



*Nuclear Surprise*

By

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## **Chapter 1**

### *Pashwari Palace*

#### *Saudi Arabia*

*Oct 11 3.50am*

**Either way, this was to be the last day on earth for nineteen year old Muhommad Pashwari. He was already a dead man walking. Mohammed already counted himself amongst the martyrs he admired. His desire to live forever in history overshadowed his former expectation of dying of old age, while naked in bed with a nubile young lady.**

**His family was one of the wealthiest in the world, and he had enjoyed the worldly benefits that money provided. Travel, beautiful women, gambling and extravagant parties were all commonplace to the handsome young man. He had already spent a large fortune in his short life, so money held little meaning for him.**

**What he desired most of all, was to make his father proud, to prove that he was worthy of the Pashwari name.**

**Whilst it was a well kept secret to the rest of the world, Muhommad had heard enough whispered conversations over the years to recognize that his father Kamal was a terrorist. He preferred to think of his father as a freedom fighter and he hoped his father would be proud of the freedom fighting that he intended to embark upon today.**

The previous evening, Muhommad had washed himself, unfolded his prayer rug, faced the east and prayed to Allah. He was content in the reality that he would go to a better place, with seventy two virgins to keep him satisfied for the rest of eternity. He set the alarm on his cell phone before hopping into bed to try and grab a couple of hours sleep. But, he had way too much on his mind for sleep to come. Eventually it was time, and he got up and dressed quietly. He had a strict schedule to keep if he was to accomplish his goal.

The huge ornate Pashwari family palace was quiet as a mouse in the early hours of the morning, everyone was asleep long ago. The huge floors were highly polished marble, and no expense was spared on tradesmen. A squeaky floor or stair would not have been tolerated in this palace, so he was able to move around silently without fear of disturbing anyone.

Muhommad quietly made his way to his father's corner office on the southern end of the ground floor. This was the only room in the palace with an expensive security system controlling access. Beside the door was a numeric keypad and he quickly tapped in a six digit code and there was an audible click. He turned the handle and the door opened.

Years before he had determined that his birth date was the combination that opened the door. In fact it was the very first set of numbers that he had actually tried.

Unknown to Muhommad's father Kamal, the young man had been in this secure room many times over the last five years. It was here that he had read and reread the documents that told of another side to the quiet successful businessman that was the outward persona of his father. The fact that Kamal was successful was not at issue. It was what the funds were used for that made him different. A bombing here, a bit of bribery here, and the odd murder, all arranged by his forty five year old father.

Behind the desk were the two large black plastic suitcases that Muhommad had overheard his father discussing earlier in the day. They looked innocent enough.

Kamal had taught Muhommad from the time he was an infant, that he was destined for greatness. Today, Muhommad decided it was time to prove it. *Carpe Diem* was the Latin phrase he remembered from his school days. Seize the day was exactly what he planned to do.

The suitcase was quite a bit heavier than Kamal had expected. He carried it outside the office, and reset the security system. His right arm was getting tired, but he managed to get it outside without making too much noise. Next he maneuvered it into his beautiful new white SL 500 Mercedes sports convertible. He strapped the case into the passenger seat with the seat belt since it was way too large for the small trunk, and he quietly drove off into the night.

The twenty minute drive to the airfield passed quickly enough. There were few cars on the road at this time of the morning and speed signs did not apply to members of the Pashwari family anyway. Muhommad navigated between a few widely spaced aircraft until he spotted the one he was looking for. He parked right beside a white Piper Arrow. The small four seat propeller driven aircraft looked in excellent condition.

The plane was tied to the tarmac with straps so the plane would not be damaged in the event of a storm. These he removed and left on the ground.

Getting the suitcase into the passenger seat was quite a challenge. Muhommad unlatched and opened the right side door. Then he lifted the case up onto the wing. There was a maximum load limit on the wing, so he could not stand on the same wing as well. It was of paramount importance that the little airplane was in top shape for today's flight. So, he went to the other side of the plane, got in the pilot's door, and pulled the suitcase inside after him. He completed the transition by securing the case into the seat with the seatbelt and he pulled the strap tight. When all was set, he flicked a switch on a small control panel attached to the suitcase. There was an audible beep and a red light came on.

Muhommad had been learning to fly, and had done thirty five hours over the previous two months, in a small Cessna 152.

**Social structure is of paramount importance in the Arab culture and this slowed his flying progress. The flying instructor was not really permitted to critique Muhammad's performance. But, nevertheless, he was smart and was a rapid learner.**

**At six feet two inches in height, Muhommad had felt extremely cramped in the small cockpit of the Cessna 152 training aircraft. Now, he felt much more at home in the larger, higher performance Piper Arrow he had been flying for the past couple of weeks. This was to be his graduation flight.**

**External checks were always part of the pre-flight routine and Muhommad went through these diligently. He used his flashlight to check all control surfaces and the engine oil levels. He pressed a small glass jar against the fuel drain valve to collect a small sample of gasoline to test for water contamination. He held the sample against his light. It was clear.**

**Now it was time to go to work inside the cockpit.**

**Like his father before him, Muhommad had studied electronics. Whilst his father had attended M.I.T. in Boston for five years, Muhommad went to the new university of the internet. He did as much research as he could for his next task, and there was no shortage of information available. He removed his flashlight and a screwdriver from his pocket and held the light in his mouth while he loosened four screws and swung down the avionics panel into his lap. Beside him on the seat was the circuit diagram he had printed out to help**

**jog his memory. Twenty minutes was all it took before he had the reconfigured unit reassembled. He swung the unit back up and re-installed the screws. He said a silent prayer to Allah that the transponder modifications would be a success.**

**Muhommad switched on the ignition with the duplicate key he had stolen the previous day. Next, he moved the fuel mixture lever to rich, pushed the propeller pitch lever forward, pushed forward the throttle a little, then he engaged the starter and the Lycoming engine sputtered to life.**

**For the first and last time Muhommad did not bother with the engine run up and magneto checks. He wanted to make as little noise as possible.**

**Next, the brakes were released and a short taxi followed down the bumpy gravel airstrip. It was so dark outside that it was difficult to stay on the runway, but he did not want to chance using the lights. He had never flown at night, and this runway had no lights anyway, but he figured that takeoffs were much easier than landings anyway.**

**There was no wind that night, so he decided to take off away from the town, toward the desert to the west. When he was in position he set the directional gyro from the compass heading. Then he gave the engine full throttle and took his toes off the brake pedals and the plane slowly accelerated down the dark strip.**

**Muhammad was expecting vertigo on takeoff since he was certainly no instrument rated pilot. As soon as the wheels cleared the ground he steeled himself to just watch three of the primary instruments, artificial horizon, directional gyro and airspeed indicator. When he passed the end of the runway he flicked up the switch to retract the undercarriage.**

**Soon he was airborne and used the small wheel beside his right knee to trim for seventy five knots in a climb before he switched on the aircraft cabin lights and then dimmed them. He needed to consult his map so he would follow the set route he had plotted. It was important for outward appearances.**

**He left the standard port, starboard and strobe lights off for his short flight and leveled out at seven thousand feet. The airspeed indicator showed one hundred thirty five miles an hour.**



## **Chapter 2**

### ***Guided Missile Cruiser USS Port Royal***

#### ***Gulf of Arabia***

***Oct 11 5am***

**The *USS Port Royal*, was a support ship for the Nimitz class aircraft carrier *USS Ronald Reagan*. Its job was to ensure the carrier, the most deadly vessel afloat was protected and safe at all times.**

**At ninety seven thousand tons and more than one thousand feet in length the *Reagan* was a monster. It carried the hull number CVN76. CV was the designation for aircraft carrier, N meant nuclear powered, and 76 was the production number.**

**The mammoth grey vessel carried the equivalent of a small town of people. On board was the full complement of ships crew of three thousand two hundred. These sailors were really just used for getting the ship safely to remote places. In addition there was a further crew of two thousand four hundred and eighty men who were needed to fly, operate and maintain the ninety fixed wing aircraft and helicopters onboard the *USS Ronald Reagan*.**

**To ensure the safety of the navy's primary offensive assets, carriers are always surrounded by a smaller more nimble phalanx of defense craft.**

**There was a three mile exclusion zone around the aircraft carrier, and it was *Port Royal's* mission to ensure no ships or aircraft violated that self administered safety net. *Port Royal* was stationed three miles west of *Ronald Reagan*. She was closer to shore, and only five miles off one of the busiest aircraft routes in the whole world.**

**Seaman Brian Peacock had dreamed of his job in the navy as long as he could remember. He had grown up in what seemed to him a fairly normal, mobile navy family. His first memories were of up state New York, and then San Diego California, his family happily following Uncle Sam's postings. His dad was away for long periods, but his stories of navy life and the lure of adventure at sea were more than enough to ensure his enlistment as soon as his father would permit it.**

**Brian was twenty one years old and a missile technician. He was superbly trained and disciplined to follow orders without question. Just like naval aviators who follow a checklist prior to every takeoff, Brian knew every task required and his role in the ship's safety. His watch had just started and he was able to do some study while on duty, as he was planning on moving to submarines as soon as he could pass the general submariner exam needed to qualify.**

**Vaughan Walters, was a school classmate of Brian at San Diego high school, but way too tall to ever consider submarine duty. He was raised by his mother, and became the proxy second son to the Peacock family. He loved Brian's dad as he was sure he would love**

his own father if he had one, and he too joined the navy and was a radar operator on board the *Port Royal*.

An unworldly silence shrouded the radar room on this balmy weekday morning. The lights of the ship were the only thing that punctuated the pre-dawn blackness.

While Vaughan would have much rather finished his shift in the radar room now, he still had two hours to go. He dozed off quite regularly, but the ping of passing air traffic kept him just this side of comatose. Vaughan's dreams took him to Singapore, where his next leave pass would allow him some time to troll the bars looking for young Asian ladies.

Something was just not right. Vaughan did not know what it was, but he was instantly awake, with that raised sense of awareness that comes from being stationed in a hostile environment. He was not yet aware that he would have nightmares about this day for the rest of his life.

Vaughan's radar screen showed a British Airways Boeing 777, flight BA154 on route from Cairo to London, but it was starting to stray a little off course. Vaughan was able to check his list of regular airline traffic. This flight was early, which was a little unusual, but flight schedules were often changed. Aircraft are located on radar by means of a transponder which emits a coded VHF radio signal giving identification details.

**BA154 was 8 miles from the exclusion zone, and was slightly off course and heading their way. Vaughan set his VHF set to the local east heading frequency of 119.9MHz and began his transmission.**

**“British Airways 154, this is United States Warship *USS Port Royal* please acknowledge.”**

**It was quite unusual for a commercial jet pilot to receive contact from a warship, so Vaughan had expected an immediate response. He was starting to get hot under the collar. When no reply was forthcoming he transmitted the same message fifteen seconds later. Again, there was still no response. It seemed to him that the cabin temperature had risen fifteen degrees in the last half minute.**

**Walters knew he was out of his depth and weighed up his options. It didn't take too long for him to pick up a microphone.**

**Vaughan used the standard urgency procedure, and called Captain Steve Johnson, a slim, grey haired twenty five year veteran, and one of the most seasoned commanders in the US Navy.**

**“Captain, this is leading Seaman Walters in the radar room, please acknowledge”.**

**Vaughan was surprised by an immediate wide awake response.**

**“This is the Captain, speak”.**

**“Sir, I have a commercial Boeing 777 transiting the gulf region. It is straying off course, and at this rate may just brush the edge of our exclusion zone” said Vaughan in a tone that was all business.**

**“Walters. What are the aircraft’s speed, altitude and heading?”**

**Vaughan should have anticipated this request and was silently kicking himself for taking twenty seconds to respond to this request.**

**“Captain, I think there must be something wrong with my system. I show the aircraft heading one six seven degrees, at seven thousand feet and speed of one hundred and thirty five miles an hour. It’s flight plan shows it should be at twenty four thousand feet, three hundred and fifty miles an hour, and climbing.” The temperature in the cabin was rising even faster. Vaughan was now visibly sweating.**

**“Walters, I will be there in forty five seconds, check all your numbers, I want to know what the hell is happening when I get there.”**

**The captain’s next call, accomplished while he was hastily pulling on his trousers was to the officer of the watch.**

**“Officer of the watch, this is the captain, sound general quarters, this is not a drill, acknowledge.”**

**“Captain, this is the officer of the watch, I confirm sounding general quarters. This is not a drill.”**

**Emergency radiation containment procedures are vitally important, but they make heavy reading. Brian was actually starting to enjoy the volume he was reading, when the klaxon horn sounded general quarters, followed by an audio announcement that this was not a drill. He slammed the book shut forgetting to mark the page.**

**The captain made it to the radio room three seconds early. This time Vaughan missed nothing.**

**“All my systems are operating correctly sir. Inbound aircraft BA154 has a bogus transponder. It should be a Boeing 777. But, performance shows this to be a small propeller driven aircraft. Perhaps there is some mix up with the codes.”**

**The captain turned around and lunged for the microphone to call weapons.**

**“Captain to Weps, acknowledge.”**

**“Weps to Captain, seaman Peacock responding.”**

**“Weps I am about to upgrade our status to battle stations. Get a sea sparrow on the rail for immediate launch!” yelled the Captain.**

**“Jesus Christ!. . . . Shit, sorry sir, I mean confirmed”, this was the first time Peacock had ever received an order to make ready a missile except as a drill.**

**“Sailor, load that bird and have it ready to fly yesterday, this is not a drill, I will be there in thirty seconds”, the captain needed to be there in person.**

**“Captain to Officer of the Watch, upgrade our status to Battle Stations. This is not a drill.”**

**“Officer of the watch to Captain. I confirm sounding Battle Stations. This is not a drill.”**

**Once again the klaxon horn sounded followed by the P.A. announcement.**

**Before he left the radar room, the captain turned back to Walters, “I want to know how far that aircraft is from the exclusion zone. I will be in weapons, radio me every thirty seconds with an update.” Captain Johnson took off at a dead sprint towards the weapons pod, nearly knocking over his Exec Officer Mark Douglas in the process. “Mark, get to the**

bridge and take over from the officer of the watch, we have a situation”, he shouted without even breaking stride.

As Walters had experienced moments earlier, Brian Peacock at the missile controls was also sweating heavily when the captain stormed into the weapons room. Just as he entered, the first report came over the intercom system, “Radar room to Weps, Captain, inbound bogie just made a slow turn onto heading one eight zero now heading directly toward *Ronald Reagan* three miles from exclusion zone one hundred and thirty five miles an hour, descending through four thousand feet. Will breach perimeter in approximately two minutes”

“Walters, is there any response from the pilot?”

“No sir. I have been continually calling on the regular area frequencies as well as all emergency channels.”

“Walters, patch the Weps intercom onto all aircraft emergency frequencies, I want to talk to the pilot.”

“Yes sir, go ahead”, Walters had finally anticipated one of the captain’s orders.

“Unidentified aircraft headed one eight zero degrees at four thousand feet towards US fleet. This is Captain Johnson aboard *USS Port Royal*. Be advised that you are headed



**for the three mile aircraft carrier exclusion zone, immediately turn around and leave the area. If you breach our “no fly” zone, you will be engaged, please respond.”**

**Peacock was squirming in his seat, “Captain, what do I do?”**

**“Sailor, you do what you have been trained to do The second I tell you to, press that fucking button and splash that bogie. Are we clear?” The captain was beginning to sweat as well!**

**“Crystal clear sir. The missile is prepared for launch, ready in all respects”, the endless hours of drill had now taken over. He was still sweating but at least Brian was now in complete control of the situation.**

**Walters’ voice was becoming higher with each syllable, “Captain, radar room, unidentified bogie has descended to two thousand feet, course and speed unchanged, two miles from exclusion zone, time to security breach fifty seven seconds.”**

**“Unidentified aircraft headed one eight zero degrees at two thousand feet towards US fleet. This is Captain Johnson aboard *USS Port Royal*. Be advised that you are headed for the three mile aircraft carrier exclusion zone, immediately turn around and leave the area. If you breach our “no fly” zone, you will be engaged, please respond. This is your last warning.”**

**Fifty seven seconds seemed like an eternity to the missile technician. Peacock had time to check all his systems three times as well as making the mental calculation that the missile was probably wasting quite a bit of fuel, since if it were fired, it would find its target in around fourteen seconds.**

**“Radar to Captain, breach imminent”, screamed Walters.**

**The missile room went deathly quiet for what seemed an eternity before the captain issued the order that was destined to end a young life. “FIRE!”**

**Peacock stabbed the red button with his index finger. The solid fuel rocket motor ignited and the first sparrow missile ever aimed at a light aircraft rocketed away from the starboard rail, and vanished into the ink black sky.**

**“Allahu Akbar . . . .”, sprang from the previously quiet radio, the Arabic cry “God is Great”, but the transmission never finished. Muhommad never even saw the incoming missile, otherwise he would have pressed the button on the small box in his lap. The five hundred pound metal cylinder travelling at over two thousand six hundred miles an hour homed in on the hot exhaust of his Lycoming engine. It was radar guided and once it had acquired the target it was game over.**

**The Raytheon guidance system was designed to explode the warhead just before it hit.**

**Seconds later, ninety pounds of high grade military explosive detonated just inches from Muhommad’s knees.**

**The shredded aircraft erupted into a fireball and fell silently into the tepid waters of the gulf below.**

**The explosion totally fragmented Muhommad’s body and blew his suitcase to pieces, scattering dense yellow powder over a wide expanse.**

**The Captain ordered a rescue and recovery craft launched, but in truth he did not expect that there would be much left to rescue. Like everything else that happened that day, it was just standard procedure.**

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### **Rigid Inflatable Rescue Craft**

**2 hours later**

**“Captain, this is seaman Lewis on board rescue 7.”**

**“Go ahead Lewis, have you found any wreckage?” asked Captain Johnson.**

**“It’s really weird Sir, there is not much to see except lots of dead fish floating on the surface.”**

**Johnson suddenly had a sinking feeling in his stomach “Lewis, do you have a Geiger counter with you?”**

**“Wait one Sir.....FUCK THIS AREA IS RED HOT!!!”**

**“Relax seaman, you haven’t been in the water” replied the Captain trying to sound unworried, “Get back here on the double and hit the decontamination showers.”**

**Lewis did not need to be told twice.**

**The Captain sprinted to his cabin and picked up the phone and called communications “Comms, get me an encrypted link to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, I want it yesterday” yelled the Captain.**

**Thirty seconds passed before a groggy voice answered “Admiral Nelson here.”**

**“I am sorry to wake you Sir” explained Johnson.**

**“Son, for you to call me direct, I am guessing you have bad news, out with it!”**

**“Yes Sir.....”**

**Johnson gave the Admiral the abridged version of the destruction of the small aircraft.**

**“Why the hell did you call me? It serves the bastard right.”**

**“Admiral, the reason I called is because our Rescue & Recovery team found the area teeming with dead fish. A check with a Geiger counter confirmed that the sea around the crash site has readings off the dial. To get readings like that, there had to be exposure to weapons grade enriched uranium. Sir, I believe the aircraft was carrying a nuclear device.”**

**“Oh my God. Let me think a moment.....Ok, get some guys in suits and get some samples of the sea water for analysis. I better wake the Commander-in-Chief. This will get ugly.”**