

American Jihad Sample Chapter for website

Chapter 1

Fallujah, Iraq

The American came to Fallujah to kill a man.

Unarmed, he walked the dusty streets for two days, dodging American patrols and Iraqi militia gangs, checking one mosque after another.

American jets bombed a militia strongpoint at the other end of town and in spite of the distance the shockwave blew grit in his eyes. Battle-scarred date palms and olive trees shuddered at the blast. Small arms fire crackled at a helicopter launching rockets in support of some marines and black smoke billowed from the stricken bird as it whirled away and limped toward home.

People flinched at a larger explosion and sought shelter in recessed doorways as the ground trembled and a choking, yellow dust cloud billowed up, obscuring a molten sun. The daring few who shared the streets with him didn't speak, but scurried past, eyes averted; mice under the eyes of an owl. Most wore veils or scarves over their faces to block the pungent stench of uncollected garbage, overflowing sewers and burning rubber. At least most of the dead had been buried.

War had come to this town where terrorist leaders were as common as sand fleas, where ancient dogma and religious zeal conspired to create chaos.

Three cars smoldered less than a block away, remnants of some soon-forgotten shootout. He paused at a shrine to sip water from a plastic bottle and check his map. Insurgents had pulled down most of the street signs, or turned them, to confound American troops—a small action causing great confusion.

Thirty minutes later he saw the Saad Bin Abi Waqas Mosque, named for a general who'd won the great battle of Qadisiyya in 636 AD, opening Persia for Muslim conquest. That was the thing about Iraq and its people—too much history. Blood feuds and religious strife originated centuries ago and no one was willing to forgive and forget.

Several multi-story concrete apartment buildings nearby had been bombed, but the mosque was undamaged, its deep blue tile walls and gold-leafed spires standing in immaculate contrast to the ruins around it. A double row of pineapple palms lined the path to the arabesque doors and provided sparse shade.

Two men wearing black headbands armed with AK-47's guarded the main entryway to the mosque.

“Salaam alikeum,” the American said as he approached, right hand on his heart in a gesture of respect.

“Alikeum salaam,” the man nearest him replied.

Armed guards at mosques not being the norm, he asked, “Is it permitted to enter?”

“Of course,” the closest guard said, “after we search you for weapons.” His eyes held a mischievous glint. “But once inside you may have trouble leaving.”

“Oh?”

“Oh yes. Big war conference. Very secret. No peasants allowed.”

His grin was infectious and the American responded by pulling a thermos and cup out of his backpack. “Would you like some coffee?”

He unscrewed the top with theatrical slowness, saying the word, “Moroccan,” as if he was caressing a woman.

The aroma wafting from the thermos tickled the guard’s nose like a lover. “Aaaah,” he sighed. “You know coffee!” He offered his hand, “Jamal Hazziri.”

“Walid,” the American lied. “Walid bin Malat.”

He tipped the thermos and poured what looked like gooey, black sludge into the metal cup. “Thick enough to walk on and sweet as honey.”

The guard took a sip, savoring the hot, delicious liquid tar.

“That may be the best coffee ever. Talal!” He called to the other guard. “Come over here and taste this.”

Talal slung his AK over his shoulder and ambled over to them.

“My brother, Talal” Jamal said, handing over the cup.

Talal nodded to Walid and took a cautious swallow. His eyebrows rose. “It’s good.”

“You sound surprised,” Walid said.

“If you were the butt of Jamal’s jokes as often as I, you would be careful too. I half expected it to taste like camel piss.”

“A subject on which he is a renowned authority,” Jamal joked.

Talal glanced at Walid and sighed. “You see what I mean?”

“I do indeed.”

“You are Saudi?” Talal asked.

Walid nodded and launched into his cover story. “My father sent me here to look for his brother, my uncle Hakim. We haven’t heard from him in more than a month and that is most unusual. He wasn’t at his home and I know he often prayed at this mosque so I thought I’d try here.” He shrugged.

“Many of our Saudi brothers have joined the Black Banner,” Talal said with a gesture to his headband. “What is his name? Maybe we know him.”

“Hakim al Malat,” Walid said, “but he is old—too old I think to fight the infidels.”

Talal and Jamal looked at each other and shook their heads. They knew no such person. "Sorry," Talal said. "If he is old he may have abandoned his home and fled to Baghdad to avoid the violence. Many have."

Walid nodded agreement. He'd been camping in abandoned houses since he'd hit town. So many inhabitants had fled that walking through Fallujah felt like walking through a graveyard.

Footsteps sounded from within the mosque and a tall thin man wearing a black hooded imam's cloak and surrounded by bodyguards stalked out and crossed the courtyard as a white Cadillac limousine pulled up to receive him.

"Mustaqa?" Walid asked.

"No," Jamal said. "I haven't seen that one before." He took another sip of coffee.

"So," Walid changed the subject. "You two get stuck with guard duty often?"

"Just since last week." Talal glowered at his brother.

Oh, a sore point, Walid thought.

"You know I was right," Jamal said. "You do!"

Talal shook his finger at his brother. "I know that because you are stubborn as Uncle Mustapha's donkey I get to share your punishment. And I did nothing wrong."

"Yes, little brother, you did," Jamal said, his tone that of a disappointed parent.

Walid had quietly taken a step back so as not to intrude in what was obviously an ongoing family dispute.

"The man was already dead, Jamal. It didn't matter."

"It would not matter if we were savages," Jamal said. "But we are not. We do not dishonor ourselves or our enemies by doing such things to them."

Bingo, Walid thought. Last week a group of Black Banner militia under the command of the imam Mustaqa al-Amad had ambushed an American patrol and grabbed the body of Lance Corporal Eric Foley before being driven off. At Mustaqa's command, the Lance Corporal's body was mutilated and dragged through the streets before being set on fire.

"Why did you join the Black Banners if you refuse to follow orders?" Talal asked.

"For the same reason you did, little brother. Our families need food, our country has been invaded, and the Banner pays cash money."

Talal turned and stormed off and Jamal finished off the cup of coffee.

"Forgive us, Walid." Jamal handed the empty cup back. "The bearer of gifts should not be burdened with family gossip." He looked at his brother and said, "Ever since we joined the Black Banners Talal thinks he is a soldier."

"I understand. So, work is hard to find?"

“Impossible. The only paying jobs in Iraq are policeman and construction worker and those who do either paint a target on their backs.”

M-16’s and AK’s popped in the distance.

“A man can get shot fighting Americans too,” Walid said with a grin and Jamal laughed out loud.

“Yes, but at least we can shoot back.”

“Speaking of which,” Walid said, “Being without a gun in this town makes me feel bare as a newborn.” He stopped, hoping his new friend would take the hint.

Jamal looked around as if checking for spies. “I think a man with such a talent for coffee should be able to defend himself and I believe Allah would agree. There is a shop that sells honey in the bazaar on Berber Street, down by the docks on the Euphrates. Ask for the beekeeper and tell him bears are bothering your hives.”

“Thank you, Jamal. Go with God.” Walid slipped the cup in his pack.

“Blessings be upon you, Walid, and good luck finding your uncle.”

Walid waved back over his shoulder as he walked off toward the marketplace, less than a mile away.

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“A rifle with a scope?” The beekeeper frowned, repeating Walid’s request.

“And a pistol.”

“Of course.” The man pulled one from beneath a box of honeycomb and handed it over for inspection. “Semi-automatic Russian Tokarev 9mm. Shoots just like a Luger.”

Walid ejected the empty ammo clip and racked the slide to look down the barrel.

“Not very clean,” he said.

The beekeeper shrugged. Take it or leave it.

Walid replaced the clip and pulled the trigger to close the slide.

“Yeow!” he yelled as the slide snapped shut on the web of his hand. He flinched so violently he would have dropped the gun if it wasn’t still clamped to the flesh between his thumb and forefinger. Walid’s eyes teared as he freed his hand and examined his new blood blister.

“My apologies young man, but I told you it shot like a Luger.” The shopkeeper’s eyes gleamed.

Walid had a sneaking suspicion he’d just been paid back for dissing the man’s merchandise.

The beekeeper took the Tokarev from Walid and demonstrated the proper grip. “See, you have to hold it lower on the butt so your hand is not caught, but I think you have already learned this lesson. No?”

Walid sighed, “Let’s see the rifle.”

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Six hours later, having sighted the Dragunov rifle in, he centered the crosshairs of his sniper scope on Mustaqqa al-Amad's left eye. Sunlight glinted off the imam's gold-rimmed spectacles. The man's head filled half the space between dots on his Bushnell mil-dot scope, telling him the range was roughly five hundred yards.

Walid hesitated briefly, knowing he was crossing his moral Rubicon.

Mustaqqa raised his arms above his head and his black Imam's cloak, slid down his arms to reveal the blazing white sleeves of his dishadashah and a gold Rolex. The man's face distorted as he screamed at the crowd, exhorting them to violence.

A yellow dust devil whirled in the distance. The scope wavered and Walid took another breath.

See a target, he thought, not a man.

Heat waves shimmered off whitewashed buildings. He let part of his breath out and held it. The scope steadied.

See a target, not a man.

He squeezed the trigger between heartbeats, just like Kira taught him at the rifle range and for a split second Mustaqqa's head bulged like a lop-sided balloon, then it burst, spraying hot, red blood and blueish gray brain matter over those closest to him.

Almost a third of a mile away, in a darkened apartment, Walid saw his target's head explode and dropped the rifle.

He recoiled and fell back against the cold rock wall, swallowed the bile that surged up in his throat and sucked in a deep, shuddering breath. The gray concrete of the bombed ruin, the dust motes dancing in a yellow sunbeam, the sage green lizard approaching a fly buzzing in a spider's web, all caught his eye, yet none registered. The horror of what he had done froze him in place. Murderer!

He knew he should leave but couldn't force himself to move. And it didn't matter, because he'd planned this out carefully, knowing gunfire in Fallujah was passé so no one could zero in on him from the sound of his shot. So it would take the hunters a long time to find this site. He was sure of it. He'd taken everything into account—except for how he'd feel after killing a man.

The lizard's tongue darted out and snared both fly and spider from the web and that broke the spell.

The American, whose real name was Aden Walid al Malat bin Saud, pulled himself together and wiped his prints from the rifle and the shell casing he now ejected. He'd leave the rifle—too hard to conceal if he took it. Besides, now he knew how easy it was to buy guns in Iraq.

He policed the room one last time, eyeing the cigarette butts he'd collected from the street nearby and ground into the bare concrete floor. That would give

them some interesting DNA. Then he took a blood red card and laid it on the floor. The card contained a passage from the Quran.

[4.18] These are they for whom We have prepared a painful chastisement.

Any Muslim who found it would recognize the passage and get the message.

Time to go.

As he rose to his feet and shouldered his pack his emotional pendulum swung the other way. His head came up and his eyes brightened. He'd thought long and hard before committing to this action and convinced himself he was doing the right thing—that killing a terrorist leader like Mustaqqa would save lives. And now that he was over the shock it felt good to hit back, just like back home in Kansas when he'd punched his first bully in the nose.

“One man can make a difference, Kira,” he whispered to himself as he stepped out into the hallway. “One man can make a difference.”

But he'd miscalculated a few things.

