrib. There he did not expect to have you playing the same part of a man with gentle words of peace. What Ali desired now was war. His wish was to take revenge on the Meccans and destroy for ever their idols, the cause of their stubbornness and a synonym for his failure. His desire was to avenge the humiliation of the expulsion he had suffered, along with the death of his father Abu Talib which had been an indirect consequence of it. From then on, “God” showed a very different face to his believers. He associated with bandits from the desert to loot the rich Meccan caravans. When you fled, you gave Ali the task of returning the property that wealthy Meccans had put in your care in the past. Keep in mind that Ali did not return anything at all, and that is also the reason that they all ended by considering you a thief who did not keep his pledged word, especially after the attack on their first caravan which had cunningly been organized by “God” with his masterly hand.”

Mohammed shook his head.

“Why did no Meccans ever say anything to me about their property not being returned?”

“The reign of terror that Ali established kept many a mouth silent. The terror you spread killed off many truths.”

Beneath his white beard, a sad smile passed over the Sage’s lips.

“Even if in your heart of hearts you did not wish it, you are in part responsible for all of this. Keep in mind that Ali was undeniably faced with a problem about you. He did not know how to get you into a warlike frenzy without you refusing to bring down a sword on the neck of your enemies. You are just an innocent lamb, and Ali was worried you might refuse to do harm to others, even at the cost of disobeying “God” and the Mother of Books. However, in the end it was you who found the solution to Ali’s problem. Above all, you need to understand that Ali is not as

much of an expert in hypnosis or drugs as his father was. His knowledge of the subject is nothing like as extensive as your Uncle Abu Talib's. Ali in fact is only a novice puppeteer. He made mistakes in using on you certain drugs with secondary residual effects. That is how he involuntarily caused you to have permanent hallucinations. Like those madmen who see visions, dreams in their head when they are not asleep, you started to be delirious. Yes, you began fighting against phantom demons that did not exist anywhere outside your head, you started seeing monstrous beings all around you among the men and women you met each day. You saw them as having horrible and inhuman faces, and began to slide into irreversible madness. Until the day when you went looking for Othman to cut his throat; that day, Othman was not afraid of your saber. He let you talk, and understood what was going on in your head and what the true reason for it was. He cleverly made you believe that all your crazy visions were true. That meant he could make up the story of good and evil Jinns, and invent a tale of a quest by good against evil. He cunningly created enemies of God to be exterminated, innocent men that he could point out to you as being part of a vast plot by the Devil, a secret and imaginary conspiracy, a plot which in fact solved the problem confronting Ali."

The Sage once again pointed his finger at Mohammed.

"Moreover, "God", or more exactly Ali, confirmed all this cock and bull tale in the Mother of Books. He made you believe that you were not bewitched, but rather, through a miracle, you had acquired an Eye of God that allowed you to see these supposed Jinns. Once he had managed to convince you to massacre his enemies, Ali took good care to make that "Eye", or more precisely that residual poisoning, disappear, in order to preserve your mental health. He ordered a long, strict fast in order that your body would purify itself of all traces of harmful substances, finding an excuse for this in the commemoration of the victory at Badr. Ali turned that fast into a healing annual custom in order to avoid any accidental relapse, a crazy fast that Ali imposed on everyone because of you, in order that you would never suspect you had been drugged. That is the whole story of your visions."

In a nearly imperceptible voice, Mohammed interrupted the old man.

“Nonetheless, I did see miraculous things that were very real at the battle of Badr, things that have nothing to do with visions.”

“You are wrong. Let me show how the battle actually proceeded, as you would have seen it if you had not been hallucinating at the time. Close your eyes and remember.”

His body trembling, Mohammed did as he was told. As if by a magic spell, he found himself standing alongside his white mare in the middle of the desert. He immediately recognized the place where his troop of three hundred men had gathered at that time, just before he had led the victorious assault against the Meccans at the well of Badr. Under the threatening shadow of low gray clouds, the troop with its seventy camels was still present back of his mare. However, just like Mohammed’s steed, it was an immobile army, frozen in strange postures, transformed into silent stone statues that a light breeze was caressing with an icy breath.

Appearing from nowhere in his white robe, the Sage of Mecca pointed his hand at the three men entirely swathed in black who stood a few yards away from Mohammed.

“Do you know why Ali, Omar and Abu Bakr covered their faces in that way with the tails of their turbans that day?” chuckled the oldster. “Well, keep in mind that they were afraid you might see in them devilish monsters, because of your hallucinations. Recall that period: Ali and his accomplices kept their faces covered almost all of the time in your presence, for fear you might take them for Jinns as was the case for Othman, and thus they would lose merit in your eyes.”

Barefoot, Mohammed walked with a light step toward the frozen trio. He looked at the titanic figure of Omar. That giant with his colossal strength seemed even bigger than usual, as imposing as a mountain.

*So for all these years, Omar has been playing games with me.*

To his rear, the Sage nodded approval.

“Yes, Omar well and truly played tricks on you, as he did with everyone. He was and still is the most bloodthirsty of men, a murderer thirsty for blood and for wine, your fiercest enemy from other time who once swore to himself he would kill you with his own hands. He might have succeeded in that, because he had made his sister Fatima believe that when reading a page of your recitation he had had the revelation that you truly were the Messenger of God. In that way he was able to discover from his idiot of a sister where it was that you were hiding. It was a very clever ruse on his part, and he set out with the intention of killing you. However, on his way there he met Abu Bakr. To prevent him from murdering you, Abu Bakr told him everything, the full extent of the play-acting in which he had been involved with your uncle from the start. Abu Bakr promised the Sun and the Moon to Omar if he agreed to join them. Omar cleverly accepted this offer, and he was perfectly right to believe in Abu Bakr’s promises. He would be his deputy and successor in ruling over the Empire of the Submitters that you handed on a golden plate to Abu Bakr.”

*My friend, Abu Bakr.*

“Abu Bakr is no friend of yours, believe me. He was never more than the cunning shadow of your uncle and Ali. Besides, what sort of integrity can be assigned to this man who gave his child Aisha to an old man like you? Besides, the only reason for it was to put his future safely in your bed, exclusively to make sure of his prospects the day your death occurred. You, poor blind fool that you are, designated Abu Bakr as your successor!”

In the distance, thunder began to growl.

“I am angry!”

The voice of God had just rung out in Mohammed’s mind.

“It is crazy what you can hear when you’re under the residual effects of drugs,” chuckled the Sage. “To tell you the whole truth, keep in mind that the day of that battle in no way did you hear the voice of God. Like now, you simply heard the sound of thunder pealing out, and your sick mind interpreted it in its own way, your crazed mind hearing noises as words, and trying to put a logical sense on the delirious vision in which your poisoned consciousness was prisoner. None of all that was true, no more than that there were virgins who came down from Paradise to take

care of the earthly body of their husband, no more than that you blinded the ranks of the Meccans with the handful of sand you threw at them. None of it is true, even if you are convinced that a divine wind transformed your handful of sand into a gigantic cloud of dust.”

The Sage went up to Mohammed and whispered in his ear.

“Yes, all of that is just imagination, nothing but illusions.”

“But the angels in the sky,” protested Mohammed. “It was definitely them who were first to attack the Meccans. I remember that the Meccan lines were disrupted, I can recall the confusion in their formations. I can see again those men who were on the ground, dying without any obvious wound, without even any blood flowing. I can bring back to mind some of them with their necks broken and others with their heads chopped off when our army hadn’t yet arrived.”

“There were no angels in the sky,” retorted the Sage in a sharp tone. “It was not your visions that killed the Meccans. The truth is completely different. Ali had given heavy bribes to fifty or so Meccans from various clans. These traitors put a fast-acting poison in part of the water for the men and horses that were preparing for battle. Just before your army began its attack, they also went into action against the rear of their side. That is why there was the confusion and panic you saw among them. It is the reason for the decapitated heads and the precipitate flight of the Meccans seeing their poisoned comrades who were dying inexplicably.”

“But why did the Meccan prisoners say nothing about all this?”

“They were all in a state of terror. They did not know what fate you had in store for them, especially if they said something that was contrary to your vision of angels, and went against what you recounted to everyone just after the battle. Once they returned home, the Meccan leaders did not explain the truth to the people, so as not to damage the cohesion between their clans, through fanning the fires of suspicion if it was learned that there were traitors among them. They simply carried out a purge of their troops, and the next battle was not the same at all. They won. You

know full well that without tricks or treachery you could not beat the Meccans, they were the stronger side.”

The Sage stepped to one side and pointed an accusing finger at the figure of Ali.

“Immediately after the battle, you told him in detail what you thought you had seen. Everything you thought you had witnessed, everything you described to him was carefully recorded and handed on to his poets by Ali. They edited it and composed a new recitation telling the tale of that battle. The Ansar Helpers were delighted to spread your delirious ravings around, saying that they too had seen the angels in the sky attacking your enemies. Among your troops, the most foolish, despite having seen nothing at all, were the ones whose tongues were the most active, giving most details. They were the ones who were keenest on telling all these lies, which after a while they started to believe were real memories. In the end, Ali was delighted by your hallucinations that helped his cause, and he never failed to give credit to all your delirious ravings. Such as the delirium that you had the day before the battle, when you went to reconnoiter the terrain. Your sick mind had a vision of the corpses that supposedly would lie on the ground the next day, and your crazy mind mixed this image up with what you saw the day after, making you believe that they were perfectly identical. That is how you came to believe that you had seen the future. However, no-one can see the future, believe me, my friend.”

The Sage went up to Ali in order to pull back the part of his turban that hid his face with its dull but youthful skin, its attractive black beard and its beaming smile.

“Look at Ali carefully, but do not judge him severely. Even if he played games with you, even if he made you do horrible actions, unlike the others he was the only one to take care of you out of love. Like a son’s love for his father, because he was like a son to you. He saw to bringing you everything he could offer you, all the treasures of the world, even if you were not interested in them. Just for your happiness, he authorized you special rights in your recitation, in order that you could at last find love with loving women.”

As if lost in half-forgotten memories, the Sage stared at Ali for over a minute. Then he delicately caressed his bearded cheek with his hand and continued speaking.

“You know, Ali had a distorted view of women because of Khadijah the poisoner. He believed they were all bad, crafty and evil toward men. Hence, he relegated them to a lower level, degrading them to animal status. He wanted them to be submissive and silent, lascivious but obedient to the least desires of men, to be taken from in front or from behind, subject to being beaten if they refused the ignominy of this new style of life. Ali transformed all our mothers and all our daughters into docile slaves through the love of “God”. They do not know that they are in fact the slaves of one man who despised them and who hated them as he hated Khadijah.”

The Sage turned suddenly toward Mohammed, his blue eyes accusing.

“If Ali looked after you, you also looked after him from day to day. Ready to lie to protect him, ready to lie to glorify him.”

Mohammed looked down to his bare feet, covered in grains of gray sand. He knew what the Sage was reproaching him for. For many years, closing his eyes to the tall tales told by Ali, he had allowed stories to go around about the warlike deeds that this beloved son had made up about himself. With guarantees from Gabriel (hardly surprising), Mohammed had given credit to all these fictional combats, all these imaginary duels or legendary exploits that Ali claimed to have accomplished on the battlefield, through divine grace, against God’s enemies. At the time, Mohammed had thought those lies legitimate. Ruses were a part of the customs of war, and allowed a morale advantage to be gained over an enemy that was brought to see in the person of Ali an indestructible superhuman, a hero who had become all-powerful through the will of the Almighty.

*Lies are always necessary to win a war.*

His body floating above the sand, the Sage flew slowly toward Mohammed.

“Lies, always lies, and you a man who reputedly never lied. Yet you lied so well, for example when the bread was multiplied.”

The growling accusatory voice of the Sage echoed in Mohammed's head like thunder.

Since God, through his angel of revelation, had asked him to do so, he had organized under Ali's supervision an ingenious fraud with the aim of uniting all the inhabitants of Yathrib definitively on the side of the Messenger. By that ruse, it would be possible to win final victory over the Meccans who were preparing to attack them. At a high price, Ali had bought a huge quantity of dried meat and of grain that had been brought secretly by night into the city. From then on, no risk at all of famine menaced the believers. The bread baked had been stored in a vast cellar dug under a small house. It was in that modest home that Mohammed had play-acted the prodigies capable of multiplying food infinitely. Through trapdoors hidden under an oven and under a cookpot standing on the floor, an accomplice hidden underground had passed out to him the loaves and the goat's meat. The trick had worked perfectly, and the townsfolk had believed in the Messenger's miraculous powers, especially after they witnessed another miracle: the rock turned into dust.

*The yellow Jinn.*

In the desert, coming from the direction where the Sun rises, the Helpers had captured a man with yellow skin and with eyelids strangely nearly shut like those of a blind man, but perfectly capable of seeing. Despite the language barrier, this man had shown them a black powder that he was transporting with small quantities in many sacks: with just one spark, he had demonstrated the destructive power of this dark substance. Ali had immediately realized all the potential of this mysterious black powder. To round out Mohammed's miraculous powers, on the day scheduled for the multiplication of food, Ali had had the idea of bringing that powder onto the stage in one of the trenches which were being dug. Before the startled eyes of the townsfolk, the Messenger had been able to make a rock disappear in a cloud of dust, thanks to the yellow man's powder. The yellow man had finally been beheaded, after Othman had said he was only an evil Jinn, a yellow Jinn who had come from a distant land.

"Under the orders of your "God", you knew very well how to play tricks during the battle of Yathrib," murmured the Sage into

Mohammed's ear. "In the end, you set to praying for divine assistance, to that the Meccans would definitively abandon their siege positions. The season of bad weather came just in time, bringing fierce storms with it. Ali took advantage to send a handful of Helpers into the enemy camp during the night. They pulled the tent-pegs out of the ground and the howling gale did the rest."

*Aisha!*

Before Mohammed's startled eyes, the frail childish figure had just appeared in the distance. Completely naked, the nipples of her tiny breasts erect, the little red-head walked innocently toward a man that was also nude, with his penis engorged from desire and frenzy. The two lovers kissed each other greedily on the mouth.

"In this desert, Aisha succumbed to the call of her senses," whispered the Sage. "She lost her virginity that day. Think back, she fell sick just after that love affair, and remained unwell for a month. Her vagina became infected, and she will probably never be able to bear a child."

The Sage pointed his finger at Ali.

"He knew that Aisha was guilty, but out of love for you, he had innocent people who spoke the truth about the adultery condemned. Ali produced lying divine laws that protected you, covering up the secrets of your sexual failures, in order that mockery would never bring down the edifice of lies on which your poor recitation is based."

In the distance, blood began to flow from between Aisha's thighs. The first drops splattered onto the gray sand. From the dark, rumbling sky a reddish rain began to fall in torrents.

Faced with this sight that he did not want to see, Mohammed shut his eyes. When he opened them again, he was back on the market square in Yathrib, at the edge of a deep trench flooded with a sea of blood whose surface was being pocked by the reddish tears falling from the sky. The heads of the decapitated Jews of the Qurayza tribe were floating there.

"Other innocents were killed here by Ali's hand," said the Sage in a sad voice. "The day of this massacre, Othman did not intervene, as he had been able to in the past for the Nadir tribe that

you expelled from Yathrib. He did not intervene as he had happily done to save some Jews from being condemned to death, in exchange for pieces of gold, of course. The day of that massacre, like the other criminal accomplices of Ali, Othman simply took once and for all the whole of the property looted from the Jews.”

“So the Jews were not evil Jinns...”

“No, neither good nor evil Jinns exist. They have never existed outside your head, my poor friend. As they had not joined you immediately, the Jews became the whipping boys for your religion, and their money was used to spread Submission through bloodshed.”

With his sleeve Mohammed wiped away the drops of rain that were trickling down his nose, and the Sage abruptly turned to face him.

“You are dying, because you have been poisoned, poisoned by all those drugs that lie dormant in your blood. Yes, you will be dead shortly, and you will carry off to your tomb the tale that I have just told you. While this story will end up in a grave, your body will not, because it is releasing an odor typical of poisoning, and there can be no doubt that Ali will take good care to get rid for good of that body whose skin is already showing traces from the drugs that he administered to you. Ali will take no risks, not wanting some Submitter a little less stupid than the others to guess at the truth by reading it from your skin. So, Ali will dump your corpse in the desert where it will rot in the sun. Your face will be forgotten for ever, because Ali does not want you to be glorified in his place. He alone will have a right to paintings and statues representing his effigy. It is high time for you to open your eyes to this reality.”

Mohammed closed his eyes for an instant. When his eyelids rose again, he was back sitting in the room with white walls. Opposite him, a yard away, the Sage faced him like the motionless reflection in a mirror. Blood was trickling from Mohammed’s nose, and he wiped away the drops with his sleeve.

“It is true that everyone hopes for glory,” carried on the Sage as if talking to himself, “Indeed, that is what motivates Submitters. They want glory in the highest Heaven, a place where they go on dying and remain eternally young, deflowering

nymphomaniac virgins till the end of time. In order to attain those juvenile fantasies, Submitters will come from the most distant lands to wander dreamily around the Kaaba, and they will have to throw pebbles at an imaginary Satan and kiss the black stone. How strange and ridiculous these sacred rites are! Ali established them for Submitters, in order to give some semblance of purpose to their lives as slaves, to provide some sense to a quest for immortality that is senseless, all of this to make certain of his power over Submission. It is true that from the depths of time power and submission have always been inseparable, since one cannot exist without the other. Exercise of great power necessarily implies the existence of great submission. If God is great, men must of necessity be small. If God is no more than a projection of human fantasies, then all religions must be inspired by a desire for power. If God exists, and has made man in His image, then that means that the Creator is the image of men, and just as greedy for power as they are. When it comes down to it, God must have created humans just to have to opportunity to exercise total power over them. That would then be the meaning of our lives. We would exist only to be submitters to a God that needs us in order to feel powerful. God needs us, because otherwise, in comparison to what would he be great? The Christians call that love: God loves us. However, does God really show love in such a completely unbalanced relationship between creature and creator?"

"Are you some deity come down from Heaven?" inquired Mohammed suddenly. "Or are you really God yourself?"

The Sage began to laugh.

"God does not exist, at least I do not believe he does, I do not believe in him. Can you not finally grasp that God, like everything around you, is perhaps not real? Yes, nothing is likely to be real, just as I do not exist!"

Perplexed, Mohammed scratched at his beard with one hand.

"You do not exist? What do you mean by that?"

"Keep in mind that in reality the old man whom you think you see in front of you does not exist except in your head, my friend. I am nothing more than your creation, just an illusion, a

fruit of your imagination. It is crazy what you can see when suffering the after-effects of drugs.”

The white hair and beard of the Sage of Mecca darkened progressively until they became as black as a moonless night. At that point, Mohammed recognized his own face in the features of the oldster with blue eyes.

“Yes, I am you,” chuckled his twin. “I have always been nothing but you, a part of you. I am the consciousness that perceived everything when you were unconscious, that heard everything said when you were drugged or under your uncle’s control, that saw everything when your hypnotized eyes saw only what your uncle or Ali wanted to make you see.”

Mohammed wanted to speak, but his surprise was such that he could not utter a word.

“We are two,” continued the Sage with the voice of Mohammed. “In fact, we are a human palindrome, we are *hallah*. You are *hal* and I am *lah*. Both together, we are just one, a simple reflection in the mirror where you look at yourself when you mind believes it can see me and talk to me.”

To his horror, Mohammed was gradually realizing that from the start he had been talking to himself out loud. He grasped that a secret and inaccessible part of himself had opened itself up to his mind, and that the words he had been saying came from his heart of hearts with a ring of truth to them.

*Remember our first meeting, my friend.*

A vivid recollection in the shape of a flood of true images showed Mohammed to himself under the tent where he thought he had met the Sage of Mecca that first day. However, on that day he had been completely alone under the tent, accompanied by no-one except himself. The murderous hand that had grasped his saber, the brutal hand that had put the blade of the weapon to his neck in order to kill him, had been his own hand. He had escaped his unwitting suicide through the unexpected arrival of Aisha. She had started screaming on seeing her husband trying to cut his own throat.

*As always, Ali took care to hush this matter up.*

His look aghast, for what felt like an infinite time he stared at the thick green curtain at the open window, which had ceased flapping. Outside, the wind seemed to have died down and the Sage had disappeared with it. Mohammed was now alone with himself. Without his noticing it, dark blood was dripping in fat drops from his nose.

“I must tell them the truth!” cried he suddenly. “I must tell the Submitters that God does not exist, that it was my uncle and Ali who made it all up! It is not too late.”

Moving slowly and with difficulty, using his trembling arms to steady himself, he rose and walked to the door. When he opened it, Mohammed was surprised to find Abu Bakr there, having had his ear pressed to the door until then.

Startled, Abu Bakr took three steps backward as Mohammed, rage in his expression, moved forward, stretching out his arms to strangle his friend.

“Liar!” shrieked the Prophet. “You are nothing but a liar.”

Two giant hands seized Mohammed’s neck. In a deadly grasp they lifted him a foot above the ground. His legs thrashed in the air grotesquely, like those of a marionette with its strings being pulled randomly.

“Peace be upon you, Messenger of God!” growled Omar with a twisted smile.

His face scarlet, his body becoming suddenly rigid and powerless, Mohammed felt life leaving him. Before his eyes a blood-red cloud formed a veil, while a cold, black shadow emerged from the firmament and clutched him in malevolent arms. Just before that death carried him off toward the darkness that was opening at his feet, Mohammed heard for one last time the voice of the Sage of Mecca echoing within him.

*hallah...*



## Acknowledgements

Anna K. Dick is not a woman, nor a man, for that matter. She is nobody, or more exactly is no more than a group of people writing in the name of love. Love for Truth, with the idea that to love is greater than to be loved.

We are no more than jewelers of writing. We found many precious gems of literature, from perfect diamonds to texts that were sometimes in the rough, by well-known or unknown authors. All they required was to be put in the setting of a novel.

Prior to quoting from them in the notes that follow, we should thus like to thank the various independent thinkers and their writings that allowed this book to have pearls inset in it. Particular mention must be made of Ibn Warraq and his work *Why I Am Not a Muslim*, as also the text *Le Koran démasqué* on @taghut.blogspot.com.

Many thanks to Olivier Surin of PhénixGraphic.com and his creation, the turning serpents, which can be admired on the cover of the book. Copyright www.phenixgraphic.com

A very big “thank you” to the army of M for their devotion to the propagation of *The God Virus* (the novel, of course) and in their daily struggle to awaken all those who have a vocation leading them to speak in public, whether in the media or among the political class. For too long, such people have used avoidance strategies or have sugar-coated the real Truth, so as to lull the ignorant masses, because of their view that words cause problems.

But words are only bad when they are lies.

In a saying that has been attributed to George Orwell, during times of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act.

Long Live the Revolution of Free Spirits.

## References, Sources and Quotation Rights

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**NOTE.** All quotations from the Koran are taken from *The Meaning of the Glorious Quran* by Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall (formerly Marmaduke William Pickthall), and use its verse and chapter numberings. This work was funded by the then Nizam of Hyderabad, completed in 1930, and authorized by Al-Azhar University in Egypt as an appropriate English version. It is like the *King James Version* of the Bible in the style of its language, and also in the fact that it is not a free translation, but a literal rendering of the original. All quotations from the Bible are taken from the King James Version. The original spellings of both these works have been respected. When referring to hadiths, there are several competing systems for numbering, involving a single continuous run of numbers; book, chapter and hadith numbers; volume, book and hadith numbers. The method used here is based on the Hadith Collection website, [hadithcollection.com](http://hadithcollection.com). For *Sahih Bukhari*, it divides hadiths into nine volumes, each with several books (books total 93), and continuous numbering within volumes. For *Sahih Muslim*, it divides hadiths into 43 books, with continuous numbering throughout the collection. This is also the case for *Abu Dawud*.

### **Chapter 1 “Final Bouquet”**

...controlling every aspect of private life, from food to clothing, from sexual relationships to professional relations, starting at birth and ending only with death.

*For nearly five hundred years, these rules and theories of an Arab Sheik and the interpretations of generations of lazy and good-for-nothing priests have decided the civil and criminal law of Turkey. They have decided the form of the*

*Constitution, the details of the life of each Turk, his food, his hours of rising and of sleeping, the shape of his clothes, the routine of the midwife who produced his children, what he learned in his schools, his customs, his thoughts, even his most intimate habits. Islam, this theology of an immoral Arab, is a dead thing. Possibly it might have suited tribes in the desert. It is no good for a modern progressive state*

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk 1881-1938, founder of the lay Turkish State.

*...take them and kill them wherever ye find them...*

Koran, chapter 4 verse 89 (4.89)

*...cursed poets in his Koran...*

**26.224:** *As for poets, the erring follow them*

He could not tell what his future needs might be, who might stand in his way, and who God should be supposed to curse in order to discredit these shadowy future opponents, as happened with his Uncle Abu Lahab and his aunt

### **Chapter 111 Palm Fiber**

He had lost all credence among the Jews, but was also discredited for Christians because in his recitation he had mixed up the mother of Christ, Mary, with the sister of Moses who happened to bear the same name...

**19.28-29:** *Then she brought him to her own folk, carrying him. They said: O Mary! Thou hast come with an amazing thing. O sister of Aaron! Thy father was not a wicked man nor was thy mother a harlot.*

**NOTE.** Aaron was the brother of Moses. There can be no ambiguity possible about the identity of this Aaron because his name is confirmed in the same chapter, verses **51-53:** *And make mention in the Scripture of Moses. Lo! he was chosen, and he was a messenger of Allah, a prophet. We called him from the right slope of the Mount, and brought him nigh in communion. And We bestowed upon him of Our mercy his brother Aaron, a prophet likewise.*

*...thought that Jesus had received the Gospels from God during his lifetime...*

**57.27:** *...We caused Jesus, son of Mary, to follow, and gave him the Gospel...*

*...proclaiming that not one verse of Allah's revelations would in future be abrogated or forgotten unless one better than it, or at least like it, was brought in its place...*

**2.106:** *Nothing of our revelation even a single verse do we abrogate or cause be forgotten, but we bring in place one better or the like thereof.*

Mohammed in the end ordered his followers indirectly through the Koran to cut off their hands and feet, to crucify them or to behead them.

**5.33***The only reward of those who make war upon Allah and His messenger and strive after corruption in the land will be that they will be killed or crucified, or have their hands and feet on alternate sides cut off, or will be expelled out of the land. Such will be their degradation in the world, and in the Hereafter theirs will be an awful doom;*

When the Meccans retired, by Allah's will, as Mohammed claimed, he started to brag...

**33.25:***And Allah repulsed the disbelievers in their wrath; they gained no good. Allah averted their attack from the believers. Allah is ever Strong, Mighty.*

...stating that no prophet had been able to take prisoners without perpetrating great massacres on the Earth.

**8.68:***It is not for any prophet to have captives until he hath made slaughter in the land*

...and were invited to benefit from war booty...

**8.69:***Now enjoy what ye have won, as lawful and good, and keep your duty to Allah.*

He had special privileges relating to the spoils of war...

**8.41:***And know that whatever ye take as spoils of war, lo! a fifth thereof is for Allah, and for the messenger*

...could have all the women he wanted...

**33.50:***O Prophet! Lo! We have made lawful unto thee thy wives unto whom thou hast paid their dowries, and those whom thy right hand possesseth of those whom Allah hath given thee as spoils of war, and the daughters of thine uncle on the father's side and the daughters of thine aunts on the father's side, and the daughters of thine uncle on the mother's side and the daughters of thine aunts on the mother's side who emigrated with thee, and a believing woman if she give herself unto the Prophet and the Prophet desire to ask her in marriage - a privilege for thee only, not for the rest of believers*

...and was the sole and definitive maker of laws in the form of divine revelations...

**33.37:***And it becometh not a believing man or a believing woman, when Allah and His messenger have decided an affair for them, that they should after that claim any say in their affair; and whoso is rebellious to Allah and His messenger, he verily goeth astray in error manifest.*

The weathervane Allah justified this as a test to try those who followed the Messenger, and separate them from those who faced away from Him. However, Mohammed had to reassure his gullible followers that saw prayers as magical acts, totaled up to calculate who would obtain the best places in Paradise,

guaranteeing them that their former prayers recited while they faced Jerusalem would be in no way erased from the divine ledger

**2.142-144:** *The foolish of the people will say: What hath turned them from the qiblah which they formerly observed? Say: Unto Allah belong the East and the West. He guideth whom He will unto a straight path. Thus We have appointed you a middle nation, that ye may be witnesses against mankind, and that the messenger may be a witness against you. And We appointed the qiblah which ye formerly observed only that We might know him who followeth the messenger, from him who turneth on his heels. In truth it was a hard (test) save for those whom Allah guided. But it was not Allah's purpose that your faith should be in vain, for Allah is Full of Pity, Merciful toward mankind. We have seen the turning of thy face to heaven (for guidance, O Muhammad). And now verily We shall make thee turn (in prayer) toward a qiblah which is dear to thee. So turn thy face toward the Inviolable Place of Worship, and ye (O Muslims), wheresoever ye may be, turn your faces (when ye pray) toward it. Lo! Those who have received the Scripture know that (this revelation) is the Truth from their Lord. And Allah is not unaware of what they do.*

Others took as their model the killer that Mohammed became towards the end of his life, perpetuating acts of terror for love of the Prophet, and finding it perfectly legitimate to massacre in the name of God.

**33.21:** *Verily in the messenger of Allah ye have a good example for him who looketh unto Allah and the Last Day, and remembereth Allah much.*

*...slay the idolaters wherever ye find them...*

**9.5:** *Then, when the sacred months have passed, slay the idolaters wherever ye find them, and take them (captive), and besiege them, and prepare for them each ambush. But if they repent and establish worship and pay the poor-due, then leave their way free. Lo! Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.*

...disregarding Mohammed's sectarian orders forbidding them to have a non-Moslem as a friend or an employer. This deliberate disregard was their way of avoiding the withering away of their community.

**3.27:** *Let not the believers take disbelievers for their friends in preference to believers. Whoso doeth that hath no connection with Allah unless it be that ye but guard yourselves against them, taking as it were security*

**5.57:** *O Ye who believe! Choose not for guardians such of those who received the Scripture before you, and of the disbelievers, as make a jest and sport of your religion. But keep your duty to Allah if ye are true believers.*

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## Chapter 2 “Revelation”

Read! In the name of your Lord, creator of all things, who made man from a clot of blood, read! Your Lord is the All-Bountiful, who taught with the pen, instructing men in that which they knew not.

**96.1-5:** *Read: In the name of thy Lord Who createth, Createth man from a clot. Read: And thy Lord is the Most Bounteous, Who teacheth by the pen, Teacheth man that which he knew not.*

Oh, Mohammed, you are truly the Messenger of God.

Sahih Bukhari **Volume 5 Book 59 Hadith 595:** *...true Prophet...*

...orchards, vineyards and luxuriant gardens ...

**78.31-34:***Lo! for the duteous is achievement - Gardens enclosed and vineyards, And maidens for companions, And a full cup.*

Among rivers of crystal water there were scattered rubies and diamonds. Streams of wine, of honey and of milk always of the freshest flavor flowed in abundance.

**47.15:***A similitude of the Garden which those who keep their duty to Allah are promised: Therein are rivers of water unpolluted, and rivers of milk whereof the flavour changeth not, and rivers of wine delicious to the drinkers, and rivers of clear-run honey...*

...a garden fringed by majestic trees with various succulent fruits that cast a shade all around.

**56.27-33:***And those on the right hand; what of those on the right hand? Among thornless lote-trees And clustered plantains, And spreading shade, And water gushing, And fruit in plenty Neither out of reach nor yet forbidden*

...they were the voices of men facing one another in garb of green satin or of silk and wearing silver bracelets. In total rapture, they relaxed on couches adorned with jewelry, sat on golden thrones or reclined on brocade mats covered with emerald-green cushions.

**37.40-49:***In the Gardens of delight, On couches facing one another; A cup from a gushing spring is brought round for them, White, delicious to the drinkers, Wherein there is no headache nor are they made mad thereby.*

**44.51-55:***Lo! those who kept their duty will be in a place secured. Amid gardens and watersprings, Attired in silk and silk embroidery, facing one another. Even so (it will be). And We shall wed them unto fair ones with wide, lovely eyes. They call therein for every fruit in safety.*

**55.54-58:***Reclining upon couches lined with silk brocade, the fruit of both the gardens near to hand. Which is it, of the favours of your Lord, that ye deny? Therein are those of modest gaze, whom neither man nor jinni will have touched before them. Which is it, of the favours of your Lord, that ye deny? In beauty like the jaynith and the coral-stone.*

**56.15-24:** *On lined couches, Reclining therein face to face. There wait on them immortal youths With bowls and ewers and a cup from a pure spring Wherefrom they get no aching of the head nor any madness, And fruit that they prefer And flesh of fowls that they desire. And there are fair ones with wide, lovely eyes, Like unto hidden pearls,*

**76.12-22:***And hath awarded them for all that they endured, a Garden and silk attire; Reclining therein upon couches, they will find there neither heat of a sun nor bitter cold. The shade thereof is close upon them and the clustered fruits thereof bow down. Goblets of silver are brought round for them, and beakers as of glass Bright as glass but made of silver, which they themselves have measured to the measure of their deeds. There are they watered with a cup whereof the mixture is of Zanjabil, The water of a spring therein, named Salsabil. There wait on them immortal youths, whom, when thou seest, thou wouldst take for scattered pearls. When thou seest, thou wilt see there bliss and high estate. Their raiment will be fine green silk and gold embroidery. Bracelets of silver will they wear. Their Lord will slake their thirst with a pure drink. And it will be said unto them: Lo! this is a reward for you. Your endeavour upon earth hath found acceptance.*

**83.23-28:***Lo! the righteous verily are in delight, On couches, gazing, Thou wilt know in their faces the radiance of delight. They are given to drink of a pure wine, sealed, Whose seal is musk - for this let all those strive who strive for bliss - And mixed with water of Tasnim, A spring whence those brought near to Allah drink*

...children eternally young...

**52.24:** *And there go round, waiting on them menservants of their own, as they were hidden pearls*

**56.17:** *There wait on them immortal youths*

**76.19:***There wait on them immortal youths, whom, when thou seest, thou wouldst take for scattered pearls.*

...From jugs they held by the handle these charming young creatures also poured inexhaustible supplies of delicious wines that caused neither drunkenness nor sleepiness in those who drank them, who remained fully sharp-witted ...

**37.47:***Wherein there is no headache nor are they made mad thereby.*

**47.15:** *...rivers of wine delicious to the drinkers...*

**83.25:***They are given to drink of a pure wine, sealed...*

...the virgins created especially for them by God...

**37.47:** *And with them are those of modest gaze, with lovely eyes*

**55.56:** *Therein are those of modest gaze, whom neither man nor jinni will have touched before them.*

**56.35-37:** *Lo! We have created them a new creation And made them virgins, Lovers, friends,*

**78.33:***And maidens for companions*

...drank down their ginger-flavored beverage...

**76.17:** *There are they watered with a cup whereof the mixture is of Zanjabil*

...showing off their rounded breasts...

**78.33:** *And maidens for companions*

...sweet intimacies which were ever virginal...

**56.35-36:** *Lo! We have created them a new creation And made them virgins*

Whipped by stinking, furnace-hot wind, hundreds of naked men and women of all ages were being subjected to the worst of torments, their movements restricted by chains or pillories.

**56.41-44:** *And those on the left hand: What of those on the left hand? In scorching wind and scalding water And shadow of black smoke, Neither cool nor refreshing.*

**76.4:** *Lo! We have prepared for disbelievers manacles and carcans and a raging fire.*

Shrieks rang out and terrified voices asked Malik, the guardian of Hell, to beg God to finish them off.

**43.77:** *And they cry: O master! Let thy Lord make an end of us. He saith: Lo! here ye must remain.*

Hanging over a chasm, a group of men and women were the victims of roaring flames that roasted their flesh. Once it had shriveled and blackened in appalling suffering, it was instantly replaced by fresh human skin, so that the punishment of these prisoners would be never-ending.

**4.56:** *Lo! Those who disbelieve Our revelations, We shall expose them to the Fire. As often as their skins are consumed We shall exchange them for fresh skins that they may taste the torment. Lo! Allah is ever Mighty, Wise.*

As he burned in the flames, an old man stretched out towards the angel, begging for help. The only result was that a jet of molten metal poured over him, disfiguring him utterly.

**18.28:** *Say: It is the truth from the Lord of you all. Then whosoever will, let him believe, and whosoever will, let him disbelieve. Lo! We have prepared for disbelievers Fire. Its tent encloseth them. If they ask for showers, they will be showered with water like to molten lead which burneth the faces. Calamitous the drink and ill the resting-place!*

**55.35:** *There will be sent, against you both, heat of fire and flash of brass, and ye will not escape.*

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### **Chapter 3 “One-Way Ticket to Hell”**

The supposed “Prophet” had stated that the Koran contained some explicit verses, and others with a hidden meaning that God alone knew.

**3.7:***He it is Who hath revealed unto thee Muhammad the Scripture wherein are clear revelations - they are the substance of the Book - and others which are allegorical. But those in whose hearts is doubt pursue, forsooth, that which is allegorical seeking to cause dissension by seeking to explain it. None knoweth its explanation save Allah. And those who are of sound instruction say: We believe therein; the whole is from our Lord; but only men of understanding really heed.*

Expressions with double senses for these gangsters abounded in the Koran...

**8.60:***Make ready for them all thou canst of armed force and of horses tethered, that thereby ye may dismay the enemy of Allah and your enemy, and others beside them whom ye know not. Allah knoweth them. Whatsoever ye spend in the way of Allah it will be repaid to you in full, and ye will not be wronged.*

...handing over a share of booty to the leader of the Medina underworld, who demanded one-fifth of any plunder for himself.

**8.41:***And know that whatever ye take as spoils of war, lo! a fifth thereof is for Allah, and for the messenger*

They “enjoined right conduct”...

**3.106:***Ye are the best community that hath been raised up for mankind. Ye enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency; and ye believe in Allah. And if the People of the Scripture had believed it had been better for them. Some of them are believers; but most of them are evil-livers.*

It was the primer for criminals, ordering the extermination of non-Moslems by beheading, claiming that it was not Moslems who killed, but God through their intervention...

**8.17:***Ye Muslims slew them not, but Allah slew them...*

...who were not permitted to deny them sexual intercourse...

**2.223:***Your women are a tilth for you to cultivate so go to your tilth as ye will...*

Mohammed decided to allow a status of inferiority, without commitments about its length, in exchange for ready money...

**9.29:***Fight against such of those who have been given the Scripture as believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, and forbid not that which Allah hath forbidden by His messenger, and follow not the Religion of Truth, until they pay the tribute readily, being brought low.*

To demean them, the terrorized victims were forced to stand and bow before the armed collector of this tribute as he remained seated. When they paid up, they were struck on the nape of the neck to humiliate them even more.

According to the Moslem commentator **Moslem al Zamakhshari** (1075-1144), as quoted in *Why I Am Not a Muslim* by Ibn Warraq, Prometheus Books, 1995.

Just as in the mafia no-one leaves organization without being “iced”, getting rid of anyone who knew too much, any apostates renouncing Islam were considered as traitors and had to be killed.

**4.91:** *Ye will find others who desire that they should have security from you, and security from their own folk. So often as they are returned to hostility they are plunged therein. If they keep not aloof from you nor offer you peace nor hold their hands, then take them and kill them wherever ye find them. Against such We have given you clear warrant.*

In contrast, there was something that media imams never said. That was that the opposite was impossible: any apostate leaving Islam for another religion must be put to death.

**3.90-91:** *Lo! Those who disbelieve after their (profession of) belief, and afterward grow violent in disbelief: their repentance will not be accepted. And such are those who are astray. Lo! Those who disbelieve, and die in disbelief, the (whole) earth full of gold would not be accepted from such an one if it were offered as a ransom (for his soul). Theirs will be a painful doom and they will have no helpers.*

**16.106:** *Whoso disbelieveth in Allah after his belief - save him who is forced thereto and whose heart is still content with the Faith - but whoso findeth ease in disbelief: On them is wrath from Allah. Theirs will be an awful doom.*

Yet the true verse in question, in its official version, said that whoever killed a man for other than manslaughter or *corruption* on Earth would have done as if he killed all men.

**5.35:** *...whosoever killeth a human being for other than manslaughter or corruption in the earth, it shall be as if he had killed all mankind...*

In one verse, the Prophet had even pushed this vice to the extent of ordering his followers to make bruises on their foreheads during their prostrations by hitting their heads against the ground, in order to show the marks of their “sanctifying” sufferings.

**48.29:** *...Thou O Muhammad seest them bowing and falling prostrate in worship, seeking bounty from Allah and His acceptance. The mark of them is on their foreheads from the traces of prostration...*

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## **Chapter 4 “Tenth Commandment: Thou Shalt Understand the Myth of Moses”**

...who had really fought Pharaoh...

**10.76:** *We sent Moses and Aaron unto Pharaoh and his chiefs with Our revelations, but they were arrogant and were a guilty folk.*

**40.37-38:** *And Pharaoh said: O Haman! Build for me a tower that haply I may reach the roads, The roads of the heavens, and may look upon the God of Moses, though verily I think him a liar. Thus was the evil that he did made fairseeming unto Pharaoh, and he was debarred from the right way. The plot of Pharaoh ended but in ruin. And he who believed said: O my people! Follow me. I will show you the way of right conduct.*

**43.46-47:** *And verily We sent Moses with Our revelations unto Pharaoh and his chiefs, and he said: I am a messenger of the Lord of the Worlds. But when he brought them Our tokens, behold! they laughed at them.*

...the flood...

**11.42:** *And it sailed with them amid waves like mountains, and Noah cried unto his son - and he was standing aloof - O my son! Come ride with us, and be not with the disbelievers.*

**54.11-12:** *Then opened We the gates of heaven with pouring water And caused the earth to gush forth springs, so that the waters met for a predestined purpose.*

**69.11:** *Lo! when the waters rose, We carried you upon the ship*

...Noah's Ark...

**11.37-40:** *Build the ship under Our eyes and by Our inspiration, and speak not unto Me on behalf of those who do wrong. Lo! they will be drowned. And he was building the ship, and every time that chieftains of his people passed him, they made mock of him. He said: Though ye make mock of Us, yet We mock at you even as ye mock; And ye shall know to whom a punishment that will confound him cometh, and upon whom a lasting doom will fall. Thus it was till, when Our commandment came to pass and the oven gushed forth water, We said: Load therein two of every kind, a pair the male and female, and thy household, save him against whom the word hath gone forth already, and those who believe. And but a few were they who believed with him.*

...Jonah swallowed by a great fish...

**37.139-144:** *And lo! Jonah verily was of those sent to warn When he fled unto the laden ship, And then drew lots and was of those rejected; And the fish swallowed him while he was blameworthy; And had he not been one of those who glorify Allah He would have tarried in its belly till the day when they are raised;*

...Adam driven out of Eden...

**7.22-25:** ...And when they tasted of the tree their shame was manifest to them and they began to hide by heaping on themselves some of the leaves of the Garden. And their Lord called them, saying: Did I not forbid you from that tree and tell you: Lo! Satan is an open enemy to you? They said: Our Lord! We have wronged ourselves. If thou forgive us not and have not mercy on us, surely we are of the lost! He said: Go down (from hence), one of you a foe unto the other. There will be for you on earth a habitation and provision for a while. He said: There shall ye live, and there shall ye die, and thence shall ye be brought forth.

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### **Chapter 5 “The Ascent”**

...the angel Gabriel had appeared before him, taking Mohammed’s heart out of his chest and removing from it a black ball, the part of the Devil that was within him...

Sahih Muslim **Book 1 Hadith 314**

That is the mark of their virtue and a restraint on men’s intentions. They will be better recognized for it and so will avoid being offended. This is the will of God who is indulgent and merciful.

**33.59:** *O Prophet! Tell thy wives and thy daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks close round them when they go abroad. That will be better, so that they may be recognised and not annoyed. Allah is ever Forgiving, Merciful.*

All the same, such tests were always followed by some form of consolation.

**94.1-6***Have We not caused thy bosom to dilate, And eased thee of the burden Which weighed down thy back; And exalted thy fame? But lo! with hardship goeth ease, Lo! with hardship goeth ease;*

...the Prophet wondered whether the name might really mean *sweat* instead of *lightning*.

عرق sweat (the father of sweating Abu araq)  
البراق Buraq (lightning al-buraaq)

In the Seventh Heaven he found Abraham waiting, along with Gabriel, who had led him to the pinnacle of the Heavens.

**2.29:** *He it is Who created for you all that is in the earth. Then turned He to the heaven, and fashioned it as seven heavens...*

**17.44:** *The seven heavens and the earth and all that is therein praise Him, and there is not a thing but hymneth His praise; but ye understand not their praise. Lo! He is ever Clement, Forgiving.*

**23.17:** *And We have created above you seven paths,...*

**23.86:** *Say: Who is Lord of the seven heavens, and Lord of the Tremendous Throne?*

**41.12:** *Then He ordained them seven heavens in two Days and inspired in each heaven its mandate;...*

**65.12:** *Allah it is who hath created seven heavens, and of the earth the like thereof....*

This night-time journey was already written in the Book.

**17.1:** *Glorified be He Who carried His servant by night from the Inviolable Place of Worship to the Far distant place of worship the neighbourhood whereof We have blessed, that We might show him of Our tokens!*

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## **Chapter 6 “Fatima”**

For Moslems, the Koran was a book that had not been created, but had come down from Heaven just as it was. Its original, the Mother of Books, was lying on a guarded table up in the starry sky.

**43.3-4:** *Lo! We have appointed it a Lecture, in Arabic that haply ye may understand. And Lo! in the Source of Decrees, which We possess, it is indeed sublime, decisive.*

**85.21-22:** *Nay, but it is a glorious Qur'an. On a guarded tablet.*

Mohammed had been impressed by the knowledge of Holy Scripture that scholarly Jews possessed. They knew their Book as well as they knew their own children.

**6.20** *Those unto whom We gave the Scripture recognise this revelation as they recognise their sons...*

How could he say in one verse *on them rests the curse of Allah* and in another *my curse is on thee?*

**3.87:** *As for such, their guerdon is that on them rests the curse of Allah and of angels and of men combined.*

**38.78:** *And lo! My curse is on thee till the Day of Judgment.*

The answer was simple. In his rush to carry out the imposture, Mohammed frequently forgot that he was supposed to be reciting the words of God, and to

be simply the human mouth that spoke in the place of the All-Highest, so that the whole Koran was supposedly Allah's expressions in the first person.

**9.65:** *And if thou ask them, O Muhammad, they will say: We did but talk and jest. Say: Was it at Allah and His revelations and His messenger that ye did scoff?*

They had had the Prophet ostensibly state that his Uncle Abu Talib, Ali's father, was in the profoundest depths of Hell, in order to discredit the dynasty Ali had founded.

Sahih Bukhari **Volume 5 Book 58 Hadith 224:** *Narrated by Abu Said Al-Khudri: That he heard the Prophet when somebody mentioned his uncle (i.e. Abu Talib), saying, "Perhaps my intercession will be helpful to him on the Day of Resurrection so that he may be put in a shallow fire reaching only up to his ankles. His brain will boil from it."*

Sahih Muslim **Book 1 Hadith 413:** *Ibn 'Abbas reported: The Prophet (may peace be upon him) said: Among the inhabitants of the Fire Abu Talib would have the least suffering, and he would be wearing two shoes of Fire which would boil his brain.*

He presents himself as the model of morality and good conduct, to be imitated by all the faithful.

**33.21:** *Verily in the messenger of Allah ye have a good example for him who looketh unto Allah and the Last Day, and remembereth Allah much.*

...Islamic suicide bombers wanting to blow themselves up in the midst of the unbelievers, in order to go directly to the Paradise promised to them.

**4.74:** *...Whoso fighteth in the way of Allah, be he slain or be he victorious, on him We shall bestow a vast reward.*

...there is the equivalent of an asterisk in the Koran, a verse stipulating that all Moslems will be flung into Hell when they die...

**19.68:** *And, by thy Lord, verily We shall assemble them and the devils, then We shall bring them, crouching, around hell.*

**19.70-71:** *And surely We are Best Aware of those most worthy to be burned therein. There is not one of you but shall approach it. That is a fixed ordinance of thy Lord.*

...because they escape any time in Hell thanks to the details of another verse.

**3.195:** *And their Lord hath heard them and He saith: Lo! I suffer not the work of any worker, male or female, to be lost. Ye proceed one from another. So those who fled and were driven forth from their homes and suffered damage for My cause, and fought and were slain, verily I shall remit their evil deeds from them and verily I shall bring them into Gardens underneath which rivers flow - A reward from Allah. And with Allah is the fairest of rewards.*

...since Allah did not allow marriage to a non-Submitter.

**2.220:***Wed not idolatresses till they believe; for lo! A believing bondwoman is better than an idolatress though she please you; and give not your daughters in marriage to idolaters till they believe, for lo! a believing slave is better than an idolater though he please you. These invite unto the Fire, and Allah inviteth unto the Garden, and unto forgiveness by His grace, and expoundeth His revelations to mankind that haply they may remember.*

**3.118:***O ye who believe! Take not for intimates others than your own folk,...*

**60.10:***O ye who believe! When believing women come unto you as fugitives, examine them. Allah is Best Aware of their faith. Then, if ye know them for true believers, send them not back unto the disbelievers. They are not lawful for them (the disbelievers), nor are they (the disbelievers) lawful for them. And give them (the disbelievers) that which they have spent (upon them). And it is no sin for you to marry such women when ye have given them their dues. And hold not to the ties of disbelieving women; and ask for (the return of) that which ye have spent;...*

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## **Chapter 8 “Peace”**

What do you think of two people whose third companion is God? Fear nothing, for God is with us!

**9.40:***If ye help him not, still Allah helped him when those who disbelieve drove him forth, the second of two; when they two were in the cave, when he said unto his comrade: Grieve not. Lo! Allah is with us. Then Allah caused His peace of reassurance to descend upon him and supported him with hosts ye cannot see, and made the word of those who disbelieved the nethermost, while Allah's Word it was that became the uppermost. Allah is Mighty, Wise.*

He had bought this book and the Book of the Jews for a tidy sum in gold.

**2.41:***And believe in that which I reveal, confirming that which ye possess already of the Scripture, and be not first to disbelieve therein, and part not with My revelations for a trifling price, and keep your duty unto Me.*

**2.174:***Lo! Those who hide aught of the Scripture which Allah hath revealed and purchase a small gain therewith, they eat into their bellies nothing else than fire. Allah will not speak to them on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He make them grow. Theirs will be a painful doom.*

**3.77:***Lo! Those who purchase a small gain at the cost of Allah's covenant and their oaths, they have no portion in the Hereafter. Allah will neither speak to them nor look upon them on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He make them grow. Theirs will be a painful doom.*

**3.78:***And lo! There is a party of them who distort the Scripture with their tongues, that ye may think that what they say is from the Scripture, when it is not*

*from the Scripture. And they say: It is from Allah, when it is not from Allah; and they speak a lie concerning Allah knowingly.*

**3.187:***And remember when Allah laid a charge on those who had received the Scripture He said: Ye are to expound it to mankind and not to hide it. But they flung it behind their backs and bought thereby a little gain. Verily evil is that which they have gained thereby.*

**3.199:***And lo! of the People of the Scripture there are some who believe in Allah and that which is revealed unto you and that which was revealed unto them, humbling themselves before Allah. They purchase not a trifling gain at the price of the revelations of Allah. Verily their reward is with their Lord. Lo! Allah is swift to take account.*

**5.44:***Lo! We did reveal the Torah, wherein is guidance and a light, by which the prophets who surrendered unto Allah judged the Jews, and the rabbis and the priests judged by such of Allah's Scripture as they were bidden to observe, and thereunto were they witnesses. So fear not mankind, but fear Me. And My revelations for a little gain. Whoso judgeth not by that which Allah hath revealed: such are disbelievers.*

**9.9:***They have purchased with the revelations of Allah a little gain, so they debar (men) from His way. Lo! Evil is that which they are wont to do.*

...accusing him of being nothing but a charlatan constantly changing what he recited...

**16.101-102:***And when We put a revelation in place of another revelation, - and Allah knoweth best what He revealeth - they say: Lo! thou art but inventing. Most of them know not. Say: The holy Spirit hath delivered it from thy Lord with truth, that it may confirm the faith of those who believe, and as guidance and good tidings for those who have surrendered to Allah.*

“God is poor and we are rich.”

**3.177:***Verily Allah heard the saying of those who said, ... "Allah, forsooth, is poor, and we are rich!" We shall record their saying with their slaying of the prophets wrongfully and We shall say: Taste ye the punishment of burning!*

It was indeed reprehensible to fight during a holy month, but, for the Creator, continued unbelief was a much more serious sin. In order to spread Submission everywhere, it was licit to make war on those who rejected God, his Prophet and the Submitters. The killing of infidels was excusable, as unbelief was worse than any slaughter of such sinners.

**2.217:***They question thee O Muhammad with regard to warfare in the sacred month. Say: Warfare therein is a great transgression, but to turn men from the way of Allah, and to disbelieve in Him and in the Inviolable Place of Worship, and to expel His people thence, is a greater with Allah; for persecution is worse than killing. And they will not cease from fighting against you till they have made you renegades from your religion, if they can. And whoso becometh a renegade and dieth in his disbelief: such are they whose works have fallen both in the world and the Hereafter.*

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## **Chapter 9 “Seventh Heaven”**

Created from pure and smokeless fire, according to the Koran’s lying fable...

**55.15:***And the jinn did He create of smokeless fire.*

In a hadith, characteristic symptoms of this ailment had been confirmed by his last spouse, the child wife Aisha. The Prophet had been “bewitched” and suffered from such hallucinations that he thought he was doing what in reality he was definitely not.

Sahih Bukhari **Volume 4 Book 53 Hadith 400:***Narrated By 'Aisha : Once the Prophet was bewitched so that he began to imagine that he had done a thing which in fact he had not done.*

Sahih Muslim **Book 26 Hadith 5428:***'Aisha reported that a Jew from among the Jews of Banu Zuraiq who was called Labid bin al-A'sam cast spell upon Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) with the result that he (under the influence of the spell) felt that he had been doing something whereas in fact he had not been doing that...*

Anguished by the mockery of what he said and by imaginary plots against him that were recounted in the Koran...

**NOTE.** The panicky obsession with mockery can be seen in many verses.

**2.14:***And when they fall in with those who believe, they say: We believe; but when they go apart to their devils they declare: Lo! We are with you; verily we did but mock.*

**4.140:***He hath already revealed unto you in the Scripture that, when ye hear the revelations of Allah rejected and derided, ye sit not with them who disbelieve and mock until they engage in some other conversation. Lo! In that case if ye stayed ye would be like unto them. Lo! Allah will gather hypocrites and disbelievers, all together, into hell;*

**6.5:***And they denied the truth when it came unto them. But there will come unto them the tidings of that which they used to deride.*

**6.10:***Messengers of Allah have been derided before thee, but that whereat they scoffed surrounded such of them as did deride.*

**11.12:***A likely thing, that thou wouldst forsake aught of that which hath been revealed unto thee, and that thy breast should be straitened for it, because they say: Why hath not a treasure been sent down for him, or an angel come with him? Thou art but a warner, and Allah is in charge of all things.*

**13.32:***And verily messengers of Allah were mocked before thee, but long I bore with those who disbelieved. At length I seized them, and how awful was My punishment!*

**15.11:***And never came there unto them a messenger but they did mock him.*

**18.54:***And verily We have displayed for mankind in this Qur'an all manner of similitudes, but man is more than anything contentious.*

**21.41:***Messengers before thee, indeed, were mocked, but that whereat they mocked surrounded those who scoffed at them.*

**25.41:***And when they see thee O Muhammad they treat thee only as a jest saying: Is this he whom Allah sendeth as a messenger?*

**26.5:***Never cometh there unto them a fresh reminder from the Beneficent One, but they turn away from it.*

**36.30:***Ah, the anguish for the bondmen! Never came there unto them a messenger but they did mock him!*

**37.12-14:***Nay, but thou dost marvel when they mock And heed not when they are reminded, And seek to scoff when they behold a portent.*

**45.33:***And the evils of what they did will appear unto them, and that which they used to deride will befall them.*

**NOTE.** The obsession with plots can be seen in several verses.

**8.30:***And when those who disbelieve plot against thee O Muhammad to wound thee fatally, or to kill thee or to drive thee forth; they plot, but Allah also plotteth; and Allah is the best of plotters.*

**35.10:***Whoso desireth power should know that all power belongeth to Allah. Unto Him good words ascend, and the pious deed doth He exalt; but those who plot iniquities, theirs will be an awful doom; and the plotting of such folk will come to naught.*

In the Koran, as faithfully noted down by his scribes, Mohammed had boasted of winning by default one such duel against rabbis. In the challenge of sorcerers he had proposed to them, participants would have had to declare solemnly "By the God X or Y, may I die if I am lying..."

**2.94:***Say unto them: If the abode of the Hereafter in the providence of Allah is indeed for you alone and not for others of mankind as ye pretend, then long for death for ye must long for death if ye are truthful.*

**2.114:***And who doth greater wrong than he who forbiddeth the approach to the sanctuaries of Allah lest His name should be mentioned therein, and striveth for their ruin. As for such, it was never meant that they should enter them except in fear. Theirs in the world is ignominy and theirs in the Hereafter is an awful doom.*

**3.61:***And whoso disputeth with thee concerning him, after the knowledge which hath come unto thee, say unto him: Come! We will summon our sons and your sons, and our women and your women, and ourselves and yourselves, then we will pray humbly (to our Lord) and solemnly invoke the curse of Allah upon those who lie.*

**62.6-7:** *Say O Muhammad: O ye who are Jews! If ye claim that ye are favoured of Allah apart from all mankind, then long for death if ye are truthful. But they will never long for it because of all that their own hands have sent before, and Allah is Aware of evil-doers.*

However, victory had come easily for Mohammed. One of their ten commandments prohibits Jews to take the name of the Lord their God in vain...

**NOTE.** The rabbis refused this duel, because such a practice is unacceptable in view of the commandment: *Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.* Such a refusal permitted Mohammed to brag to his followers, telling them that if the Jews had accepted his challenge, not one Jew would have remained alive on Earth.

In fact, the whole Koran is a criminal collection of threats, Arabian sorcery and curses.

**113.1-5:** *Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of the Daybreak From the evil of that which He created; From the evil of the darkness when it is intense, And from the evil of malignant witchcraft, And from the evil of the envier when he envieth.*

It culminates with the cursing of Uncle Abu Lahab

### **Chapter 111 *Palm Fiber***

...Islamic countries where Moslems devoutly punish homosexuals...

**4.16-18:** *And as for the two of you who are guilty thereof, punish them both. And if they repent and improve, then let them be. Lo! Allah is ever relenting, Merciful. Forgiveness is only incumbent on Allah toward those who do evil in ignorance and then turn quickly in repentance to Allah. These are they toward whom Allah relenteth. Allah is ever Knower, Wise. The forgiveness is not for those who do ill-deeds until, when death attendeth upon one of them, he saith: Lo! I repent now; nor yet for those who die while they are disbelievers. For such We have prepared a painful doom.*

...religiously whip adulterous women...

**24.2:** *The adulterer and the adulteress, scourge ye each one of them with a hundred stripes. And let not pity for the twain withhold you from obedience to Allah, if ye believe in Allah and the Last Day. And let a party of believers witness their punishment.*

...and wall up ... women alive in their houses...

**4.15:** *As for those of your women who are guilty of lewdness, call to witness four of you against them. And if they testify to the truth of the allegation then confine them to the houses until death take them or until Allah appoint for them a way through new legislation.*

**NOTE.** The stipulations in this passage were modified by **24.2**, quoted above, requiring one hundred lashes.

...ordering mutilations, beheadings and executions

Mutilations **5.38:** *As for the thief, both male and female, cut off their hands. It is the reward of their own deeds, an exemplary punishment from Allah. Allah is Mighty, Wise.*

**Decapitations8.12:** *When thy Lord inspired the angels, saying: I am with you. So make those who believe stand firm. I will throw fear into the hearts of those who disbelieve. Then smite the necks and smite of them each finger.*

...verses that authorized men to beat their wives...

**4.34:***Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property (for the support of women). So good women are the obedient, guarding in secret that which Allah hath guarded. As for those from whom ye fear rebellion, admonish them and banish them to beds apart, and scourge them. Then if they obey you, seek not a way against them. Lo! Allah is ever High, Exalted, Great.*

...or said that women were inferior to the stronger sex...

**4.38**, as quoted above

The Islamic veils that women were supposed to wear...

**33.59:***O Prophet! Tell thy wives and thy daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks close round them when they go abroad. That will be better, so that they may be recognised and not annoyed. Allah is ever Forgiving, Merciful.*

...drinking alcohol was fine...

**2.219:** *They question thee about strong drink and games of chance. Say: In both is great sin, and some utility for men; but the sin of them is greater than their usefulness...*

**4.43:** *O ye who believe! Draw not near unto prayer when ye are drunken, till ye know that which ye utter...*

**5.91:***Satan seeketh only to cast among you enmity and hatred by means of strong drink and games of chance, and to turn you from remembrance of Allah and from His worship. Will ye then have done?*

**16.67:** *And of the fruits of the date-palm, and grapes, whence ye derive strong drink and also) good nourishment. Lo! therein is indeed a portent for people who have sense.*

...no verse ordering the killing of people in the name of God...

**4.90:** *...If they keep not aloof from you nor offer you peace nor hold their hands, then take them and kill them wherever ye find them. Against such We have given you clear warrant.*

**9.5:** *...slay the idolaters wherever ye find them, and take them (captive), and besiege them, and prepare for them each ambush....*

...no chapter mentioning the Paradise awaiting Moslem martyrs that died while slaughtering innocent folk...

**47.4-6:***Now when ye meet in battle those who disbelieve, then it is smiting of the necks until, when ye have routed them, then making fast of bonds; and afterward either grace or ransom till the war lay down its burdens. That is the*

*ordinance. And if Allah willed He could have punished them without you but thus it is ordained that He may try some of you by means of others. And those who are slain in the way of Allah, He rendereth not their actions vain. He will guide them and improve their state, And bring them in unto the Garden which He hath made known to them.*

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## **Chapter 11 “War”**

“I shall succor you by sending a thousand angels, who will deploy one after the other.”

**8.9:***When ye sought help of your Lord and He answered you saying: I will help you with a thousand of the angels, rank on rank.*

“Is it not enough that God is sending three thousand angels to our aid?”

**3.123-124:***Allah had already given you the victory at Badr, when ye were contemptible. So observe your duty to Allah in order that ye may be thankful. When thou didst say unto the believers: Is it not sufficient for you that your Lord should support you with three thousand angels sent down (to your help)?*

Following him, Submitters and Helpers had formed in two attacking lines. Thanks to a miraculous optical illusion, surrounded as they were by a cloud of sand, Mohammed got the impression that they had increased tenfold. This immense phantom army, combined with the sight of the angels, had cast terror into the Meccans.

**3.11:***There was a token for you in two hosts which met: one army fighting in the way of Allah, and another disbelieving, whom they saw as twice their number, clearly, with their very eyes. Thus Allah strengtheneth with His succour whom He will. Lo! herein verily is a lesson for those who have eyes.*

Smite the necks and smite of them each finger!

**8.12:***When thy Lord inspired the angels, saying: I am with you. So make those who believe stand firm. I will throw fear into the hearts of those who disbelieve. Then smite the necks and smite of them each finger.*

The hosts will all be routed and will turn and flee!

**54.44-46:***Or say they: We are a host victorious? The hosts will all be routed and will turn and flee. Nay, but the Hour of doom is their appointed tryst, and the Hour will be more wretched and more bitter than their earthly failure.*

Ye slew them not but Allah slew them! Thou threwest not when thou didst throw but Allah threw!

**8.17:** *Ye Muslims slew them not, but Allah slew them. And thou Muhammad threwest not when thou didst throw, but Allah threw, that He might test the believers by a fair test from Him. Lo! Allah is Hearer, Knower.*

When God had made man out of clay that rang like pottery, He had also created Jinns from the flame of a smokeless fire.

**51.56:***I created the jinn and humankind only that they might worship Me.*

**55.14-15:***He created man of clay like the potter's, And the jinn did He create of smokeless fire.*

Not all Jinns were evil beings. Some were good, like Othman, and venerated God.

**72.8-11:***And the Jinn who had listened to the Qur'an said: We had sought the heaven but had found it filled with strong warders and meteors. And we used to sit on places high therein to listen. But he who listeneth now findeth a flame in wait for him; And we know not whether harm is boded unto all who are in the earth, or whether their Lord intendeth guidance for them. And among us there are righteous folk and among us there are far from that. We are sects having different rules.*

These strange conversions, along with all the other facts that Othman had revealed, had been confirmed out of the very mouth of the angel Gabriel a few nights later

#### **Chapter 72 The Jinn**

**46.29-30:***And when We inclined toward thee Muhammad certain of the jinn, who wished to hear the Qur'an and, when they were in its presence, said: Give ear! and, when it was finished, turned back to their people, warning. They said: O our people! Lo! we have heard a scripture which hath been revealed after Moses, confirming that which was before it, guiding unto the truth and a right road.*

He had also given the Prophet protective spells allowing Jinns to be warded off. Henceforward, Mohammed would have available a range of charms that were particularly efficacious.

**113.1-5:** *Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of the Daybreak From the evil of that which He created; From the evil of the darkness when it is intense, And from the evil of malignant witchcraft, And from the evil of the envier when he envieth.*

**NOTE.** Mohammed had a particular fear of the dark and believed that the Devil resided within people's noses at night. This is reflected in the custom of plugging the bodily orifices of a corpse before burial, intended to prevent the Devil from entering it.

Sahih Bukhari **Volume 4 Book 54 Hadith 516:** *Narrated by Abu Huraira: The Prophet said, "If anyone of you rouses from sleep and performs the ablution, he should wash his nose by putting water in it and then blowing it out thrice, because Satan has stayed in the upper part of his nose all the night."*

Sahih Muslim **Book 2 Hadith 462**:*Abu Huraira reported: The Apostle of Allah (may peace be upon him) said: When any one of you awakes up from sleep and performs ablution, he must clean his nose three times, for the devil spends the night in the interior of his nose.*

Nonetheless, the Prophet had pledged never to reveal even the smallest part of his anatomy to Othman. Of course, he had confidence in him, but prudence was mother to safety. He had no desire for Othman, confused through some underhand trick by the Devil, to take over his body.

Sahih Muslim **Book 31 Hadith 5906** and a very similar hadith on the authority of Aisha:

*The Messenger of Allah was lying down in my apartment with his thigh or his shank uncovered when Abu Bakr sought permission to come in. It was given to him and he conversed with the prophet in that very state, with the Prophet's thigh or shank uncovered. Then Omar sought permission to come in and it was given to him and he conversed with the Prophet in that very state. Then 'Uthmaan sought permission to come in; the Messenger of Allah sat up straight and set right his clothes. Then he Othman entered and conversed with the Prophet. When he went out, Aisha said: 'Abu Bakr entered and you did not stir and did not observe much care in arranging your clothes, then Omar entered and you did not stir and did not observe much care, then Othman entered and you sat up and set your clothes right.' Thereupon, he said: 'Should I not be bashful of a man whom the Angels are bashful of?'*

In past times, men had believed they saw in them demigods with extraordinary powers. They had even raised some of them to divinity, worshipping them like gods, when Jinns were just another work of God, as were humans.

**6.100**:*Yet they ascribe as partners unto Him the jinn, although He did create them, and impute falsely, without knowledge, sons and daughters unto Him. Glorified be He and High Exalted above all that they ascribe unto Him.*

**37.158**:*And they imagine kinship between him and the jinn, whereas the jinn know well that they will be brought before Him.*

God had given the order for self-defense, protecting the faithful from the assaults of all those, whether evil Jinns or men that were their accomplices, who were surreptitiously aiding the machinations of the Devil.

**22.39-40**:*Sanction is given unto those who fight because they have been wronged; and Allah is indeed Able to give them victory; Those who have been driven from their homes unjustly only because they said: Our Lord is Allah - For had it not been for Allah's repelling some men by means of others, cloisters and churches and oratories and mosques, wherein the name of Allah is oft mentioned, would assuredly have been pulled down. Verily Allah helpeth one who helpeth Him. Lo! Allah is Strong, Almighty.*

...If Submission was to survive in this world and until the end of days, peace was no longer possible. Sooner or later the Devil would end up by enslaving humankind with his legions of evil Jinns.

**2.251:** *...And if Allah had not repelled some men by others the earth would have been corrupted...*

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## **Chapter 12 “Quisling”**

...they seemed to have at the back of their mind the fact that Alan was a Jew and that they should keep their distance from him as the Koran commanded...

**5.51:** *O ye who believe! Take not the Jews and the Christians for friends. They are friends one to another. He among you who taketh them for friends is one of them. Lo! Allah guideth not wrongdoing folk.*

**5.57:** *O Ye who believe! Choose not for guardians such of those who received the Scripture before you, and of the disbelievers, as make a jest and sport of your religion. But keep your duty to Allah if ye are true believers.*

**5.80-81:** *Thou seest many of them making friends with those who disbelieve. Surely ill for them is that which they themselves send on before them: that Allah will be wroth with them and in the doom they will abide. If they believed in Allah and the Prophet and that which is revealed unto him, they would not choose them for their friends. But many of them are of evil conduct.*

...putting into practice Allah’s injunction ordering the killing of Jews.

**4.91:** *They long that ye should disbelieve even as they disbelieve, that ye may be upon a level with them. So choose not friends from them till they forsake their homes in the way of Allah; if they turn back to enmity then take them and kill them wherever ye find them, and choose no friend nor helper from among them.*

**8.12-13:** *When thy Lord inspired the angels, saying: I am with you. So make those who believe stand firm. I will throw fear into the hearts of those who disbelieve. Then smite the necks and smite of them each finger. That is because they opposed Allah and His messenger. Whoso opposeth Allah and His messenger, for him lo! Allah is severe in punishment.*

**47.4:** *Now when ye meet in battle those who disbelieve, then it is smiting of the necks until, when ye have routed them, then making fast of bonds; and afterward either grace or ransom till the war lay down its burdens. That is the ordinance. And if Allah willed He could have punished them without you but thus it is ordained that He may try some of you by means of others. And those who are slain in the way of Allah, He rendereth not their actions vain.*

...historical passages revealing the racist genocide orchestrated by Mohammed.

**33.25-27:** *And Allah repulsed the disbelievers in their wrath; they gained no good. Allah averted their attack from the believers. Allah is ever Strong, Mighty. And He brought those of the People of the Scripture who supported them down from their strongholds, and cast panic into their hearts. Some ye slew, and ye made captive some. And He caused you to inherit their land and their houses and their wealth, and land ye have not trodden. Allah is ever Able to do all things.*

Reality, however, was what remained when you ceased to believe in it.

**Philip Kindred Dick** "How to Build A Universe that Doesn't Fall Apart Two Days Later" from the collection *I Hope I Shall Arrive Soon* (1985):  
*Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away.*

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### **Chapter 14 “The Ruse”**

He had accused the Prophet of plagiarizing crazy ancient legends to make up his recitation.

**8.31-32:** *And when Our revelations are recited unto them they say: We have heard. If we wish we can speak the like of this. Lo! this is naught but fables of the men of old. And when they said: O Allah! If this be indeed the truth from Thee, then rain down stones on us or bring on us some painful doom!*

...stating that no prophet had been able to take prisoners without perpetrating great massacres on the Earth

**8.67-69:** *It is not for any prophet to have captives until he hath made slaughter in the land. Ye desire the lure of this world and Allah desireth (for you) the Hereafter, and Allah is Mighty, Wise. Had it not been for an ordinance of Allah which had gone before, an awful doom had come upon you on account of what ye took. Now enjoy what ye have won, as lawful and good, and keep your duty to Allah. Lo! Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.*

Gabriel confirmed the shadowy proposals to kill him.

**9.74:** *They swear by Allah that they said nothing (wrong), yet they did say the word of disbelief, and did disbelieve after their Surrender (to Allah). And they purposed that which they could not attain, and they sought revenge only that Allah by His messenger should enrich them of His bounty. If they repent it will be better for them; and if they turn away, Allah will afflict them with a painful doom in the world and the Hereafter, and they have no protecting friend nor helper in the earth.*

The Almighty could plot much better than the conspirators themselves, so as to eliminate one by one these servants of the Devil.

**8.30:***And when those who disbelieve plot against thee O Muhammad to wound thee fatally, or to kill thee or to drive thee forth; they plot, but Allah also plotteth; and Allah is the best of plotters.*

Is there no honorable man who can take advantage of a moment's inattention on his part to put an end to the vain hopes of the gullible?

In **Ibn Ishaq's** *Sirat Rasul Allah*, **Asma bint Marwan** is reported to have written: *I despise Malik and al-Nabit and Auf and al-Khazraj. You obey a stranger who is none of yours, One not of Murad or Madhhij. Do you expect good from him after the killing of your chiefs Like a hungry man waiting for a cook's broth? Is there no man of pride who would attack him by surprise And cut off the hopes of those who expect aught from him?"*

**A. Guillaume**, *The Life of Mohammed. A translation of Ishaq's "Sirat Rasul Allah"*, pp 675–676, Oxford University Press, 1955.

Not even a pair of goats would fight over that!

**Ibn Ishaq**, *Mohammed tome II*, Paris, éditions Al-Buraq, 2001, pp 562, 597.

And if thou fearest treachery from any folk, throw back to them their treaty fairly.

**8.58:***And if thou fearest treachery from any folk, then throw back to them their treaty fairly. Lo! Allah loveth not the treacherous.*

They were reproachful about the death of their brothers, who would have done better to stay in the safety of the City, far from this futile affair of war which had led to bitter defeat. Through the mouth of the Prophet, God replied to them saying that Submitters fallen in combat were not dead. Such martyrs lived on eternally with him in the highest Heaven.

**3.156-157:***O ye who believe! Be not as those who disbelieved and said of their brethren who went abroad in the land or were fighting in the field: If they had been (here) with us they would not have died or been killed: that Allah may make it anguish in their hearts. Allah giveth life and causeth death; and Allah is Seer of what ye do. And what though ye be slain in Allah's way or die therein? Surely pardon from Allah and mercy are better than all that they amass.*

**3.168-169:***Those who, while they sat at home, said of their brethren (who were fighting for the cause of Allah): If they had been guided by us they would not have been slain. Say (unto them, O Muhammad): Then avert death from yourselves if ye are truthful. Think not of those, who are slain in the way of Allah, as dead. Nay, they are living. With their Lord they have provision.*

Even if they had never left home, death would have struck in their beds all those whose demise was inscribed up above.

**3.154:***Then, after grief, He sent down security for you. As slumber did it overcome a party of you, while the other party, who were anxious on their own account, thought wrongly of Allah, the thought of ignorance. They said: Have we any part in the cause? Say O Muhammad: The cause belongeth wholly to Allah. They hide within themselves a thought which they reveal not unto thee,*

*saying: Had we had any part in the cause we should not have been slain here. Say: Even though ye had been in your houses, those appointed to be slain would have gone forth to the places where they were to lie. All this hath been in order that Allah might try what is in your breasts and prove what is in your hearts. Allah is Aware of what is hidden in the breasts of men.*

Moreover, defeat was not really such. It was a trial sent by God to distinguish true Submitters from false.

**3.140-142:***If ye have received a blow, the (disbelieving) people have received a blow the like thereof. These are (only) the vicissitudes which We cause to follow one another for mankind, to the end that Allah may know those who believe and may choose witnesses from among you; and Allah loveth not wrong-doers. And that Allah may prove those who believe, and may blight the disbelievers. Or deemed ye that ye would enter paradise while yet Allah knoweth not those of you who really strive, nor knoweth those (of you) who are steadfast?*

**3.160:***If Allah is your helper none can overcome you, and if He withdraw His help from you, who is there who can help you after Him? In Allah let believers put their trust.*

**3.165-167:***And was it so, when a disaster smote you, though ye had smitten (them with a disaster) twice (as great), that ye said: How is this? Say (unto them, O Muhammad): It is from yourselves. Lo! Allah is Able to do all things. That which befell you, on the day when the two armies met, was by permission of Allah; that He might know the true believers; And that He might know the hypocrites, unto whom it was said: Come, fight in the way of Allah, or defend yourselves. They answered: If we knew aught of fighting we would follow you. On that day they were nearer disbelief than faith...*

...it was a warning to those who had set greater store on booty than on wiping out the forces of the Devil.

**3.152-153:***Allah verily made good His promise unto you when ye routed them by His leave, until the moment when your courage failed you, and ye disagreed about the order and ye disobeyed, after He had shown you that for which ye long. Some of you desired the world, and some of you desired the Hereafter. Therefore He made you flee from them, that He might try you. Yet now He hath forgiven you. Allah is a Lord of Kindness to believers. When ye climbed the hill and paid no heed to anyone, while the messenger, in your rear, was calling you to fight. Therefor He rewarded you grief for His grief, that He might teach you not to sorrow either for that which ye missed or for that which befell you. Allah is Informed of what ye do.*

Disobeying the Prophet came to the same thing as disobeying God, and that was a sin that condemned you to Hell. However, God was merciful. He would forgive all the transgressions committed at Uhud.

**3.155:***Lo! those of you who turned back on the day when the two hosts met, Satan alone it was who caused them to backslide, because of some of that which*

they have earned. Now Allah hath forgiven them. Lo! Allah is Forgiving, Clement.

**3.172:** *As for those who heard the call of Allah and His messenger after the harm befell them in the fight; for such of them as do right and ward off evil, there is great reward.*

In the Mother of Books, God would know how to divide up all the abandoned wealth wisely.

**Chapter 59**, and especially,

**59.6-8:***And that which Allah gave as spoil unto His messenger from them, ye urged not any horse or riding-camel for the sake thereof, but Allah giveth His messenger lordship over whom He will. Allah is Able to do all things. That which Allah giveth as spoil unto His messenger from the people of the townships, it is for Allah and His messenger and for the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer, that it become not a commodity between the rich among you. And whatsoever the messenger giveth you, take it. And whatsoever he forbiddeth, abstain from it. And keep your duty to Allah. Lo! Allah is stern in reprisal. And it is for the poor fugitives who have been driven out from their homes and their belongings, who seek bounty from Allah and help Allah and His messenger. They are the loyal.*

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## Chapter 15 “Narco”

She could enjoy a high social status, run a business or simply write poetry

**26.224:** *As for poets, the erring follow them*

...Allah ordered them to stay shut up at home, and it was forbidden for visitors to talk with them one-on-one in private.

**033.032:** *O ye wives of the Prophet! Ye are not like any other women. If ye keep your duty to Allah, then be not soft of speech, lest he in whose heart is a disease aspire to you, but utter customary speech. And stay in your houses. Bedizen not yourselves with the bedizement of the Time of Ignorance. Be regular in prayer, and pay the poor-due, and obey Allah and His messenger. Allah's wish is but to remove uncleanness far from you, O Folk of the Household, and cleanse you with a thorough cleansing.*

**33.51:** *...And when ye ask of them, the wives of the Prophet, anything, ask it of them from behind a curtain...*

...they had been buried alive in a different way, under a veil that was far more oppressive, heavy as a leaden cope.

**24.31:***And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and be modest, and to display of their adornment only that which is apparent, and to draw their*

*veils over their bosoms, and not to reveal their adornment save to their own husbands or fathers or husbands' fathers, or their sons or their husbands' sons, or their brothers or their brothers' sons or sisters' sons, or their women, or their slaves, or male attendants who lack vigour, or children who know naught of women's nakedness. And let them not stamp their feet so as to reveal what they hide of their adornment...*

**NOTE.** Some Islamists have used this passage to justify a ban on dancing.

**33.59:** *O Prophet! Tell thy wives and thy daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks close round them when they go abroad. That will be better, so that they may be recognised and not annoyed. Allah is ever Forgiving, Merciful.*

**NOTE.** In the end, most Moslem women do not veil their faces and their menfolk do not make any complaint about it, since this prescription from “God” is not accompanied, either in the Koran or in the hadiths, by any sanction of punishment for non-observance. While there are hadiths confirming Chapter 57 verse 39, which is interpreted as a requirement to hide the face and even the hands and feet, this is not an obligation with a punishment of Hell and the worst tortures, as is usually the case for daring to flout other verses. (An example is **4.115:** *And whoso opposeth the messenger after the guidance (of Allah) hath been manifested unto him, and followeth other than the believer's way, We appoint for him that unto which he himself hath turned, and expose him unto hell - a hapless journey's end!*) Some religious intellectuals have taken advantage of this “divine procedural flaw” to plunge through the breach it opens into modernity and free women from their cloth prisons.

This verse had been produced by Mohammed when women had come to request his opinion about an unnatural coupling, when their men took them in the anus from the rear as well as in the vagina from in front.

**2.223:** *Your women are a tilth for you to cultivate, so go to your tilth as ye will, and send good deeds before you for your souls, and fear Allah, and know that ye will one day meet Him. Give glad tidings to believers, O Muhammad.*

This prostitution was legalized in the chapter called “Women”.

**4.28:** *...And those of whom ye seek content, give unto them their portions as a duty. And there is no sin for you in what ye do by mutual agreement after the duty hath been done. Lo! Allah is ever Knower, Wise...*

**24.33:** *And let those who cannot find a match keep chaste till Allah give them independence by His grace. ... Force not your slave-girls to whoredom that ye may seek enjoyment of the life of the world, if they would preserve their chastity. And if one force them, then (unto them), after their compulsion, lo! Allah will be Forgiving, Merciful.*

**NOTE.** These two verses of the Medina period abolish the former verse from Mecca prohibiting prostitution

**16.90:** *Lo! Allah enjoineeth justice and kindness, and giving to kinsfolk, and forbiddeth lewdness and abomination and wickedness. He exhorteth you in order that ye may take heed.*

A man who could not pay the tariff to have sex with a converted woman could always rape one of his non-Moslem slaves for no charge, even if she was a married woman.

**4.28:***And all married women are forbidden unto you save those captives whom your right hands possess. It is a decree of Allah for you...*

If Mohammed had limited polygamy to four believer wives, he had set no limit at all on what a man “possessed with his right hand”, or in other words had gained as spoils of war. An unlimited number of captive female slaves could be his, as a little foretaste of the promised Paradise.

**4.3:** *...marry of the women, who seem good to you, two or three or four; and if ye fear that ye cannot do justice to so many then one only or the captives that your right hands possess...*

Mohammed had given an order in one verse that they should be shut away and beaten until they became docile and obedient...

**4.34:** *...So good women are the obedient, guarding in secret that which Allah hath guarded. As for those from whom ye fear rebellion, admonish them and banish them to beds apart, and scourge them. Then if they obey you, seek not a way against them...*

Men were the masters by divine right.

**4.34:***Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property for the support of women...*

In the Koran, there was no chapter describing women’s fate in Paradise. Luckily, though, by deduction from certain verses, Moslem intellectuals had worked out that men not only received seventy-two virgins, but also found their earthly spouses returned to them by right.

**36.55-56:***Lo! those who merit paradise this day are happily employed, They and their wives, in pleasant shade, on thrones reclining.*

**43.70:***Enter the Garden, ye and your wives, to be made glad.*

**44.54:***Even so (it will be). And We shall wed them unto fair ones with wide, lovely eyes.*

...women were not the equals of men in the Koran.

**2.228:** *...women have rights similar to those of men over them in kindness, and men are a degree above them. Allah is Mighty, Wise.*

A woman could inherit only half as much as her brother.

**4.11:** *Allah chargeth you concerning (the provision for) your children: to the male the equivalent of the portion of two females...*

4.176: *They ask thee for a pronouncement. Say: Allah hath pronounced for you concerning ... kindred ... if they be brethren, men and women, unto the male is the equivalent of the share of two females...*

...two women's testimonies were required for this to be equal to a just one man's statement to a court of law.

**2.282:** *...And call to witness, from among your men, two witnesses. And if two men be not at hand then a man and two women, of such as ye approve as witnesses, so that if the one erreth through forgetfulness the other will remember...*

...verses allowing him to have more than four wives, without any duty to share out his nights among them in a fair and equitable manner.

**33.50-51:** *O Prophet! Lo! We have made lawful unto thee thy wives unto whom thou hast paid their dowries, and those whom thy right hand possesseth of those whom Allah hath given thee as spoils of war, and the daughters of thine uncle on the father's side and the daughters of thine aunts on the father's side, and the daughters of thine uncle on the mother's side and the daughters of thine aunts on the mother's side who emigrated with thee, and a believing woman if she give herself unto the Prophet and the Prophet desire to ask her in marriage - a privilege for thee only, not for the rest of believers - We are Aware of that which We enjoined upon them concerning their wives and those whom their right hands possess - that thou mayst be free from blame, for Allah is ever Forgiving, Merciful. Thou canst defer whom thou wilt of them and receive unto thee whom thou wilt, and whomsoever thou desirest of those whom thou hast set aside (temporarily), it is no sin for thee (to receive her again); that is better; that they may be comforted and not grieve, and may all be pleased with what thou givest them...*

He also made up an entire chapter to justify his affair with Mary, his Coptic concubine.

### **Chapter 66, especially**

**66.1-5:** *O Prophet! Why bannest thou that which Allah hath made lawful for thee, seeking to please thy wives? And Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. Allah hath made lawful for you Muslims absolution from your oaths of such a kind, and Allah is your Protector. He is the Knower, the Wise. When the Prophet confided a fact unto one of his wives and when she afterward divulged it and Allah apprised him thereof, he made known to her part thereof and passed over part. And when he told it her she said: Who hath told thee? He said: The Knower, the Aware hath told me. If ye twain turn unto Allah repentant, ye have cause to do so for your hearts desired the ban; and if ye aid one another against him Muhammad then lo! Allah, even He, is his Protecting Friend, and Gabriel and the righteous among the believers; and furthermore the angels are his helpers. It may happen that his Lord, if he divorce you, will give him in your stead wives better than you, submissive to Allah, believing, pious, penitent, devout, inclined to fasting, widows and maids.*

His passion for the wife of Zaid, his own adopted son and close friend, was the subject of a divine message, as always highly convenient, in which Allah swept aside his feigned scruples, permitting the couple to divorce and ordering the Prophet to wed the object of his desire.

**33.37:***And when thou saidst unto him on whom Allah hath conferred favour and thou hast conferred favour: Keep thy wife to thyself, and fear Allah. And thou didst hide in thy mind that which Allah was to bring to light, and thou didst fear mankind whereas Allah hath a better right that thou shouldst fear Him. So when Zeyd had performed that necessary formality of divorce from her, We gave her unto thee in marriage, so that henceforth there may be no sin for believers in respect of wives of their adopted sons, when the latter have performed the necessary formality of release from them. The commandment of Allah must be fulfilled*

He was seen as a fine model to follow...

**33.21:***Verily in the messenger of Allah ye have a good example for him who looketh unto Allah and the Last Day, and remembereth Allah much.*

As a precaution, he made up divine verses warning them to stay shut up in the house...

**33.32-33:***O ye wives of the Prophet! Ye are not like any other women. If ye keep your duty to Allah, then be not soft of speech, lest he in whose heart is a disease aspire to you, but utter customary speech. And stay in your houses...*

...not to speak to any visitors except when shielded by a curtain. In his Koran, Mohammed had also issued a formal prohibition on anyone marrying any of the women that he had attempted to have intercourse with.

**33.53:** *...And when ye ask of them (the wives of the Prophet) anything, ask it of them from behind a curtain. That is purer for your hearts and for their hearts. And it is not for you to cause annoyance to the messenger of Allah, nor that ye should ever marry his wives after him. Lo! that in Allah's sight would be an enormity.*

Such intercourse probably also extended to young boys, as he had fantasized it would be so in Paradise.

**56.17:** *There wait on them immortal youths.*

For three years he was able to practice with Aisha so-called *mufakhathat*, thighing, or rubbing his penis between her thighs...

Sahih Bukhari **Volume 1 Book 4 Hadith 229.***Narrated by Aisha: I used to wash the traces of Janaba (semen) from the clothes of the Prophet and he used to go for prayers while traces of water were still on it (water spots were still visible).*

...until he eventually deflowered her at the age of just nine years.

Sahih Bukhari **Volume 7 Book 62 Hadith 64**. Narrated by Aisha: That the Prophet married her when she was six years old and he consummated his marriage when she was nine years old, and then she remained with him for nine years (i.e., till his death).

Sahih Muslim **Book 8 Hadith 3310**. Aisha reported: Allah's Apostle married me when I was six years old, and I was admitted to his house when I was nine years old.

Abu Dawud **Book 36 Hadith 4915**. Narrated by Aisha: The Apostle of Allah married me when I was seven or six. When we came to Medina, Umm Ruman came to me when I was swinging. They took me, made me prepared and decorated me. I was then brought to the Apostle of Allah, and he took up cohabitation with me when I was nine.

...the chapter bearing the title "Divorce", which legalized the worst forms of pedophilia.

**65.4:** *And for such of your women as despair of menstruation, if ye doubt, their period of waiting shall be three months, along with those who have it not. And for those with child, their period shall be till they bring forth their burden. And whosoever keepeth his duty to Allah, He maketh his course easy for him.*

...such as gambling or alcohol, because they might constitute a competitor to his religion. As for alcohol, at first Mohammed more or less tolerated it...

**NOTE.** The following verses show the progression from acceptance through disapproval to total ban.

**16.67:** *And of the fruits of the date-palm, and grapes, whence ye derive strong drink and also good nourishment. Lo! therein is indeed a portent for people who have sense.*

**2.219:** *They question thee about strong drink and games of chance. Say: In both is great sin, and some utility for men; but the sin of them is greater than their usefulness...*

**4.43:** *O ye who believe! Draw not near unto prayer when ye are drunken, till ye know that which ye utter...*

**5.90:** *O ye who believe! Strong drink and games of chance and idols and divining arrows are only an infamy of Satan's handiwork. Leave it aside in order that ye may succeed.*

Those who don't know true Islam claim that it warns against waging war.

2.190-191: *Fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you... And slay them wherever ye find them.... Such is the reward of disbelievers.*

**2.216:** *Warfare is ordained for you, though it is hateful unto you; but it may happen that ye hate a thing which is good for you, and it may happen that ye love a thing which is bad for you. Allah knoweth, ye know not.*

**4.71:** *O ye who believe! Take your precautions, then advance the proven ones, or advance all together.*

**8.39:** *And fight them until persecution is no more, and religion is all for Allah...*

**9.38-39:** *O ye who believe! What aileth you that when it is said unto you: Go forth in the way of Allah, ye are bowed down to the ground with heaviness... If ye go not forth He will afflict you with a painful doom, and will choose instead of you a folk other than you...*

**9.123:** *O ye who believe! Fight those of the disbelievers who are near to you, and let them find harshness in you...*

**NOTE.** See also **2.244, 4.74-78, 4.84, 8.15-16, 9.5, 9.13-14, 9.29, 22.39.**

In a verse in the Koran, Mohammed had given the near relatives of a dead person a free hand to revenge his murder. The family was authorized to act as judge and jury for themselves and to murder the designated guilty party

**17.33:** *And slay not the life which Allah hath forbidden save with right. Whoso is slain wrongfully, We have given power unto his heir, but let him not commit excess in slaying. Lo! he will be helped.*

He added in his verse a financial clause that could wash away blood at a price, allowing the wealthiest murderers to buy themselves out of trouble with the law and kill with impunity.

**2.178:** *O ye who believe! Retaliation is prescribed for you in the matter of the murdered; the freeman for the freeman, and the slave for the slave, and the female for the female. And for him who is forgiven somewhat by his injured brother, prosecution according to usage and payment unto him in kindness. This is an alleviation and a mercy from your Lord. He who transgresseth after this will have a painful doom.*

**NOTE.** Taken literally, this verse enjoins the *lex talionis*, “an eye for an eye” The family of the victim is granted permission to take justice into its own hands, by killing someone from the presumed murderer’s family, who may well be innocent of any crime whatsoever. The system is extended to all forms of wounding or harm.

**5.45:** *And We prescribed for them therein: The life for the life, and the eye for the eye, and the nose for the nose, and the ear for the ear, and the tooth for the tooth, and for wounds retaliation. But whoso forgoeth it (in the way of charity) it shall be expiation for him. Whoso judgeth not by that which Allah hath revealed: such are wrong-doers.*

...Islamic law had finally become fixed. It was inward-looking, graven in stone of the worst obscurantism, and permitted no changes whatsoever

**48.23:** *It is the law of Allah which hath taken course aforesaid. Thou wilt not find for the law of Allah aught of power to change.*

Sharia was no more than a system for tyranny within and aggression without, with verses ordering no obedience to be accorded to non-Moslems or to any of their democratic laws that ran contrary to the Koran.

**9.29:** *Fight against such of those who have been given the Scripture as believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, and forbid not that which Allah hath forbidden by His messenger, and follow not the Religion of Truth, until they pay the tribute readily, being brought low.*

**33.45:***And incline not to the disbelievers and the hypocrites. Disregard their noxious talk, and put thy trust in Allah. Allah is sufficient as Trustee.*

Once Sharia had been imposed on the world, a non-Moslem would no longer be able to testify against a Moslem.

Section on the legal code in M.d'Ohsson, *Tableau général de l'empire Othoman* Volume 6 page 226.

That was the case for usury which was formally forbidden in the Koran.

**3.130:** O ye who believe! Devour not usury, doubling and quadrupling the sum lent. Observe your duty to Allah, that ye may be successful.

**30.39:** *That which ye give in usury in order that it may increase on other people's property hath no increase with Allah; but that which ye give in charity, seeking Allah's Countenance, hath increase manifold.*

The divine order to wall up adulterous women alive...

**4.15:***As for those of your women who are guilty of lewdness, call to witness four of you against them. And if they testify to the truth of the allegation then confine them to the houses until death take them or until Allah appoint for them a way through new legislation.*

The cutting off of a thief's hand was still in full force to this day...

**5.38:***As for the thief, both male and female, cut off their hands. It is the reward of their own deeds, an exemplary punishment from Allah. Allah is Mighty, Wise.*

...a school could just as well teach that the Earth was not round, because that contradicted a verse in the Koran.

**79.30:***And after that He spread the earth,*

...since the Koran confirms the creationist tale of Adam and Eve,...

**15.26:***Verily We created man of potter's clay of black mud altered,*

**17.61:***And when We said unto the angels: Fall down prostrate before Adam and they fell prostrate all save Iblis, he said: Shall I fall prostrate before that which Thou hast created of clay?*

**2.35:** *And We said: O Adam! Dwell thou and thy wife in the Garden, and eat ye freely of the fruits thereof where ye will; but come not nigh this tree lest ye become wrong-doers.*

*Woe to that man by whom offence cometh, is what Jesus said...*

The Gospel according to Saint **Matthew 18.7:***Woe unto the world because of offences! for it needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh.*

Mohammed had gone worse than that by making up a verse that ordered the crucifixion of all who opposed him or worked to offend him.

**5.33:** *The only reward of those who make war upon Allah and His messenger and strive after corruption in the land will be that they will be killed or crucified, or have their hands and feet on alternate sides cut off, or will be expelled out of the land. Such will be their degradation in the world, and in the Hereafter theirs will be an awful doom;*

There was no truth in the claim that religion made people more altruistic.  
*Cerveau et psycho*, **Number 73 January 2016, page 12.**

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### **Chapter 17 “Love”**

Everyone had believed her when she started saying that the Prophet had deflowered her before she reached the age of ten.

Sahih Bukhari **Volume 7 Book 62 Hadith 64.** *Narrated by Aisha: That the Prophet married her when she was six years old and he consummated his marriage when she was nine years old, and then she remained with him for nine years (i.e., till his death).*

“Keep your wife to yourself and fear God,” replied the Prophet.

**33.37:** *And when thou saidst unto him on whom Allah hath conferred favour and thou hast conferred favour: Keep thy wife to thyself, and fear Allah. And thou didst hide in thy mind that which Allah was to bring to light, and thou didst fear mankind whereas Allah hath a better right that thou shouldst fear Him. So when Zeyd had performed that necessary formality of divorce from her, We gave her unto thee in marriage, so that henceforth there may be no sin for believers in respect of wives of their adopted sons, when the latter have performed the necessary formality of release from them. The commandment of Allah must be fulfilled.*

The Almighty authorized his future marriage, since the ignorance of ancient times had given way to the arrival of Truth.

**33.4-5:** *Allah hath not assigned unto any man two hearts within his body, nor hath He made your wives, whom ye declare to be as your mothers, your mothers, nor hath He made those whom ye claim to be your sons, your sons. This is but a saying of your mouths. But Allah saith the truth and He showeth the way. Proclaim their real parentage. That will be more equitable in the sight of Allah. And if ye know not their fathers, then they are your brethren in the faith, and your clients...*

**33.36:** *And it becometh not a believing man or a believing woman, when Allah and His messenger have decided an affair for them, that they should after that claim any say in their affair; and whoso is rebellious to Allah and His messenger, he verily goeth astray in error manifest.*

33.37, as quoted above.

**33.38-40:** *There is no reproach for the Prophet in that which Allah maketh his due. That was Allah's way with those who passed away of old - and the commandment of Allah is certain destiny - Who delivered the messages of Allah and feared Him, and feared none save Allah. Allah keepeth good account. Muhammad is not the father of any man among you, but he is the messenger of Allah and the Seal of the Prophets; and Allah is ever Aware of all things.*

A shooting star had just traversed the vault of the sky. It was a dart thrown by God's guardians at a demon that had tried to break into the first Heaven.

**72.8:** *And the Jinn who had listened to the Qur'an said: We had sought the heaven but had found it filled with strong warders and meteors.*

**NOTE.** Ancient Arab superstition, retained in this verse, saw shooting stars as darts thrown against demons trying to penetrate into Heaven.

...God would know for sure how to protect his Messenger with fresh words written in the Mother of Books, bringing back to obedience any tongues that had ducked away from their promise.

**66.1-5:** *O Prophet! Why bannest thou that which Allah hath made lawful for thee, seeking to please thy wives? And Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. Allah hath made lawful for you Muslims absolution from your oaths of such a kind, and Allah is your Protector. He is the Knower, the Wise. When the Prophet confided a fact unto one of his wives and when she afterward divulged it and Allah apprised him thereof, he made known to her part thereof and passed over part. And when he told it her she said: Who hath told thee? He said: The Knower, the Aware hath told me. If ye twain turn unto Allah repentant, ye have cause to do so for your hearts desired the ban; and if ye aid one another against him Muhammad then lo! Allah, even He, is his Protecting Friend, and Gabriel and the righteous among the believers; and furthermore the angels are his helpers. It may happen that his Lord, if he divorce you, will give him in your stead wives better than you, submissive to Allah, believing, pious, penitent, devout, inclined to fasting, widows and maids.*

...it said that the Seal of the Prophets was not immortal and the day he was killed Submission would have to continue its advance without him.

**3.144:** *Muhammad is but a messenger, messengers the like of whom have passed away before him. Will it be that, when he dieth or is slain, ye will turn back on your heels? He who turneth back on his heels doth no hurt to Allah, and Allah will reward the thankful.*

Through the Prophet's voice, God scolded the townsfolk for having passed on by word of mouth such atrocious rumors about Aisha when they were obvious lies. God could have brought down a terrible punishment on them all for the gossip that they had spread around. Nonetheless, the Almighty was compassionate and would forgive the sin they had committed.

**24.11-20:** *Lo! they who spread the slander are a gang among you. Deem it not a bad thing for you; nay, it is good for you. Unto every man of them will be paid that which he hath earned of the sin; and as for him among them who had the greater share therein, his will be an awful doom. Why did not the believers, men and women, when ye heard it, think good of their own folk, and say: It is a manifest untruth? Why did they not produce four witnesses? Since they produce not witnesses, they verily are liars in the sight of Allah. Had it not been for the grace of Allah and His mercy unto you in the world and the Hereafter an awful doom had overtaken you for that whereof ye murmured. When ye welcomed it with your tongues, and uttered with your mouths that whereof ye had no knowledge, ye counted it a trifle. In the sight of Allah it is very great. Wherefor, when ye heard it, said ye not: It is not for us to speak of this. Glory be to Thee O Allah! This is awful calumny. Allah admonisheth you that ye repeat not the like thereof ever, if ye are in truth believers. And He expoundeth unto you the revelations. Allah is Knower, Wise. Lo! those who love that slander should be spread concerning those who believe, theirs will be a painful punishment in the world and the Hereafter. Allah knoweth. Ye know not. Had it not been for the grace of Allah and His mercy unto you, and that Allah is Clement, Merciful, ye had been undone.*

Adulterous men and women were to receive a hundred lashes of the whip, and accusers who could not produce a foursome to attest to the truth of their claims would receive eighty.

**24.2:***The adulterer and the adulteress, scourge ye each one of them with a hundred stripes. And let not pity for the twain withhold you from obedience to Allah, if ye believe in Allah and the Last Day. And let a party of believers witness their punishment.*

**24.4:***And those who accuse honourable women but bring not four witnesses, scourge them with eighty stripes and never afterward accept their testimony - They indeed are evil-doers -*

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## **Chapter 18 “Divine Wind”**

...the Moslems who stayed quietly at home were not equal to those who fought for the triumph of Islam

**4.95:***Those of the believers who sit still, other than those who have a disabling hurt, are not on an equality with those who strive in the way of Allah with their wealth and lives. Allah hath conferred on those who strive with their wealth and lives a rank above the sedentary. Unto each Allah hath promised good, but He hath bestowed on those who strive a great reward above the sedentary;*

...seven Hells, some of them reserved especially for Christians, for Jews or for atheists...

**15.43-44:***And lo! for all such, hell will be the promised place. It hath seven gates, and each gate hath an appointed portion.*

...there were seven Paradises...

**17.44:***The seven heavens and the earth and all that is therein praise Him, and there is not a thing but hymneth His praise; but ye understand not their praise. Lo! He is ever Clement, Forgiving.*

**41.12:***Then He ordained them seven heavens in two Days and inspired in each heaven its mandate; and We decked the nether heaven with lamps, and rendered it inviolable. That is the measuring of the Mighty, the Knower.*

**65.12:***Allah it is who hath created seven heavens, and of the earth the like thereof. The commandment cometh down among them slowly, that ye may know that Allah is Able to do all things, and that Allah surroundeth all things in knowledge.*

If a believer wanted to reach the premium deck of the vessel, his only choice was to become a warrior. He had the obligation to kill infidels in the name of God, so as to impose Islam in a sea of tears, or die in the attempt with his weapons in his hand as a martyr, as Mohamed had hoped to end his days.

**4.74:***Let those fight in the way of Allah who sell the life of this world for the other. Whoso fighteth in the way of Allah, be he slain or be he victorious, on him We shall bestow a vast reward.*

Highlighted by manipulating Islamic gurus, the advantage of the status of martyr, as opposed to that of warrior-murderer, was to see one's sins redeemed by Allah

**3.195:***And their Lord hath heard them and He saith: Lo! I suffer not the work of any worker, male or female, to be lost. Ye proceed one from another. So those who fled and were driven forth from their homes and suffered damage for My cause, and fought and were slain, verily I shall remit their evil deeds from them and verily I shall bring them into Gardens underneath which rivers flow - A reward from Allah. And with Allah is the fairest of rewards.*

This was set against a backdrop of Koranic verses threatening Hell for those who refused to participate in it.

**9.39:***If ye go not forth He will afflict you with a painful doom, and will choose instead of you a folk other than you. Ye cannot harm Him at all. Allah is Able to do all things.*

**48.17:***There is no blame for the blind, nor is there blame for the lame, nor is there blame for the sick that they go not forth to war. And whoso obeyeth Allah and His messenger, He will make him enter Gardens underneath which rivers flow; and whoso turneth back, him will He punish with a painful doom.*

This Holy War was not a struggle from another age, a moral campaign, or a metaphoric battle, as the Meccans claimed. It was a sacred duty, a religious obligation established in the Koran as a divine institution, intended to inflict Islam definitively upon all humanity by murderous force

**9.111:***Lo! Allah hath bought from the believers their lives and their wealth because the Garden will be theirs: they shall fight in the way of Allah and shall slay and be slain...*

Its fundamentalism, its acts of terrorism and its murderous madness had the merit of being logical and even honest when compared to what Allah commanded.

**2.186-187:***Fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you, but begin not hostilities. Lo! Allah loveth not aggressors. And slay them wherever ye find them, and drive them out of the places whence they drove you out, for persecution is worse than slaughter...*

“It’s not just because there are lots of people who are wrong that their opinions have to be right”.

Quotation from the French actor. Michel Gérard Joseph Colucci, best known under his stage name **Coluche**: *C’est pas parce qu’ils sont nombreux à avoir tort qu’ils ont raison!*

Mohammed forbade them to discuss his verses with unbelievers

**6.68:**And when thou seest those who meddle with Our revelations, withdraw from them until they meddle with another topic. And if the devil cause thee to forget, sit not, after the remembrance, with the congregation of wrong-doers.

...seeing nothing but the Koran, because it claimed that Allah sufficed for all purposes.

**22.64:***Unto Him belongeth all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. Lo! Allah, He verily is the Absolute, the Owner of Praise.*

Feeling inferior to the Almighty Creator...

**5.116:** *Thou knowest what is in my mind, and I know not what is in Thy Mind. Lo! Thou, only Thou, art the Knower of Things Hidden.*

Whoso slayeth a believer of set purpose, his reward is Hell for ever.

**4.93:***Whoso slayeth a believer of set purpose, his reward is hell for ever. Allah is wroth against him and He hath cursed him and prepared for him an awful doom.*

The justification for this barbarity had merited a couple of lines in the Koran.

**9.107-108:** *And as for those who chose a place of worship out of opposition and disbelief, and in order to cause dissent among the believers, and as an outpost for those who warred against Allah and His messenger aforesaid, they will surely swear: We purposed naught save good. Allah beareth witness that*

*they verily are liars. Never stand to pray there. A place of worship which was found upon duty to Allah from the first day is more worthy that thou shouldst stand to pray therein, wherein are men who love to purify themselves. Allah loveth the purifiers*

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## **Chapter 19 “Fifth Commandment: Thou Shalt Refute the Perfection of the Koran”**

...God has revealed in its verses that He designed this Koran with a view to easy memorization...

**54.22:***And in truth We have made the Qur'an easy to remember.*

...He wrote it in Arabic...

**26.192-195:**And lo! it is a revelation of the Lord of the Worlds, Which the True Spirit hath brought down Upon thy heart, that thou mayst be (one) of the warners, In plain Arabic speech.

Mohammed was incapable of expressing certain concepts using only his mother tongue. An instance is the term Nabi, meaning prophet.

**NOTE.** Further examples are *sawt* (whip, scourge), *madinah* (city, town) *masjid* (place of prayer, mosque), *Sultan* (ruler, sovereign), *sullam* (ladder, stairway)

There are words which are not standard Arabic, others which are used with meanings a long way from their normal sense, adjectives and verbs which do not agree as they should in gender and number, and pronouns used illogically or ungrammatically.

**NOTE.** Verse 15 of Chapter 20 is totally incongruous, its rhyme differing from all the rest of the chapter. Verses 1 to 5 of Chapter 78 have all the hallmarks of being an addition done completely artificially, because their rhyme and tone are totally different from the rest of the Chapter. In the same Chapter, verses 32, 33 and 34 have been inserted between verses 31 and 35, creating a break in the logic between verse 32 and verse 35. In Chapter 74 verse 31 is plainly also an addition, since it is in an absolutely different style from the rest of the Chapter, as well as being much longer than all the other verses in it. In Chapter 50, verses 24 to 32 have been twisted into a context in which they do not belong. Details taken from Ibn Warraq *Why I Am Not a Muslim*, Prometheus Books, 1995.

An instance is when in His Koran He describes Alexander the Great (under the nickname of “The Two-Horned One”) as a fervent monotheist

**18.83-98:***They will ask thee of Dhu'l-Qarneyn. Say: I shall recite unto you a remembrance of him. Lo! We made him strong in the land and gave him unto every thing a road. And he followed a road Till, when he reached the setting-place of the sun, he found it setting in a muddy spring, and found a people thereabout. We said: O Dhu'l-Qarneyn! Either punish or show them kindness. He said: As for him who doeth wrong, we shall punish him, and then he will be brought back unto his Lord, Who will punish him with awful punishment! But as for him who believeth and doeth right, good will be his reward, and We shall speak unto him a mild command.*

NOTE. Dhu'l-Qarneyn or Zul-Qarnayn (the one with two horns) is understood to be Alexander the Great, who issued coins on which he was depicted with the horns of Zeus Ammon.

...just the sort of polytheist that a Koranic verse orders should be killed...

**9.5:***Then, when the sacred months have passed, slay the idolaters wherever ye find them, and take them captive, and besiege them, and prepare for them each ambush....*

...but the earth is not flat!

**50.7:***And the earth have We spread out, and have flung firm hills therein, and have caused of every lovely kind to grow thereon,*

**51.48:***And the earth have We laid out, how gracious is the Spreader (thereof)!*

**79.30:***And after that He spread the earth,*

...anachronisms (Mohammed confuses Mary, the mother of Jesus, with Mary, the sister of Moses).

**19.27-28:***Then she brought him to her own folk, carrying him. They said: O Mary! Thou hast come with an amazing thing. O sister of Aaron! Thy father was not a wicked man nor was thy mother a harlot.*

NOTE. There are other such confusions. Haman is taken to be a minister of Pharaoh at the time of Moses, when in fact he served Ahasuerus (Xerxes I), King of Persia.

**40.36:***And Pharaoh said: O Haman! Build for me a tower that haply I may reach the roads,*

**Esther 3.1:***After these things did king Ahasuerus promote Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him.*

NOTE. There is a confusion between Saul in the tale of David and Goliath (**I Samuel 17**), and Gideon in **Judges 7**.

**2.249-2.251:***And when Saul set out with the army, he said: Lo! Allah will try you by the ordeal of a river. Whosoever therefore drinketh thereof he is not of me, and whosoever tasteth it not he is of me, save him who taketh thereof in the hollow of his hand. But they drank thereof, all save a few of them. And after he had crossed the river, he and those who believed with him, they said: We have no power this day against Goliath and his hosts. But those who knew that they*

would meet Allah exclaimed: *How many a little company hath overcome a mighty host by Allah's leave! Allah is with the steadfast. And when they went into the field against Goliath and his hosts they said: Our Lord! Bestow on us endurance, make our foothold sure, and give us help against the disbelieving folk. So they routed them by Allah's leave and David slew Goliath; and Allah gave him the kingdom and wisdom, and taught him of that which He willeth.*

**Judges 7.4-7:** *And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people are yet too many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there: and it shall be, that of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go. So he brought down the people unto the water: and the LORD said unto Gideon, Every one that lappeth of the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink. And the number of them that lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, were three hundred men: but all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water. And the LORD said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: and let all the other people go every man unto his place.*

**NOTE.** Another Koranic error is to have Noah be alive 950 before the beginning of the Flood, when that was the total length of his life, according to Genesis.

**29.14:** *And verily we sent Noah as Our messenger unto his folk, and he continued with them for a thousand years save fifty years; and the flood engulfed them, for they were wrong-doers.*

**Genesis 9.29:** *And all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years: and he died.*

**NOTE.** Trying to plagiarize the fictitious genealogies in the Judeo-Christian traditions, the Koran **3.33-47** apparently confuses Imran (Amram) the father of Aaron, Miriam and Moses, of the tribe of Levi, with Joachim, the father of Mary, the grandfather of Jesus, of the tribe of Judah, these two figures being separated by more than a millennium. This is probably an outcome of the fact that “Miriam” and “Mary” are both “Maryam” in Arabic.

...“People of the Cave”...

**NOTE.** There is a Christian fable of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, saying that seven young men took refuge in a cave from persecution under the Emperor Decius around 250 A.D. and were walled up in it by their pursuers. They were found there alive in the reign of Theodosius II, two hundred years later. The Koran (**18.8-26**) recounts this as a historical truth, the first of the verses reading: *Or deemest thou that the People of the Cave and the Inscription are a wonder among Our portents?*

Mohammed should not have put such a boast into a verse, thinking that he had the very best poet-scribes in his pay, with an inimitable style.

**2.23:***And if ye are in doubt concerning that which We reveal unto Our slave Muhammad, then produce a surah of the like thereof, and call your witness beside Allah if ye are truthful.*

**10.38:***Or say they: He hath invented it? Say: Then bring a surah like unto it, and call for help on all ye can besides Allah, if ye are truthful.*

This was because the poet Bashshar Ibn Burd composed much better verse.

**NOTE.** Ibn Warraq in his *Why I Am Not a Muslim* explains that one of the charges often leveled against Bashshar ibn Burd was his systematic criticism of the dogma of the miraculous nature of the inimitable Koran. The orthodox held that no man was capable of attaining the perfection of Koran. Goldziher gave an example of his “impertinence”, saying that a group of free-thinkers, both Moslem and non-Moslems, but all of them heretical, had the habit of meeting in Basra. In these meetings Bashshar ibn Burd more than once commented on poetry submitted to this assembly by saying that a given poem surpassed such and such a verse in the Koran or that a particular line was better than a given line in the Koran. In fact, Bashshar praised one of his own poems that he had heard recited by a singer in Baghdad by noting that she found it better than Chapter 59 “The Gathering”. The literary style of the Koran was criticized, particularly its metaphors. Al Mubarrad tells of a heretic who ridiculed **37.63-66***Lo! We have appointed it a torment for wrong-doers. Lo! it is a tree that springeth in the heart of hell. Its crop is as it were the heads of devils And lo! they verily must eat thereof, and fill their bellies therewith.* His comment was that the fruits of this Zaqqum tree, further identified in **44.43-44.46**, involve a comparison between the visible and the unknown. He said that no-one has seen a Devil’s head, so this is a very poor sort of a simile.

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## **Chapter 21 “Scientific Miracle”**

...Tom would have been capable of killing all of humanity, just as the Murderer of Medina would have to attain his aims

**3.92:***Lo! Those who disbelieve, and die in disbelief, the whole earth full of gold would not be accepted from such an one if it were offered as a ransom for his soul. Theirs will be a painful doom and they will have no helpers*

**29.4:***Or do those who do ill-deeds imagine that they can outstrip Us? Evil for them is that which they decide.*

Our Submission to Allah takes priority over everything, including wives and children. The Qur’an warns us that our wives and children are like enemies for us, and we must beware of them. Our property and our children are just a temptation, while in the company of Allah there is an immense reward

**64.14-15:** *O ye who believe! Lo! among your wives and your children there are enemies for you, therefore beware of them. And if ye efface and overlook and forgive, then lo! Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. Your wealth and your children are only a temptation, whereas Allah! with Him is an immense reward.*

...the tyrannical shepherd had taken care to separate his flock from Jewish or Christian herds by Koranic injunctions that forbade them from having a non-Moslem as a spouse, a friend or a boss

**3.118:** *O ye who believe! Take not for intimates others than your own folk, who would spare no pains to ruin you; they love to hamper you. Hatred is revealed by the utterance of their mouths, but that which their breasts hide is greater. We have made plain for you the revelations if ye will understand.*

**5.51:** *O ye who believe! Take not the Jews and the Christians for friends. They are friends one to another. He among you who taketh them for friends is one of them. Lo! Allah guideth not wrongdoing folk.*

**5.57:** *O Ye who believe! Choose not for guardians such of those who received the Scripture before you, and of the disbelievers, as make a jest and sport of your religion. But keep your duty to Allah if ye are true believers.*

... chapter three of the Koran that recounts a far-fetched whacky nativity of Jesus made up from fragments of apocryphal gospels

**3.47-49:** *She said: My Lord! How can I have a child when no mortal hath touched me? He said: So it will be. Allah createth what He will. If He decreeth a thing, He saith unto it only: Be! and it is. And He will teach him the Scripture and wisdom, and the Torah and the Gospel, And will make him a messenger unto the Children of Israel, saying: Lo! I come unto you with a sign from your Lord. Lo! I fashion for you out of clay the likeness of a bird, and I breathe into it and it is a bird, by Allah's leave. I heal him who was born blind, and the leper, and I raise the dead, by Allah's leave. And I announce unto you what ye eat and what ye store up in your houses. Lo! herein verily is a portent for you, if ye are to be believers.*

**NOTE:** The miracle of the clay bird is in the Gospel of Thomas, and recurs in Koran **5.110**.

The worth of an authority is never questioned unless the questioner also has some power, but no-one could be in a sphere as elevated as Mohammed's. In the hierarchy of the prophets he was the last and greatest representative of God on Earth. He was due all obedience, as accredited by the Koran that he had made up himself.

**4.59:** *O ye who believe! Obey Allah, and obey the messenger and those of you who are in authority...*

...the Murderer of Medina had used an indoctrination procedure which consisted of attributing imaginary knowledge to those who contradicted him. In particular, he had suggested that the People of the Book were covering up what

they knew and hiding a secret treasure which could bring them to Paradise to the detriment of others.

**2.144-146:** *We have seen the turning of thy face to heaven for guidance, O Muhammad. And now verily We shall make thee turn in prayer toward a qiblah which is dear to thee. So turn thy face toward the Inviolable Place of Worship, and ye O Muslims, wheresoever ye may be, turn your faces when ye pray toward it. Lo! Those who have received the Scripture know that this revelation is the Truth from their Lord. And Allah is not unaware of what they do. .... Those unto whom We gave the Scripture recognise this revelation as they recognise their sons. But lo! a party of them knowingly conceal the truth.*

This had triggered a paranoid tidal wave of criticism in the hearts of the Moslems, which had poured out in the form of hatred for their Jewish or Christian friends who were accused by a verse of concealed malevolence.

**3.118:** *O ye who believe! Take not for intimates others than your own folk, who would spare no pains to ruin you; they love to hamper you. Hatred is revealed by the utterance of their mouths, but that which their breasts hide is greater. We have made plain for you the revelations if ye will understand.*

In the Koran, many verses are aimed at denigrating, insulting or cursing Christians and Jews.

**2.61:** *...And humiliation and wretchedness were stamped upon them and they were visited with wrath from Allah. That was because they disbelieved in Allah's revelations and slew the prophets wrongfully. That was for their disobedience and transgression.*

**2.85:** *Yet ye it is who slay each other and drive out a party of your people from their homes, supporting one another against them by sin and transgression? - and if they came to you as captives ye would ransom them, whereas their expulsion was itself unlawful for you - Believe ye in part of the Scripture and disbelieve ye in part thereof? And what is the reward of those who do so save ignominy in the life of the world, and on the Day of Resurrection they will be consigned to the most grievous doom. For Allah is not unaware of what ye do.*

**4.48-52:** *Lo! Allah forgiveth not that a partner should be ascribed unto Him. He forgiveth all save that to whom He will. Whoso ascribeth partners to Allah, he hath indeed invented a tremendous sin. ... See, how they invent lies about Allah! That of itself is flagrant sin. Hast thou not seen those unto whom a portion of the Scripture hath been given, how they believe in idols and false deities, and how they say of those idolaters who disbelieve: "These are more rightly guided than those who believe"? Those are they whom Allah hath cursed, and he whom Allah hath cursed, thou O Muhammad wilt find for him no helper*

This was Mohammed's battle plan as revealed in the second chapter. It involved propaganda intended to manipulate the minds of his followers so as to seize the property of the Jewish tribes of Medina, ordering them killed or deported as part of a campaign of ethnic cleansing.

See **Chapter 2** “The Cow”.

However, despite being supposedly all-seeing, his non-existent God was incapable of indicating to him the precise identity of his numerous opponents

**7.200:** *...seek refuge in Allah. Lo! He is Hearer, Knower.*

By using roundabout language in some verses, on the lines of *there is a party of them*,

**3.78:***And lo! There is a party of them who distort the Scripture with their tongues, that ye may think that what they say is from the Scripture, when it is not from the Scripture. And they say: It is from Allah, when it is not from Allah; and they speak a lie concerning Allah knowingly.*

The principle was to drown the intellect, which was avid for closure, in tales without an ending or questions left unanswered, so as to oblige the subconscious to drink in the warnings that Mohammed scattered about in his phrases.

**3.101-102:** *How can ye disbelieve, when it is ye unto whom Allah's revelations are recited, and His messenger is in your midst? He who holdeth fast to Allah, he indeed is guided unto a right path. O ye who believe! Observe your duty to Allah with right observance, and die not save as those who have surrendered unto Him.*

**10.31:***Say unto them, O Muhammad: Who provideth for you from the sky and the earth, or Who owneth hearing and sight; and Who bringeth forth the living from the dead and bringeth forth the dead from the living; and Who directeth the course? They will say: Allah. Then say: Will ye not then keep your duty unto Him?*

Jesus was never crucified, that's all false pretenses!

**4.157:***And because of their saying: We slew the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, Allah's messenger - they slew him not nor crucified him, but it appeared so unto them; and lo! Those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof; they have no knowledge thereof save pursuit of a conjecture; they slew him not for certain.*

You know, the first time I read it, what struck me was the wealth of subjects that are discussed in it: creation, astronomy, the Earth, the animal and vegetable kingdoms, human reproduction. Where the Bible's full of colossal scientific errors, because of the Devil, in the holy Qur'an I didn't find even one. That's what made me ask myself, if a man was the author of the Qur'an, how was he able, in the seventh century of the Christians' era, to write what's nowadays proven to be in conformity with modern scientific knowledge. What human explanation could be given for that fact? How could an inhabitant of the Arabian Peninsula, in the times when France was ruled by King Dagobert, have an acquaintance with science that was a dozen centuries in advance of his times?

**NOTE.** See Dr. Maurice Bucaille: *La Bible, le Koran et la science*, Editions Seghers, 1976. Dagobert I was King of various parts of France between 623 and 639 A.D.

We caused them to turn over to the right and the left

**18.18:***And thou wouldst have deemed them waking though they were asleep, and We caused them to turn over to the right and the left, and their dog stretching out his paws on the threshold. If thou hadst observed them closely thou hadst assuredly turned away from them in flight, and hadst been filled with awe of them.*

The verse in Arabic could be rendered *He compresses his chest and causes anguish in it as if he were trying to climb into Heaven.*

**6.125:***And whomsoever it is Allah's will to guide, He expandeth his bosom unto the Surrender, and whomsoever it is His Will to send astray, He maketh his bosom close and narrow as if he were engaged in sheer ascent. Thus Allah layeth ignominy upon those who believe not.*

Besides, the name “Halley” was not really in the verse. It could be twisted out of it only by taking the end of the third word and the beginning of the fourth “*Aalayhi allaylu*”, and even then was not the correct pronunciation.

6.76. فَلَمَّا جَنَّ عَلَيْهِ اللَّيْلُ رَأَى كَوْكَبًا قَالَ هَذَا رَبِّي فَلَمَّا أَقَلَ قَالَ لَا أُجِبُّ الْإِفْلِينَ.

Falamma janna Aalayhi<sup>h</sup>allaylu raa kawkaban qala hatha rabbee falamma afala qala la ohibbu alafileena

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## **Chapter 22 “Fourth Commandment: Thou Shalt Prophesy Koranic Blunders”**

...from electricity to Einstein’s theory of relativity...

**24.35:***Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The similitude of His light is as a niche wherein is a lamp. The lamp is in a glass. The glass is as it were a shining star. This lamp is kindled from a blessed tree, an olive neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil would almost glow forth of itself though no fire touched it. Light upon light. Allah guideth unto His light whom He will. And Allah speaketh to mankind in allegories, for Allah is Knower of all things.*

...via space exploration...

**55.33:***O company of jinn and men, if ye have power to penetrate all regions of the heavens and the earth, then penetrate them! Ye will never penetrate them save with Our sanction.*

...from the conception of the first man from clay...

**23.12-14:***Verily We created man from a product of wet earth; Then placed him as a drop of seed in a safe lodging; Then fashioned We the drop a clot, then fashioned We the clot a little lump, then fashioned We the little lump bones, then*

*clothed the bones with flesh, and then produced it as another creation. So blessed be Allah, the Best of creators!*

...to the creation of the Earth in two days...

**41.89:***Say O Muhammad, unto the idolaters: Disbelieve ye verily in Him Who created the earth in two Days, and ascribe ye unto Him rivals? He and none else is the Lord of the Worlds.*

Unfortunately for them, Mohammed in the chapter called “The Pilgrimage” gave the mathematical formula for converting Allah’s days into human years: *unto Him in a Day, whereof the measure is a thousand years of that ye reckon.*

**22.47:**... but lo! a Day with Allah is as a thousand years of what ye reckon.

**32.4:***He directeth the ordinance from the heaven unto the earth; then it ascendeth unto Him in a Day, whereof the measure is a thousand years of that ye reckon.*

**70.3-4:***From Allah, Lord of the Ascending Stairways Whereby the angels and the Spirit ascend unto Him in a Day whereof the span is fifty thousand years.*

This is because the chapter “The Snatchers” indeed prophesies that the day the earth quakes at the first sound of a trumpet, immediately followed by another, there will be hearts trembling with fear.

**79.6-8:***On the day when the first trump resoundeth. And the second followeth it, On that day hearts beat painfully.*

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## **Chapter 23 “The Question”**

...God has created men that he had deliberately made blind...

**2.7:** *Allah hath sealed their hearing and their hearts, and on their eyes there is a covering. Theirs will be an awful doom.*

**6.25:***Of them are some who listen unto thee, but We have placed upon their hearts veils, lest they should understand, and in their ears a deafness. If they saw every token they would not believe therein; to the point that, when they come unto thee to argue with thee, the disbelievers say: This is naught else than fables of the men of old.*

**6.110-11:***We confound their hearts and their eyes. As they believed not therein at the first, We let them wander blindly on in their contumacy. And though We should send down the angels unto them, and the dead should speak unto them, and We should gather against them all things in array, they would not believe unless Allah so willed. Howbeit, most of them are ignorant.*

**7.179:** *Already have We urged unto hell many of the jinn and humankind, having hearts wherewith they understand not, and having eyes wherewith they see not, and having ears wherewith they hear not. These are as the cattle - nay, but they are worse! These are the neglectful.*

**17.45-469:** *And when thou recitest the Qur'an we place between thee and those who believe not in the Hereafter a hidden barrier; And We place upon their hearts veils lest they should understand it, and in their ears a deafness; and when thou makest mention of thy Lord alone in the Qur'an, they turn their backs in aversion.*

**18.57:** *And who doth greater wrong than he who hath been reminded of the revelations of his Lord, yet turneth away from them and forgetteth what his hands send forward to the Judgment? Lo! on their hearts We have placed coverings so that they understand not, and in their ears a deafness. And though thou call them to the guidance, in that case they can never be led aright.*

**45.23:** *Hast thou seen him who maketh his desire his god, and Allah sendeth him astray purposely, and sealeth up his hearing and his heart, and setteth on his sight a covering? Then who will lead him after Allah hath condemned him? Will ye not then heed?*

...his power is far stronger than our power, that his cunning is way more than our cunning, that his will is above our will, and that his pride is much greater than our pride.

**3.54:** *And they, the disbelievers, schemed, and Allah schemed against them: and Allah is the best of schemers.*

**8.30:** *And when those who disbelieve plot against thee O Muhammad to wound thee fatally, or to kill thee or to drive thee forth; they plot, but Allah also plotteth; and Allah is the best of plotters.*

**10.21:** *And when We cause mankind to taste of mercy after some adversity which had afflicted them, behold! they have some plot against Our revelations. Say: Allah is more swift in plotting. Lo! Our messengers write down that which ye plot.*

**59.23-24:** *He is Allah, than Whom there is no other God, the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One, Peace, the Keeper of Faith, the Guardian, the Majestic, the Compeller, the Superb. Glorified be Allah from all that they ascribe as partner unto Him. He is Allah, the Creator, the Shaper out of naught, the Fashioner. His are the most beautiful names. All that is in the heavens and the earth glorifieth Him, and He is the Mighty, the Wise.*

Submission is not the worship of God, it is the worship of Mohammed.

**33.21:** *Verily in the messenger of Allah ye have a good example for him who looketh unto Allah and the Last Day, and remembereth Allah much.*

**68.4:** *And lo! thou art of a tremendous nature.*

...poet, the son of Saad, who also had become an apostate. Your former scribe tells anyone who wants to listen that he himself produced certain parts of your recitation.

Abu Dawud **Book 33 Hadith 4346** recounts how ibn Saad was nearly executed. *Narrated by Sa'd ibn Abu Waqqas: On the day of the conquest of Mecca, Abdullah ibn Sa'd ibn Abu Sarh hid himself with Uthman ibn Affan. He brought him and made him stand before the Prophet, and said: Accept the allegiance of Abdullah, Apostle of Allah! He raised his head and looked at him three times, refusing him each time, but accepted his allegiance after the third time. Then turning to his companions, he said: Was not there a wise man among you who would stand up to him when he saw that I had withheld my hand from accepting his allegiance, and kill him? They said: We did not know what you had in your heart, Apostle of Allah! Why did you not give us a signal with your eye? He said: It is not advisable for a Prophet to play deceptive tricks with the eyes.*

Ibn Athir *Usud Ulghabah* entry on **Abudullah ibn Saad ibn Abi Sarh:** *He converted to Islam before the conquest of Mecca and immigrated to the Prophet [i.e. in Medina]. He used to record the revelation for the Prophet before he apostatized and went back to Mecca. Then he told Quraysh: "I used to orient Muhammad wherever I willed, he dictated to me 'All-Powerful All-Wise' and I suggest 'All Knowing All-Wise' so he would say: 'Yes, it is all the same.'"*

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## Chapter 24 "Emptiness"

...Allah will see that his commandment is respected in the heart of his kingdom.

**9.17-18:** *It is not for the idolaters to tend Allah's sanctuaries, bearing witness against themselves of disbelief. As for such, their works are vain and in the Fire they will abide. He only shall tend Allah's sanctuaries who believeth in Allah and the Last Day and observeth proper worship and payeth the poor-due and feareth none save Allah. For such only is it possible that they can be of the rightly guided.*

...no-one ever mentioned the very real plot of the salamalaikums to take over the whole Earth by trickery or by lies...

**3.28:** *Let not the believers take disbelievers for their friends in preference to believers. Whoso doeth that hath no connection with Allah unless it be that ye but guard yourselves against them, taking, as it were, security. Allah biddeth you beware only of Himself. Unto Allah is the journeying.*

“And if anyone of the idolaters seeketh thy protection idolaters seeketh thy protection, then protect him”. This extract from the chapter “Repentance” is, naturally, cut off in full flow. The rest of the verse goes on to make it clear that the protection in question is exclusively for the purpose of conversion to Islam...

**9.5-6:** *Then, when the sacred months have passed, slay the idolaters wherever ye find them, and take them captive, and besiege them, and prepare for them each ambush. But if they repent and establish worship and pay the poor-due, then leave their way free. Lo! Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. And if anyone of the idolaters seeketh thy protection O Muhammad, then protect him so that he may hear the Word of Allah, and afterward convey him to his place of safety. That is because they are a folk who know not.*

The first little detail that caught my attention is the name “Mohammed” itself, a name that no-one had ever used in the region before he came along. It’s a word that means “the glorified one” or perhaps “the beloved one”. It’s not really a name, more of a title, and it’s strangely similar to the way that the Christian God speaks of Jesus in the Bible.

The Gospel According to Saint **Matthew 3.16-17:***And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*

When he was in Mecca, before the Hegira in 622, in his chapter called “Byzantium”, he predicted that the Eastern Roman Empire would be victorious some years later in 629, and that they would retake Jerusalem which they had lost to the Persians in 614.

**30.2-4:***The Romans have been defeated In the nearer land, and they, after their defeat will be victorious Within ten years...*

**NOTE.** During the Byzantine-Sasanian war of 602 to 628, the Persians invaded Palestine in 611, taking Jerusalem in 614. The city was recovered by the Byzantines in 629 as a consequence of the victories of Heraclius over Khosrau’s armies from 622 onwards. On July 17, 629, an agreement was reached between the Persian general Shahrbaraz, who had become the Persian Emperor, and Heraclius, by the terms of which Roman Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine and Egypt were returned to the Byzantine Empire.

...a paranoid worry that his imposture would be found out and these fears are reflected in many verses.

**4.140:***He hath already revealed unto you in the Scripture that, when ye hear the revelations of Allah rejected and derided, ye sit not with them who disbelieve and mock until they engage in some other conversation. Lo! In that case if ye stayed ye would be like unto them. Lo! Allah will gather hypocrites and disbelievers, all together, into hell.*

**6.5:***And they denied the truth when it came unto them. But there will come unto them the tidings of that which they used to deride.*

**6.10:***Messengers of Allah have been derided before thee, but that whereat they scoffed surrounded such of them as did deride.*

**11.8:***And if We delay for them the doom until a reckoned time, they will surely say: What withholdeth it? Verily on the day when it cometh unto them, it cannot be averted from them, and that which they derided will surround them.*

**11.38:***...every time that chieftains of his people passed him, they made mock of him. He said: Though ye make mock of Us, yet We mock at you even as ye mock;*

**13.32:***And verily messengers of Allah were mocked before thee, but long I bore with those who disbelieved. At length I seized them, and how awful was My punishment!*

**15.11:***And never came there unto them a messenger but they did mock him.*

**16.34:***So that the evils of what they did smote them, and that which they used to mock surrounded them.*

**18.54:***And verily We have displayed for mankind in this Qur'an all manner of similitudes, but man is more than anything contentious.*

**21.41:***Messengers before thee, indeed, were mocked, but that whereat they mocked surrounded those who scoffed at them.*

**25.41:***And when they see thee O Muhammad they treat thee only as a jest saying: Is this he whom Allah sendeth as a messenger?*

**26.5-6:***Never cometh there unto them a fresh reminder from the Beneficent One, but they turn away from it. Now they have denied the Truth; but there will come unto them tidings of that whereat they used to scoff.*

**35.4:***And if they deny thee, O Muhammad, messengers of Allah were denied before thee. Unto Allah all things are brought back.*

**35.10:***Whoso desireth power should know that all power belongeth to Allah. Unto Him good words ascend, and the pious deed doth He exalt; but those who plot iniquities, theirs will be an awful doom; and the plotting of such folk will come to naught.*

**36.30:***Ah, the anguish for the bondmen! Never came there unto them a messenger but they did mock him!*

**37.12:***Nay, but thou dost marvel when they mock*

**45.33:***And the evils of what they did will appear unto them, and that which they used to deride will befall them.*

...during his lifetime Mohammed had never ceased showering praise on Abu Bakr...

**NOTE.** There is material in the hadiths to this effect. Quotations suggest that when Mohammed first claimed to be God's Messenger to the Arabs, they all called him a liar, with the exception of Abu Bakr. Other quotes suggest that when Mohammed called on people to embrace Islam, they all requested time to think it over, except Abu Bakr, who did not hold back or hesitate. A further set of comments suggest that Mohammed stated that if he had had the possibility of

having an intimate friend other than God, it would have been Abu Bakr, but in any case the latter was his brother and companion.

...this chapter was a consequence of the divorces of two imaginary daughters of the Prophet who supposedly had been married to the sons of that uncle...

**NOTE.** According to Moslem legend, Othman ibn ‘Affan was nicknamed “Dhun al-Nurayn”, that is, the man with two lights, since he had married two of the Messenger of God’s daughters, Ruqayya and Umm Kulthum. Ruqayya had been married to Otba Ibn Abi Abu Lahab and Umm Kulthum to his brother Oteiba Ibn Abi Abu Lahab. When the Chapter “Palm Fiber” of the Koran was revealed, it aroused the anger of the couple, Abu Lahab and his wife, who demanded that their sons should repudiate their wives.

The two women returned home, and after a short while Othman asked the Prophet for the hand of his daughter Ruqayya in marriage, since he had been very fond of her even before his conversion to Islam. When Ruqayya died, Othman was so sad at having lost his dear wife and his status as an in-law of the Prophet that the Messenger of God authorized him to marry another of his daughters, Umm Kulthum. Othman was the only human being on Earth ever to have had the privilege of marrying two daughters of the same Prophet. He was present at all the major events affecting the Messenger of God except the battle of Badr, because his wife Ruqayya was dying at the time. For that reason, the Prophet ordered him to stay at her bedside in Medina.

If Othman had been able to claim marriage with all the daughters Mohammed is said to have had, he’d have done so without hesitation.

**NOTE.** A tradition reports that Mohammed told Othman, “Had we a third daughter, surely, we would have given her in marriage to you.”

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## **Chapter 26 “Victory”**

When he heard this news, Mohammed had sworn an oath, shaking his companions’ hands on it, that he would avenge him.

**48.18:***Allah was well pleased with the believers when they swore allegiance unto thee beneath the tree, and He knew what was in their hearts, and He sent down peace of reassurance on them, and hath rewarded them with a near victory;*

...anyone who runs away from Mecca will be hidden in our city, naturally. It is completely out of the question to expel a Submitter...

**60.12:***O Prophet! If believing women come unto thee, taking oath of allegiance unto thee that they will ascribe no thing as partner unto Allah, and*

*will neither steal nor commit adultery nor kill their children, nor produce any lie that they have devised between their hands and feet, nor disobey thee in what is right, then accept their allegiance and ask Allah to forgive them. Lo! Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.*

I am sure that God will confirm this victory in the Mother of Books.  
The majority of **Chapter 48**.

Once there, Mohammed received a new recitation from Gabriel confirming the brilliant victory won over the idolators at Hodaybiyya.

**48.1:***Lo! We have given thee O Muhammad a signal victory,*

Mohammed had him tortured before going on to see his head rolling at his feet. This was to give him a foretaste of the Hell where he would end up, and also to get him to confess where the hidden treasure of the Jews had been concealed.

*Al-sira al-Nabawiyya, II, 336-337.* Mentions are also found in Sahih Bukhari, **Volume 2 Book 14 Hadith 68** and **Volume 5 Book 59 Hadiths 522** and **523**.

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### **Chapter 27 “Friday Thirteenth”**

To dress up this unpleasant reality, the Koran claimed that its emissary had been prophesied in the Torah and that an announcement of his arrival had been given because the exact name of Mohammed was written in black and white in the New Testament.

**7.157:***Those who follow the messenger, the Prophet who can neither read nor write, whom they will find described in the Torah and the Gospel which are with them. He will enjoin on them that which is right and forbid them that which is wrong. He will make lawful for them all good things and prohibit for them only the foul; and he will relieve them of their burden and the fetters that they used to wear. Then those who believe in him, and honour him, and help him, and follow the light which is sent down with him: they are the successful.*

**61.6:** *And when Jesus son of Mary said: O Children of Israel! Lo! I am the messenger of Allah unto you, confirming that which was revealed before me in the Torah, and bringing good tidings of a messenger who cometh after me, whose name is the Praised One. Yet when he hath come unto them with clear proofs, they say: This is mere magic.*

**Deuteronomy 18.15:** *The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken;*

**18.18:***I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.*

The **Acts of the Apostles 3.22:***For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you.*

**Acts 7.37:***This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear.*

Tom had thought that Moslems were playing with words by twisting the Greek version of the Gospel of Saint John, which announced the future arrival of the “parakletos”. This was a term with the sense of “consoler” or “comforter” and designated the Holy Spirit. Moslems, he thought, had replaced it with “periklytos”, meaning “the glorious one” in order to refer to the Arab name Ahmad, an alternative form for Mohammed in the Koran.

The Gospel According to Saint **John 14.16:***And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever;*

**NOTE.** “Comforter” in the original Greek is παράκλητον, the accusative form of παράκλητος, parakletos, in English “paraclete”, literally “one called to help”.

**61.6:***And when Jesus son of Mary said: O Children of Israel! Lo! I am the messenger of Allah unto you, confirming that which was (revealed) before me in the Torah, and bringing good tidings of a messenger who cometh after me, whose name is the Praised One. Yet when he hath come unto them with clear proofs, they say: This is mere magic.*

...the reference in the Old Testament that read: “I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.” That sounded quite like the idea that Mohammed retransmitted what was dictated to him by the archangel Gabriel.

**Deuteronomy 18.18:***I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.*

The Gospel According to Saint **John 16.13:***Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.*

He felt guilty of having fallen for the same Ikea effect that he had so often decried himself.

**NOTE.** See the article on “L’effet Ikea” by Sébastien Bohler, in the *Cerveau et psycho* magazine.

From its very first page, the Koran set the tone by stigmatizing the Jews. They were described as those who earn the anger of God, which naturally stirred up spurning and animosity toward them.

**1.6-7:***Show us the straight path, The path of those whom Thou hast favoured; Not the path of those who earn Thine anger nor of those who go astray.*

Worse still, in later chapters there were verses treating them as animals, calling them “apes” and even “swine”.

**2.65:***And ye know of those of you who broke the Sabbath, how We said unto them: Be ye apes, despised and hated!*

**2.171:***The likeness of those who disbelieve in relation to the messenger is as the likeness of one who calleth unto that which heareth naught except a shout and cry. Deaf, dumb, blind, therefore they have no sense.*

**5.60:***Shall I tell thee of a worse case than theirs for retribution with Allah? Worse is the case of him whom Allah hath cursed, him on whom His wrath hath fallen and of whose sort Allah hath turned some to apes and swine, and who serveth idols. Such are in worse plight and further astray from the plain road.*

**7.166:***So when they took pride in that which they had been forbidden, We said unto them: Be ye apes despised and loathed!*

The Koran dehumanized Jews and other disbelievers, degrading them to the level of sub-humans by calling them “the worst of beasts”.

**8.22:***Lo! the worst of beasts in Allah's sight are the deaf, the dumb, who have no sense.*

**8.55:***Lo! the worst of beasts in Allah's sight are the ungrateful who will not believe.*

**NOTE.** Also.

**7.176:***And had We willed We could have raised him by their means, but he clung to the earth and followed his own lust. Therefor his likeness is as the likeness of a dog: if thou attackest him he panteth with his tongue out, and if thou leavest him he panteth with his tongue out. Such is the likeness of the people who deny Our revelations. Narrate unto them the history of the men of old, that haply they may take thought.*

In the Koran, since they were in addition God's representatives on Earth, a verse stated that Moslems were the most excellent people among men...

**3.110:***Ye are the best community that hath been raised up for mankind...*

**3.139:***Faint not nor grieve, for ye will overcome them if ye are indeed believers.*

The Führer had been aware that Islam was not merely a religion, but also a political ideology, the Prophet of which played the part of Statesman, General of the Army, judge and policeman.

**NOTE.** See Hamed Abdel-Samed *Islamic Fascism*, Prometheus Books, New York, 2016.

Imitating the mythical figure of Mohammed, Hitler had awarded himself the backing of the divine will by having the military slogan *Gott mit uns* [God with us] engraved on the belt buckles of his soldiers.

**NOTE.**Erwin Rommel, who had considerable personal contacts with Hitler, acting for a while as the commander of his bodyguard troops, stated that he had a magnetism that attracted the crowds, arising from his belief he had a mission entrusted to him by God. Hitler's way of speaking often seemed to be that of a Prophet.

...war being decreed because it was a religious obligation ordered by Allah in the chapter "Repentance".

**9.38-9:***O ye who believe! What aileth you that when it is said unto you: Go forth in the way of Allah, ye are bowed down to the ground with heaviness. Take ye pleasure in the life of the world rather than in the Hereafter? The comfort of the life of the world is but little in the Hereafter. If ye go not forth He will afflict you with a painful doom, and will choose instead of you a folk other than you. Ye cannot harm Him at all. Allah is Able to do all things.*

...Plan B, based on dissimulation or *taqiya*. They presented Islam as a religion of tolerance and peace...

**3.28:***Let not the believers take disbelievers for their friends in preference to believers. Whoso doeth that hath no connection with Allah unless it be that ye but guard yourselves against them, taking as it were security. Allah biddeth you beware only of Himself. Unto Allah is the journeying.*

...marriages with their obligation for conversion...

**2.221:***Wed not idolatresses till they believe; for lo! A believing bondwoman is better than an idolatress though she please you; and give not your daughters in marriage to idolaters till they believe, for lo! a believing slave is better than an idolater though he please you...*

...ceaselessly colonizing the entire planet through emigration. This was a holy duty included in the chapter "Women", an absolute necessity punished by Hell if they refused to perform this.

**4.97:***Lo! as for those whom the angels take in death while they wrong themselves, the angels will ask: In what were ye engaged? They will say: We were oppressed in the land. The angels will say: Was not Allah's earth spacious that ye could have migrated therein? As for such, their habitation will be hell, an evil journey's end;*

**4.100-101:***Whoso migrateth for the cause of Allah will find much refuge and abundance in the earth, and whoso forsaketh his home, a fugitive unto Allah and His messenger, and death overtaketh him, his reward is then incumbent on Allah. Allah is ever Forgiving, Merciful. And when ye go forth in the land, it is no sin for you to curtail your worship if ye fear that those who disbelieve may attack you. In truth the disbelievers are an open enemy to you.*

...the Koran promised them the comforts of Paradise as a reward for this exodus.

**3.195:** *And their Lord hath heard them and He saith: Lo! I suffer not the work of any worker, male or female, to be lost. Ye proceed one from another. So those who fled and were driven forth from their homes and suffered damage for My cause, and fought and were slain, verily I shall remit their evil deeds from them and verily I shall bring them into Gardens underneath which rivers flow...*

**8.74:** *Those who believed and left their homes and strove for the cause of Allah, and those who took them in and helped them - these are the believers in truth. For them is pardon, and bountiful provision.*

Islam was therefore totally incompatible with any form of democracy, just as Christianity or Judaism were in their way, because these religions' concept of God was merely that of a tyrannical law-maker...

**NOTE.** The main reason that Scriptural religions are not compatible with the laws of a democratic republic is that these religions are theocentric (God is the supreme and unrivaled value), while a democratic republic is anthropocentric (humans are the priority value).

Religious theocentricism is illustrated in a graphic manner by the Biblical anecdote in which Abraham, bowing to the demands of Elohim, agrees to slit the throat of his only son and make of him a burnt offering (**Genesis, 22.1-18**). It is true that the angel of Yahve speaks and holds back the old man's armed hand. However, in moral terms in this case intention is equivalent to action: Abraham showed no sign of refusing when asked for such a horrid tribute. He behaved as one who "feareth God", a theocentricist!

In Christianity, the "promise" of the heavenly Jerusalem is directly conditional upon the principle of "Faith in Jesus Christ". In the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the **Galatians (3.16-17)**, the covenant is with "Abraham and his seed". The "promise" to Christians, the children of Abraham through Jesus, rests solely on the patriarch's theocentric belief manifested when he binds Isaac (**Galatians, 3.6**). The foundation of Christianity, just like that of Judaism, is thus theocentricism.

The anecdote of the binding of Isaac is also to be found in the Koran (chapter 37, verses 101 to 111). As in the Bible (which is constantly used as a source by the Koran), Abraham's Submission is put on trial, and the outcome is identical. This makes Abraham a *hanif*, a man "obedient" to the orders of God (**16.120**). In fact, the basic principle of Sharia is total Submission to divine dictates; it is the expression of Moslem theocentricism. The Koran, which is supposedly divinely inspired, has no lack of examples where its intransigent precepts are clearly opposed to democratic laws: "an eye for an eye", polygamy, slavery, and the inferior status of women relative to men, to name but a few.

Under these conditions, it is obvious that if the interests of a Scriptural religion happen to run counter to the interests of a democratic State, a true believer must give priority to the former, to the detriment of the latter, or else will be acting as an apostate. This is why *humanism* (which must not be

confused with *humanitarianism*, a simple attitude of social generosity independent of any religions) should be the sole guideline for those who support democracy, there only principle for duties and obligations. This puts human lives and the continuation of the human race above any other consideration.

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## Chapter 28 “Second Commandment: Thou Shalt Watch over the Future”

They think they are superior because an ancestral verse claims this...

**3.110:** *Ye are the best community that hath been raised up for mankind. Ye enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency; and ye believe in Allah. And if the People of the Scripture had believed it had been better for them. Some of them are believers; but most of them are evil-livers.*

...the human “apes”, which is what the Koran calls us...

**5.60:** *Shall I tell thee of a worse case than theirs for retribution with Allah? Worse is the case of him whom Allah hath cursed, him on whom His wrath hath fallen and of whose sort Allah hath turned some to apes and swine, and who serveth idols. Such are in worse plight and further astray from the plain road.*

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## Chapter 29 “Death”

The angel Gabriel had thus whispered a new recitation to Mohammed which reprimanded his wives for their insubordination, threatening them he would send them away and replace them with much better spouses.

**66.1-5:** *Prophet! Why bannest thou that which Allah hath made lawful for thee, seeking to please thy wives? And Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. Allah hath made lawful for you Muslims absolution from your oaths of such a kind, and Allah is your Protector. He is the Knower, the Wise. When the Prophet confided a fact unto one of his wives and when she afterward divulged it and Allah apprised him thereof, he made known to her part thereof and passed over part. And when he told it her she said: Who hath told thee? He said: The Knower, the Aware hath told me. If ye twain turn unto Allah repentant, ye have cause to do so for your hearts desired the ban; and if ye aid one another against him, Muhammad, then lo! Allah, even He, is his Protecting Friend, and Gabriel and the righteous among the believers; and furthermore the angels are his helpers. It may happen that his Lord, if he divorce you, will give him in your stead wives*

*better than you, submissive to Allah, believing, pious, penitent, devout, inclined to fasting, widows and maids.*

Henceforth, to mark the end of idolatry, God would no longer tolerate the presence there of any man not a Submitter.

**9.103:***And a proclamation from Allah and His messenger to all men on the day of the Greater Pilgrimage that Allah is free from obligation to the idolaters, and so is His messenger. So, if ye repent, it will be better for you; but if ye are averse, then know that ye cannot escape Allah. Give tidings O Muhammad of a painful doom to those who disbelieve.*

**9.280:***O ye who believe! The idolaters only are unclean. So let them not come near the Inviolable Place of Worship after this their year. If ye fear poverty from the loss of their merchandise Allah shall preserve you of His bounty if He will. Lo! Allah is Knower, Wise.*

They will start robbing them, since according to your recitation that is perfectly licit and has been since the battle of Badr.

**8.069:***Now enjoy what ye have won, as lawful and good, and keep your duty to Allah. Lo! Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.*

...those future generations will see things solely in terms of money.

*Mainstream sociologists prefer to speak of “rejection by despairing youth, the victim of racist segregation, the victim of unemployment and not seeing a place for itself in our materialist society” and the like. The word “victim” recurs frequently. Too frequently. Would anybody think of presenting Hitler as a victim of 1930s society? In fact, far from being the “spiritually minded” victims of a supposedly “materialistic” system that marginalizes them, these potential terrorists are quite the contrary. They initially worship one single God: the God Money. They have one single dream: to drive a big car, to live in a huge mansion and to be surrounded by girls of easy morals. To take things easy and get everything they want while undertaking the least possible effort. They tip over into terrorism when they come to the end of their train of thought and realize that they will never obtain as much money and material comfort as they would wish. Frustrated, they then lay the blame on society for their failures, rather than taking a fresh look at themselves. The typical profile of such terrorists is well known: petty criminals not interested in the slightest in religion but enormously interested in everything that money can bring them. They dream about one big heist that will leave their pockets bulging. Unfortunately, their despicable minor pilfering never brings them enough. That is how they come to hate society, which has been “really mean” to them.*

*However, is this a sufficient explanation for the monstrous acts of which they become guilty? How can simple frustration lead to the blind massacring of innocent victims, women, children, entire families? It is at this point that their racism comes into play. Their racism, which has been present in them from the beginning, encouraged, possibly unconsciously, by their parents, through their traditions and mythologies. This latent racism is very vigorous. Like all racism,*

*it takes the form of “them” and “us”, profoundly different and irremediably separate. “We aren’t like them”, “they aren’t like us”. This necessarily leads to “We’re worth more than them” and may go as far as “they don’t deserve to live, the world would be a better place without them, because their existence in itself is the source of all problems”. Only this sort of racism can explain the cold-blooded way in which these young terrorists commit their massacres. Such horrors would not be possible if they had not turned their victims into “aliens” beforehand, denying them the status of human beings. This racism loves to hide behind pretexts of a “cultural” or “religious” nature, but in reality, it is far more than that. It is not just a culture or a religion, but rather a whole people that they include in their delirium. It is whole peoples that they would like to exterminate. To annihilate Europe, to annihilate the United States, to exterminate everyone who is not like them, that is their ultimate dream. Islamic fundamentalism serves as an excuse for putting into practice their bloodthirsty fantasies, as it offers a framework with some semblance of legitimacy for satiating their longing for genocide. Islam, that religion which is “clearly from their home”, which fits their people, their race, their “us” so well. To close one’s eyes to this racism widely present even among “moderate” Moslems, to tolerate such speeches stigmatizing our whole society because they judge it decadent, is to make oneself guilty of complicity with these future terrorists.* Extract from a letter by Christophe V.K.

These Jews will drive you out because they too are fanatics worshiping a murderous God, and believe in holy books whose texts are as fallacious as your recitation.

**Deuteronomy 7.1-3:***When the LORD thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them: Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son.*

**Deuteronomy 28.9-13:***The LORD shall establish thee an holy people unto himself, as he hath sworn unto thee, if thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, and walk in his ways. And all people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the LORD; and they shall be afraid of thee. And the LORD shall make thee plenteous in goods, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy ground, in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers to give thee. The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow. And the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the*

*commandments of the LORD thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them:*

The Book of **Psalms 2.8-9**: *Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.*

NOTE. A reading of the Old Testament casts great light on the difficulty, even at the present day, of establishing a peace treaty between the Israelis and the Palestinians and making it last.

...Jesus says that he came not to bring peace on Earth, but a sword.

The Gospel According to Saint **Matthew 10.34**: *Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.*

He also orders that his enemies, who did not wish him to reign over them, be brought and slain before him.

The Gospel According to Saint **Luke 19.27**: *But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me.*

He tells his followers go and teach all nations to observe all things he had commanded, saying that those who do not believe shall be damned.

The Gospel According to Saint **Mark 16.15-16**: *And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*

The Gospel According to Saint **Matthew 28.19-20**: *Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.*

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### **Chapter 30 “Apocalypse”**

...this *taqiya*, a practice recorded in the chapter “The Cow” that ordered duplicitous misrepresentation of true thoughts when in the presence of a non-Moslem.

**2.225**: *Allah will not take you to task for that which is unintentional in your oaths. But He will take you to task for that which your hearts have garnered. Allah is Forgiving,*

NOTE. In this same Chapter 2, “The Cow”, there are racist comments in **2.65**: *And ye know of those of you who broke the Sabbath, how We said unto them: Be ye apes, despised and hated!*

A barbarous version of “an eye for an eye” in **2.178**: *O ye who believe! Retaliation is prescribed for you in the matter of the murdered; the freeman for*

*the freeman, and the slave for the slave, and the female for the female. And for him who is forgiven somewhat by his injured brother, prosecution according to usage and payment unto him in kindness. This is an alleviation and a mercy from your Lord. He who transgresseth after this will have a painful doom. And there is life for you in retaliation, O men of understanding, that ye may ward off evil.*

A call to murder in **2.191**: *And slay them wherever ye find them, and drive them out of the places whence they drove you out, for persecution is worse than slaughter. And fight not with them at the Inviolable Place of Worship until they first attack you there, but if they attack you there then slay them. Such is the reward of disbelievers.*

Disregard for months of truce in **2.217**: *They question thee O Muhammad with regard to warfare in the sacred month. Say: Warfare therein is a great transgression, but to turn men from the way of Allah, and to disbelieve in Him and in the Inviolable Place of Worship, and to expel His people thence, is a greater with Allah; for persecution is worse than killing. And they will not cease from fighting against you till they have made you renegades from your religion, if they can. And whoso becometh a renegade and dieth in his disbelief: such are they whose works have fallen both in the world and the Hereafter. Such are rightful owners of the Fire: they will abide therein.*

Prohibition in **2.219**: *They question thee about strong drink and games of chance. Say: In both is great sin, and some utility for men; but the sin of them is greater than their usefulness. And they ask thee what they ought to spend. Say: that which is superfluous. Thus Allah maketh plain to you His revelations, that haply ye may reflect.*

Rape within marriage in **2.223**: *Your women are a tilth for you to cultivate so go to your tilth as ye will, and send good deeds before you for your souls, and fear Allah, and know that ye will one day meet Him. Give glad tidings to believers, O Muhammad.*

Dissimulation in **2.225**: *Allah will not take you to task for that which is unintentional in your oaths. But He will take you to task for that which your hearts have garnered. Allah is Forgiving, Clement.*

The legal incapacity of women in **2.282**: *...And call to witness, from among your men, two witnesses. And if two men be not at hand then a man and two women, of such as ye approve as witnesses, so that if the one erreth through forgetfulness the other will remember...*

There is also a slew of divine punishments and curses in 2.7, 2.10, 2.24, 2.39, 2.85-86, 2.89, 2.98, 2.114, 2.159, 2.161-162.

...authorized by God to use lying, cheating and even treachery.

**3.28-9**: *Let not the believers take disbelievers for their friends in preference to believers. Whoso doeth that hath no connection with Allah unless it be that ye but guard yourselves against them, taking, as it were, security. Allah biddeth you beware only of Himself. Unto Allah is the journeying. Say, O Muhammad: Whether ye hide that which is in your breasts or reveal it, Allah knoweth it. He*

*knoweth that which is in the heavens and that which is in the earth, and Allah is Able to do all things.*

**8.58:***And if thou fearest treachery from any folk, then throw back to them their treaty fairly. Lo! Allah loveth not the treacherous.*

**16.106:***Whoso disbelieveth in Allah after his belief - save him who is forced thereto and whose heart is still content with the Faith - but whoso findeth ease in disbelief: On them is wrath from Allah. Theirs will be an awful doom.*

**NOTE.**Verse 16.94 says that oaths must not be violated, but this injunction is abolished by verse 5.89. This introduces a principle of compensation, through which perjury can be redeemed through certain good actions. This principle is confirmed by verse 66.2, which effectively extends it to the Prophet himself. The grave consequence of this is that Islamic law has no means of obliging a person who has made an oath to respect it.

The worst was the claim that no verse in the Koran ordered the killing of apostates...

**4.89:***They long that ye should disbelieve even as they disbelieve, that ye may be upon a level with them. So choose not friends from them till they forsake their homes in the way of Allah; if they turn back to disbelief then take them and kill them wherever ye find them, and choose no friend nor helper from among them.*

So as to reel in potential victims for con tricks with varying religious beliefs, this crypto salamalaikum had not hesitated to say that Buddha and even all the Greek philosophers could be considered by Islam as prophets in their own right

**NOTE.**God purportedly had sent messengers to warn every people.

**10.47:***And for every nation there is a messenger. And when their messenger cometh on the Day of Judgment it will be judged between them fairly, and they will not be wronged.*

**16.43-44:***And We sent not as Our messengers before thee other than men whom We inspired - Ask the followers of the Remembrance if ye know not! - With clear proofs and writings; and We have revealed unto thee the Remembrance that thou mayst explain to mankind that which hath been revealed for them, and that haply they may reflect.*

**35.24-25:***Lo! We have sent thee with the Truth, a bearer of glad tidings and a warner; and there is not a nation but a warner hath passed among them. And if they deny thee, those before them also denied. Their messengers came unto them with clear proofs of Allah's Sovereignty, and with the Psalms and the Scripture giving light.*

Thanks to his Koran that orders the beating of disobedient mothers...

**4.34:***Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property for the support of women. So good women are the obedient, guarding in secret that which Allah hath guarded. As for those from whom ye fear rebellion, admonish them and banish them to beds apart, and scourge them. Then if they obey you, seek not a way against them. Lo! Allah is ever High, Exalted, Great.*

Who on Earth could spew out such a horrid thought unless he had read in the Koran the verses explaining that Allah gave his followers women and slaves as a gift?

**2.25:***And give glad tidings O Muhammad unto those who believe and do good works; that theirs are Gardens underneath which rivers flow; as often as they are regaled with food of the fruit thereof, they say: this is what was given us aforetime; and it is given to them in resemblance.*

We'll see each other in Paradise, *insh'Allah*.

**18.23-24:** *And say not of anything: Lo! I shall do that tomorrow, Except if Allah will. And remember thy Lord when thou forgettest, and say: It may be that my Lord guideth me unto a nearer way of truth than this.*

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### **Chapter 32 "Hallah"**

His desire was to avenge the humiliation of the expulsion he had suffered...

**2.191:***And slay them wherever ye find them, and drive them out of the places whence they drove you out, for persecution is worse than slaughter. And fight not with them at the Inviolable Place of Worship until they first attack you there, but if they attack you there then slay them. Such is the reward of disbelievers.*

**2.217:** *They question thee O Muhammad with regard to warfare in the sacred month. Say: Warfare therein is a great transgression, but to turn men from the way of Allah, and to disbelieve in Him and in the Inviolable Place of Worship, and to expel His people thence, is a greater with Allah...*

**60.9:***Allah forbiddeth you only those who warred against you on account of religion and have driven you out from your homes and helped to drive you out, that ye make friends of them. Whosoever maketh friends of them - All such are wrong-doers.*

Moreover, "God", or more exactly Ali, confirmed all this cock and bull tale in the Mother of Books. He made you believe that you were not bewitched, but rather, through a miracle, you had acquired an Eye of God that allowed you to see these supposed Jinns.

**68.2:**Thou art not, for thy Lord's favour unto thee, a madman.

...Ali had a distorted view of women because of Khadijah the poisoner. He believed they were all bad, crafty and evil toward men.

**NOTE.** The antifeminist comments of Ali (600 to 661), the Prophet's cousin and fourth Caliph, are notorious. "*Woman is all evil; the most evil thing about her is that she is indispensable.*" "*You should never ask a woman her*

*advice because her advice is worthless. Hide them so that they cannot see other men! . . . Do not spend too much time in their company for they will lead you to your downfall!"; "Men, never ever obey your women. Never let them advise you on any matter concerning your daily life. If you let them advise you they will squander all your possessions and disobey all your orders and desires. When alone they forget religion and think only of themselves; and as soon as it concerns their carnal desires they are without pity or virtue. It is easy to get pleasure from them but they give you big headaches too. Even the most virtuous among them is of easy virtue. And the most corrupt are whores! Old age does not spare them of their vices. They have three qualities worthy of an unbeliever: they complain of being oppressed when in fact it is they who oppress; they take solemn oaths and at the same time lie; they make a show of refusing the advances of men when in fact they long for them ardently. Let us implore God's help to escape their sorcery."*

**4.34:***Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property for the support of women.*

Mohammed had given credit to all these fictional combats, all these imaginary duels or legendary exploits that Ali claimed to have accomplished on the battlefield, through divine grace, against God's enemies.

**NOTE.** Traditional Moslem biographers of Mohammed recount that when one of the fortresses was being attacked, first Abu Bakr, then Omar, went directly forward at the head of the assailants in order to break the Jewish resistance, but both failed. According to Moslem tradition, Mohammed then called on his cousin and standard-bearer Ali, who killed a Jewish leader with a single blow of his sword that split in two the helmet, the head and the body of his victim. Having lost his shield, Ali is claimed to have lifted the two gates of the fortress off their hinges, to have gone down into the moat and to have made a bridge with these two gates, thus allowing the attackers to break into the fortress. The gates were so heavy that forty men were needed to put them back in place. This story, seen from the Moslem, and more especially the Shiite, viewpoint, makes Ali into the prototype of a hero.

The season of bad weather came just in time, bringing fierce storms with it. Ali took advantage to send a handful of Helpers into the enemy camp during the night. They pulled the tent-pegs out of the ground and the howling gale did the rest.

**33.9:***O ye who believe! Remember Allah's favour unto you when there came against you hosts, and We sent against them a great wind and hosts ye could not see. And Allah is ever Seer of what ye do.*

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