

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Copyright © 2008 by Ronald John Godlewski

Cover graphics © 2008 R.J. Godlewski

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews

This novel is written exclusively for Right Truth Blog (www.righttruth.typepad.com) and its readers.

In loving memory of my precious
Sara (7/25/1951 to 12/13/2003) who always
encouraged me to write from the heart and was
at once both my greatest critic and my most
loyal fan.

In love with you always!

And...

To the greatest dad anyone like me could ever
have hoped for: Joseph Stanley Godlewski
(11/29/1918 to 04/14/2008).

You gave me life. Thank you!

www.rjgodlewski.com

Chapter Twenty-Two

Outside *Viper's Lair* Complex
Kerch, Ukraine

Haytham ran like dysentery; forgoing any concerns over the large ball of flames and heat that lapped at his ass because of his negligence. He wanted out of the area and damn fast. Soldiers were pouring out of nearly every building and shooting at virtually anything that moved; many of Mahmoud's men had been silenced in their tracks as they fought to recover any weapon that offered itself.

The young Arab was now fully on self-preservation mode and he bolted across the asphalt towards the corner of the parking lot heading for the nearest clump of body-shielding trees, never minding that his choice of direction thrust him headlong towards the main prison structure. With fires raging, bombs exploding, and bullets zinging everywhere, Haytham wanted something slightly more durable than human flesh between his heart and the copper-jacketed lead slugs that screamed past his ears.

Reaching the trees, he ricocheted from the trunks like a soccer ball amidst a crowd of competitors but still forged ahead in his ambition to seek safety *somewhere*. The woods offered him concealment, but they were not very large and he knew instinctively that it wouldn't take very much time before he himself was discovered and so he kept running, hoping to find something a bit more palatable to his soaring fears.

He saw in the distance, the tall glass-enclosed watch tower and knew that his was a precarious position so he ambled over towards the edge of the main building which sat just a few

meters away from the trees. The back of the prison building had no windows on the first floor and none of the other three perpendicular buildings had any windows on their end so Haytham decided that movement along the base of the main prison building was the preferable way in which to move undetected – providing, of course, that he could escape the attention of those observing from high above in the towers.

With so much commotion going on, he hoped that his plain clothes, dirtied significantly from the blast and fire, would conceal him from prying eyes; the perfect impromptu urban camouflage offered courtesy of one ruse in the guise of a United Nations employee and one mishap of major proportions.

For the moment, Haytham feared less about meeting an enraged Mahmoud than of coming face to face with Ukrainian guards. *Everyone* onsite seemed to be acting spontaneously and it would not be a very large leap of anyone's imagination to conclude that the young Arab was quite simply – and quite accurately – fleeing for his very life. Only he, however, understood that the commotion was created by his own incompetence. Had not the sirens and klaxon startled him, he considered, then nothing would have happened. As to *why* exactly those blasted sirens began roaring was someone else's concerns.

No matter how hard he tried to squash the fear of capture by dodging the probability through maneuvering within a crowd of darting soldiers, Haytham realized that his only option was to get as far away from the chaos as possible. He had to make it to the large hill in the distance. Only by submerging himself within the seemingly impenetrable trees, he thought, would he have any chance of rest or escape. The problem was, however, that particular mound of solitude rested just past several large buildings, two towering observation posts, and a quadrant of block houses.

Haytham inhaled a deep breath that irritated his sore lungs and lurched forward towards the three secondary buildings located just behind the prison. His progression from one complex towards the other was aided partially by another band of trees just behind the prison. His movement through

them camouflaged his person and, he hoped, kept him undetectable from the watch towers until he could position himself against the first of the long, narrow, coral-colored buildings midway to the tree covered hill.

The young medical student's confidence increased a bit as he made it out of the tree line and quickly found himself snug against the first building. To his horror, however, he found a sidewalk running in between the first and second building from the rear of the prison. Sidewalks meant pedestrians and in this particular case pedestrians might be armed. Haytham elected to race across the path and work his way towards the hill from between the second and third buildings which were separated only by a narrow field of the ubiquitous asphalt paving.

Haytham sucked in some more air, offered a brief prayer to Allah for courage, and before his mind could formulate a second thought raced towards the path keeping his own profile low to the ground. No sooner than he had reached the concrete sidewalk, his eyes focused on a broad swatch of green camouflage uniform and before he realized what was about to transpire, the young Arab impacted hard against the unsuspecting Ukrainian conscript, sending both men down hard against the concrete.

Instinctively and without any thought whatsoever, Haytham picked up the AKM rifle that had been discharged from the soldier and prepared to hand the weapon back to its rightful owner. However, seeing a strange person of obvious foreign ethnicity now armed with a deadly firearm, the young Ukrainian soldier panicked, leapt up and scurried away towards the main prison building leaving the Arab alone and totally confused as what to do with the weapon.

The sound of more soldiers, men apparently better disciplined in their function than had the young conscript been, forced Haytham to act and he ran towards the far two buildings where he hoped there would be no further encounters. He thought continually about dropping the firearm – such things tend to attract counter-fire – but his mind kept defeating the plan as he concentrated on simply getting the hell out of the area.

Haytham tore around the corner of the second building oblivious to whether he would meet anyone and raced down along the asphalt that marked the separation between the two windowless rectangular structures. He ran as fast as his legs would allow him to move. Ran faster than he had ever run in his entire life including his brief but intense military training at the hands of men like Mahmoud. Haytham would have likely kept running right smack into the fourth coral-colored building that sat perpendicular to the first three had it not been for a very strange sight that froze him solid within his tracks.

Emerging from the far end of the second building was a tall, grungy looking man wearing absolutely nothing but a camouflaged tactical vest and sporting an AKM. Haytham could tell that the large, semi-bearded man was a fellow Arab but he had no idea on who the strange and beastly looking individual staring back at him was. The student saw the other man's rifle being raised at him though there was a certain look of hesitance within the naked man's eyes. Then, for some strange reason artificial to his powers of thought, Haytham had an inspiration.

"Master Muhammad?" the student spoke; his voice meek as a mouse.

"Who are you?" the man grumbled. His voice harsh and forced.

"I am Haytham al-Ashab. One of Master Mahmoud al-Walid's men. Your servant."

The elder man scrutinized the young Arab closely, wondering whether some form of deceit had been unleashed. He had been expecting a larger group of followers to come to his aid. "Where is *qiyadi* Mahmoud?"

Haytham shrugged ever so briefly; he was unnerved by the sight of the man that seemed so uncharacteristic of what he had expected. Muhammad looked less like a prophet than a beggar; less like a global leader and more like an institution-bound basket case.

"When I ask a question, young man." Muhammad voiced more harshly. "I receive only answers."

"Yes, Master." yelled Haytham nervously. "He left to go inside the prison. I heard sirens sound and soon..." he

subconsciously let out the lie. "...the truck that we brought for your rescue blew up."

Muhammad lowered his rifle, the bright sun made him squint towards his disciple. "So as I have escaped, *only* you have been brave enough to come to my aid? That Mahmoud al-Walid has abandoned his mission to rescue me?"

"Yes, Master." Haytham's voice could barely be heard.

"You are a brave soldier, young Haytham." Muhammad reached for the younger Arab's rifle, briefly removed the magazine clip to inspect its content, and then handed the weapon back to its possessor. "Come, we need to make it to safety."

www.rjgodlewski.com