

KANGDING

The two women found their way separately to the Kowloon airport, and Dave and Duke travelled there together. Li Chi'en had round-the-clock surveillance on all of them so there was no need to be unduly suspicious or alert for watchers, but they were becoming accustomed to being cautious. At the check-in counter for the Chengdu tourist charter flight Dave and Duke chatted casually with Fleur and Van to merge their acquired relationship of "Dr and Mrs Wilson and Dr and Mrs Miller", travelling to Tibet to study wildlife in the remote northern Chang Tang region.

Fleur and Van had obviously compared notes on what to wear, for both were carrying lamb's-wool fur-lined coats over their arms in anticipation of the icy cold weather in West China and East Tibet. Both were casually dressed in long heavy-knit white sweaters over jeans, the jeans tucked into calf-high shear-ling lined boots. In their large shoulder-bags they had shear-ling cloche hats, with brilliantly coloured cashmere mufflers loosely tied to the shoulder-bag straps. They could have been two supermodels travelling on assignment. While chatting together they also kept a watchful eye on the movements of the people in the airport, seeing Li Chi'en moving inconspicuously among them but making no attempt at contact.

The crowds thinned out as they went to their respective departure gates, with Li following a short distance behind the others. "I hope

Li has had the 'plane checked for bombs," Duke said laconically.

Dave was undisturbed. "If he thought about our rooms being bugged, and had them swept, you can bet he has had the plane checked."

The two-and-half hours' flight from Hong Kong to Chengdu was uneventful, the 'plane flying above cloud level most of the way so that the passengers saw little of the terrain beneath them. Dave had suggested that he and Duke sit together for the earlier part of the journey to talk over the situation and prepare plans. But once they were satisfied with the basic outline of a plan they switched seats so Dave could find out more about Tariq from Fleur.

Before he had gone to sit with Duke Dave had been reading his copy of *The Travels of Marco Polo* to Fleur, sitting beside him. With a smile and too-innocent look he had indicated a paragraph he had marked for her to read.

"When strangers arrive, and desire to have lodging and accommodation at their houses, it affords them the highest gratification. They give positive orders to their wives, daughters, sisters, and other female relations, to indulge their every wish, whilst they themselves leave their homes, and retire into the city, and the stranger lives in the house with the females as if they were their own wives, and they send whatever necessaries may be wanted; but for which, it is understood, they expect payment: nor do they return to their houses so long as the strangers remain in them. This abandonment of the females of their family to accidental guests, who assume the same privileges and meet with the same indulgences as if they were their own wives, is regarded by these people as doing them honour and adding to their reputation . . ."

When Dave returned to sit beside her after talking with Duke Fleur returned the book to Dave with a smile indicating that she had underlined a paragraph of her own for his attention

"The women are in truth very handsome, very sensual, and fully disposed to conform in this respect to the injunction of their husbands. The unlicensed intercourse of the sexes is not in general considered by these people as a serious offence; and their maxim is, that if the advances are made by the female, the connection does not

constitute an offence, but it is held to be such when the proposal comes from the man."

"Just remember", Fleur's smile widened, and she added warningly "Marco Polo wasn't travelling with his own wife."

"Point taken," Dave replied with a grin. "Let's get back to Tariq's history as you know it in the Middle East."

"In visiting Syria," Fleur began, "Tariq knew he was entering a veritable snake-pit of Muslim politics and religion. Libya was probably the least complex Muslim country in the Middle East except, perhaps, for Turkey. Turkey was unabashedly secular and orthodox Muslim and pro-Western in orientation, while Libya was Gadaffi-Muslim and egotistically radical. Syria's relations with its Muslim neighbours were horrendously complicated by ancient and modern antagonisms. The Muslim region's history was rooted in the dominating Mesopotamian civilizations of Assyria, Babylon and Persia. In Iraq, Babylon's glorious history was a modern stimulus through Saddam Hussein; in Iran, Persia's glorious history was a modern stimulus to the Shah of Iran and, on his overthrow, to the Ayatollah Khomeini; but in Syria, Assyria's glorious history had become a dream and mockery.

"From the seventeenth century, when the Muslim Ottoman Empire was broken up, the Muslim world had been desperately trying to recover its universal mission and religious confidence. Khomeini's successful overthrow of the Shah, and defiance of the United States, in the twentieth century's first Islamic Revolution, inspired a new generation of Muslim radicals hungering to emulate him in their own countries.

Unfortunately for those aspiring revolutionaries, they never grasped that it was necessary first of all to have a universally accepted Muslim religion before they could bring about a universal Islamic format. The greatest cause of disunity was the sectarian divisions in Islam itself, the institutionalized rivalries of the various Muslim priesthoods, or mullahs.

"The major division was between the Sunnis and Shi'ites, the Sunni radicalism of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt challenging the rule of Gamal Abdul Nasser before Khomeini's arrogant

revolutionary offspring began to spread across the world seeking allies against Western domination. Then there were the Hamas and Palestine Liberation Organizations, the Hezbollah and National Islamic Front, plus all the others already mentioned. The Muslim Brotherhood had started out with the right idea when its founder, Hasan al Banna, declared, and I quote roughly from memory:

‘My brothers, you are not a benevolent society, nor a political party, nor a local organization having political purposes. Rather you are a new soul in the heart of this nation (Egypt) to give it light by means of the Quran to destroy the darkness of materialism through knowing God.’

“Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s the Muslim Brotherhood had been the principle vehicle of Sunni political activism, not only in Egypt but in Syria. However, its religious emphasis in politics did not appeal to Arab nationalists like Gamal Abdul Nasser of Egypt. Consequently, when an Arab nationalist writer, Michael Aflaq, created a new political party called Ba’ath, meaning ‘rebirth’ in Arabic, it was hailed as a common political denominator for both Sunnis and Shi’ites and other sectarian groups. This reduced the traditional powers of the mosques and mullahs, and enabled the military dominated dictatorships to emerge—among them the current President of Syria. From the time he first seized power in 1970 Asad sought to project an image of his regime as constitutional and democratic, but in fact he constructed the presidency to give himself unprecedented absolute power in Syria’s history. He came from the heretic Alowite minority in a Sunni majority country, and so he devised a formal nationalist appearance of Sunni Muslim colouring, with an informal predominantly Alowite power base, presenting himself as a devout Muslim.

“In order to consolidate his aspirations as a leader of the Arab world Asad had portray himself as ‘most Arab of the Arabs’; the leader of Syria, ‘the beating heart of Arabism’. In Asad’s own words:

‘Arab unity is not merely an emotional feeling, but is an eternal historical truth. It is the source of strength for the Arabs. It is also a struggle of the entire Arab people to achieve equality with other peoples of the world.’

“Asad saw himself not only as a pan-Arab leader like Nasser of Egypt, but a conquering Saladin of the twentieth century. Tariq was interested in the possibility of seeing this man close-up to find out what a putative world conqueror was like as part of his own aspirations. Tariq’s introduction to him was facilitated through Gadaffi’s fulsome recommendations, in which he described Tariq as both a revolutionary and spiritual miracle-worker!

“Syria was linked with Libya and Iran in an unholy Islamic trinity of terrorism as an instrument of foreign policy. They made their embassies, their officials, their diplomatic pouches, their communications channels, and their territories and training centres as safe havens for a variety of Islamic terrorists. Ironically, Asad had the impression that Tariq was an authority on terrorist techniques—presumably because of the expertise and reputation he had acquired in Libya due to the instructors’ enthusiasm! Asad was inordinately suspicious about Tariq’s motivation in studying revolution as a theory, and especially Tariq’s idea of a fusion of religion and politics in revolution. He even extended the time of the interview with him in order to pursue the subject.

“Tariq didn’t think Asad was particularly interested in religion from the stand-point of spiritual values. In consolidating his own power Asad had shrewdly manipulated the mullahs to his own advantage by easing some previous restrictions on them, creating a minister of religious endowments, encouraging the construction of mosques and reviving the Islamic formulation of the presidential oath in the Syrian constitution. Although a known heretic Alowite, he had himself declared an authentic Sunni Muslim, had made a pilgrimage to Mecca, and had observed the Islamic commandment of jihad in the war against Israel. All this he repeated to Tariq in considerable detail.

“However, he was totally incapable of any rational discussion of Islamic revolution as love and righteousness and justice instead of mullahs, mosques and manipulative power plays. When Tariq pointed out that the former values were the bases of the effective revolutions of the past and present centuries, while the latter were responsible for hypocrisy, nepotism, corruption and failure, Asad

became impatient and shortly afterwards ended the interview. But he agreed that Tariq could interview the various leaders of revolutionary movements living in Damascus and in Lebanon.

“He probably considered Tariq a harmless idealist! On his part, Tariq confirmed his opinion of him as a ‘journeyman dictator’, an opportunist with a certain amount of political cunning and considerable personal ambition, who lacked the creative intelligence of a Nasser or Sadat to be an adequate leader of the Arab world. His short-term and short-sighted policies vis-a-vis Iraq, Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia alienated him in wider Arab circles. Even his self-serving alliance with Iran produced more failures than successes, and further isolated him. Tariq concluded, therefore, that, while he was notoriously ruthless in his exercise of power in Syria, his position was inherently weak; and from both his politics and weak health he could be overthrown by a well-organized internal opposition.

“Having Asad’s approval to meet with the various Islamic revolutionary leaders in Syria and Lebanon made it easy for Tariq to visit their offices and camps and talk with them. The various factions of the Palestine Liberation Organization in Damascus in his opinion were little more than terrorist thugs, continuing to exist not by virtue of any ideology but by the specious largesse of Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Libya—plus whatever western powers would provide them with money.

“The rival militias in Lebanon were a different proposition, and it seemed to Tariq that in certain circumstances they could threaten Asad’s strategies of a ‘Greater Syria’. Pro-Arafat commandos in camps near Beirut and Sidon, Sheikh Sha’ban’s Sunni fundamentalists in Tripoli, Maronite Lebanese in Mount Lebanon, Druze in Shuf and Kharrub regions, all opposed Asad’s attempts at control. So did the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, and the Shi’ite Hezbollah in the Bekaa Valley and Beirut.

“His most significant meeting was with Sheikh Muhammed Hussein Fadlallah in Lebanon, a claimed descendant of the Prophet Mohammed, in his mid-fifties, poet, scholar and influential Shi’ite mullah. He had a classical Islamic education in leading Shi’ite

seminaries, and was the leader of Hezbollah, the Iranian-supported 'Party of God'. Under Sheikh Fadlallah, Hezbollah had not only captured the largest number of seats in the Lebanese Parliament, it had also developed an impressive number of passionate following among young Shi'ite Muslims in Lebanon.

"Tariq was impressed by Fadlallah as an inspiring orator in the Friday sermons in his Beirut mosque, using both Islamic and Western sources with fluency and cogency. He was vitriolic in his denunciations of secularism, especially of the Ba'ath variety, and enthusiastic about the need to make Islam relevant. He detested Saudi Arabia, declaring that it was not Muslim let alone fundamentalist, and foretold that the present regime there would not be in power much longer.

"Tariq found him an interesting, if elusive, personality. He was the leader of one of Islam's most revolutionary movements yet he insisted that he did not believe that change came through revolution but through democratic processes promoting Islamic ideas. If some regimes came to power through revolution, Fadlallah maintained, they should be transformed into democratic institutions. He gave the example of Hezbollah in Lebanon, where they participated in a secular, multi-party government with Christians and others. But his idea of democracy was contradicted by his stated Islamic belief that governance is the prerogative of God, whereas the West believed that it was 'of the people', shutting God out in their specious dichotomy of 'separation of Church and State'.

"When Tariq pointed out to Fadlallah that King David of Israel had established the State of Israel on the principle of divine governance around 1000 BC he was at a loss for words. He had obviously assumed that it was the revelation of the Prophet Mohammed around 700 AD and exclusive to Islam. But to give him his due intellectually, when Tariq asked him if he could envisage a Christian-Muslim State governed by God's laws in the Bible and Koran, he responded without equivocation to the religious and political challenge and, after a time of argument, agreed that it might be possible with people of spiritual principles and good faith on both sides.

“Fadlallah was very interested in Tariq’s account of the Latin American revolution of ‘Liberation Theology’, based on love and righteousness, and in Tariq’s personal search for a synthesis of religion and politics. But he viewed it from the standpoint of shared power for priests and politicians, and not mutual submission to God’s laws which he considered idealistic and unrealistic. Like the Ayatollah Khomeini, he believed that the supreme ruler in a nation should be the most senior and wise of clerics, and not a God-appointed ruler like David of Israel.

“For all his passion for Islam, Fadlallah lacked the capacity for true spiritual vision and faith to accept a God-directed society. He was confounded when Tariq broached the subject of individual spirit power, evidently unable to comprehend individual capability and accountability without the mediation of a mullah representative. Tariq was amused to discover that, instead of his ideas making him more threatening in Fadlallah’s estimation, they seemed to ease whatever suspicions he had of Tariq and his ultimate goals. Also, Tariq concluded that the fact that he was proceeding to Iran after Syria confirmed his academic rather than political interest in Islamic revolution. He enthusiastically endorsed what the mullahs in Iran had accomplished through their version of the Islamic revolution.

“Tariq was increasingly excited by the way in which he was learning to measure himself against leaders of Islam of various personalities and religious persuasions. With his broadening experience he would become a legitimate contender among them sometime in the future— sooner rather later, he hoped.”

Fleur stopped talking and turned away from Dave to look out of the window. It was obvious she was considering what to say next and Dave was intrigued by the interruption in her account. Eventually she made up her mind and began talking to Dave again.

“I think it was in Iran that Tariq may have first confronted the possibility of using the nuclear bomb in the interests of the Islamic Revolution. Iran’s Islamic Revolution by Ayatollah Khomeini had reached a point where their obsession with revolution, and conspiracies by rival Muslim groups, Israel, and the West, had them using rapidly diminishing financial resources in ever more frantic

purchases of weapons - including materials for a nuclear device.

“Despite crippling economic failures the Iranian Government continued to bankroll Islamic revolutionary groups in Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Algeria and Africa. But it was Iran’s spending on nuclear hardware that posed the greatest dangers. Iran was said to be in cooperation with Russia and China with regard to nuclear research and power-generating reactors. It was calculated that Iran was spending almost double the United States in military hardware —7 per cent of Iran’s gross domestic product compared with the US’s 4.8 per cent. The Islamic Republic of Iran, as it was designated since the Khomeini revolution, had engaged in undisputed terrorist activity abroad, given both religious and material support to militants throughout the Muslim world, attacked the Arab-Israel peace process, persecuted and intimidated its own citizens, and assiduously purchased weapons of mass destruction in its pursuit of power. In association with the Syrian President, Iran condoned, supported and even directed the Lebanon-based Hezbollah attacks on Israel.

“Its Sunni Muslim neighbour to the south-east, Pakistan, probably had the nuclear bomb. Saudi Arabia, its greatest and most hated rival, had long-range missiles. Iraq, with its nuclear capability, was just across the border. Syria was expanding its military capability with the help of Saudi Arabia. Israel had missiles and nuclear weapons. The nightmares of external military destruction were further exacerbated by internal conspiracies. The mullahs had come to power in Iran through conspiracies of their own, first against the Shah, and then against previous revolutionary partners whom they betrayed and removed. Their sole claim to ruling in Iran was based on Ayatollah Khomeini’s arbitrarily imposed system of one-man rule, ‘the guardianship of the Islamic jurist’, meaning the religious jurist had the final authority in all matters. He was able to maintain this Islamic fiction by virtue of his personal charisma, but with his death the mullahs had been under increasing pressure to get out of politics altogether. It was this potential that fascinated Tariq I gather.

“Because so many of them were personally as well as officially

corrupt, the public mocked their 'clerical games' which had increased their wealth and impoverished the country. The charges and counter-charges of conspiracies had reached the point where the term *posht-e pardeh* had been coined—'behind the curtain'. Another sign that the moral fibre of the nation had been destroyed by the mullahs was the unconcerned propensity for lying. This was due, partly to the historical belief among Shi'ites that they could operate only in a Sunni environment if they were economical with the truth; and partly because the contemporary conditions they had created were such that they were forced to lie in order to survive.

"Tariq's abhorrence of the priesthood was the greatest he had known since his early disgust with Tibet's Buddhist lamas and their blatantly immoral practices. Nor was Tariq alone in his revulsion. He met several of Iran's leaders through Teheran's 'Combatant Clerical Association', the country's leading political clergy fraternity, and they were frank in their condemnation of the mullahs in government. A former secretary-general, and a former prime minister, as well as a leading writer, all expressed their contempt of the mullahs, saying that they should return to their mosques. Naturally, this gave rise to discussions regarding what should be the form of an Islamic revolutionary government in the twentieth century, and Tariq had a ready and responsive audience for his own theories.

"So, in Iran, Tariq preached a different form of revolution from the military and political emphases he had used in Libya and Syria, passionately proclaiming the necessity of a religious revolution in Iran which would restore the purity of the Islam prophets. The powerful 'Combatant Clerical Association', whose members included friends and advisers to the Prime Minister, Hashemi Rafsanjani, and the President, Ali Khomeini, arranged for him to visit and address government officials and religious organizations, where he was not only given a respectful hearing but very often an enthusiastic response.

"At this time Tariq still had no clear formula for a synthesis of religion and politics but he had a clear conviction that religion had to clean its own house before it could tell others politically how to

organize their country. He also had a strong conviction that he was moving positively towards a fusion, using King David's model of a theocratic state. What David had done in his generation in establishing Israel as a God-pleasing State had been held up by God as a criterion of governance to others for centuries. Time after time God said of later kings approvingly, 'He followed in the steps of David'; or, disapprovingly, 'He did not follow in the steps of David'. The Biblical Messiah who was to return in 'the last days' of the world would rule as 'Prince of the House of David'. So, David's life and activities were Tariq's basic theme on the subject of revolution and rule in a country. He emphasized particularly how it was only David's lapse into immorality with Bathsheba which stopped him from ruling an empire and becoming the greatest emperor of his time.

"While Tariq was aware that it was his passion that gave force to his addresses, and made them acceptable, he was also convinced that it was their content that excited those who listened. The pre-Mohammed Old Testament prophets were respected by Muslims, but only in a vague general sense. The traditional practice of the mullahs was to excite their audiences with rhetoric and slogans, not exposition and illumination. Tariq made a point and practice of requiring time for quiet meditation and prayer before each address at important meetings, and seeking the power and presence of God's Spirit. So, when he spoke, he was conscious, as were the listeners, that he was a messenger of God. Even in the most hostile environment of antagonistic mullahs, if he didn't win them over he lectured them into silence!

"Iran's Islamic revolution was ready for an Islamic counter-revolution, and the mullahs were aware of it. While they were furious with Tariq's criticisms, they were pathetically grateful to learn that he had no intention—no immediate intention, anyway—of inflaming Islamic opposition against them. What disturbed Tariq most about the mullah's gotterdammerung strategy was their obsession regarding obtaining the nuclear bomb capability. He sensed that, in the final analysis, in order to ensure their hold on power, they would use the bomb against Iraq or Israel,

or maybe even Saudi Arabia, in a desperate attempt to gain or recover public acceptance. After all, it was Iranian-directed Lebanese terrorists who had blown up the United States Embassy. The Iranian mullahs would have been replaced long before if they had not been commercially supported by lucrative agreements with Germany and Japan. These two powerful trading nations kept the embargoed Iran economy viable in the teeth of world sanctions for commercial advantage. But there was no indication that either of them were supporting or providing Iran's nuclear ambitions.

"However, while Tariq was attending a high-level social gathering in Teheran he was introduced to two international financiers, a German and a Japanese. He had a suspicion that his introduction to them had been previously arranged when they chose to extend their initial conversation and then to suggest a further meeting. He was intrigued, because he had little commercial or financial expertise and, in any case, he was a visitor to Iran with no particular influence.

"When Tariq met with them at their hotel he chose to go alone as they had delicately suggested, but he took the initiative in seeking to find out more about their activities. At the previous night's reception they had not been forthcoming about their representation. The German was an international financier called Heinz Muller, and the Japanese was an international financier called Jantara Naka. Both of them projected the understated but powerful aura of successful entrepreneurs. Their confidence and experience became quickly apparent as they frankly stated their interest. While it was true that they were as they had declared to Tariq, they said, they were also colleagues in an exclusive international association known to its select members as the 'Janus Club'. The international association had been formed in order to advance their financial and commercial interests without having to observe the restraints of national governments' often adverse policies. I don't need to explain the Janus Club to you as you are world famous in fighting it!

"But in this case they were watching Tariq closely as they told him—or, the Japanese Naka talked, and the German observed Tariq. He guessed what they were observing in the shrewd choice of words

was that they were part of an organization that operated outside internationally accepted laws, a criminal association to put it bluntly. Tariq concluded he was not shocked because he had spent years in the study of revolution – which itself was a form of law-ignoring and law-violating behaviour. But he wondered what was their interest in him personally?

“They came to the point quickly. They had learned of his interest in revolution and his increasing influence in the Middle East’s Muslim circles. They had considerable international interests in gold and oil and arms, and other commodities, all of which would be affected in the event of national revolutions. Because of this they had a proposition for Tariq which would be to their mutual benefit. It was the Janus Club’s intention, in association with select individuals and groups and governments, to gain control of the world’s economic watershed from their unparalleled resources, and, through this, to manipulate the world’s policies to their advantage. At a recent meeting they had agreed that one way to do this would be to work in association with a money-favouring international movement with political ambitions and strong religious associations, for example, the Islamic fundamentalist movement. To date, this movement had been restricted in its aspirations because they were dependent on the erratic largesse of the oil-owning but corrupt Arab nations.

“A major factor of dissension among the Janus Club members had been the fractured character of the Islamic revolutionary movement. However, they had heard reports of Tariq’s ideas of revolution, and his ambition to unify the Islamic Revolution, and he and his German colleague were prepared to recommend that the Janus Club finance his vision—on condition that Tariq’s plans included world domination.

“Naka had stopped talking to evaluate Tariq’s reaction to this statement. Tariq had seen it coming, although he had not expected the world conquest plans to be stated so baldly. He had thought he would be invited to participate in the Janus Club’s activities in some way, not offered the opportunity for world revolution and religious conquest! So, although he wasn’t shocked, he was certainly surprised and probably showed it.

“Naka smiled as Tariq contemplated the proposition, and looked from Tariq to his German colleague, then appeared to come to a decision. ‘You are probably wondering whether we are serious—or mad’, he said, “so let me tell you something about the Janus Club. As I said, it is a loose association of national leaders of a variety of enterprises which generate vast amounts of profits. These profits are not always legal, and so cannot be processed or used through legal institutions. Consequently, we have set up intricate but effective mechanisms of collection, laundering and eventual investment in legal operations across the world. Presently, we control more money than most corporations—than most governments—and we are now accumulating billions of dollars faster than we can invest them.

“The stakes are astronomical, with profits in the region of a minimum of five hundred billion US dollars annually, rising to the thousand trillions in the early 21st century, from a variety of enterprises which we control. To these profits can be added those of narco-terrorism in weapons sales to groups like the IRA in Ireland, the PLO in the Middle East, the Sikhs in Punjab in India, the Muslims in Kashmir in India, the mujahedin in Iraq, the Kurds in Turkey, the Taleban in Afghanistan. The latest element in our wide-ranging interests is the marketing of nuclear weapons, uranium and plutonium, in addition to oil, from high-level sources in Russia. Our Russian colleague virtually controls everything legal and illegal inside and flowing from Russia. The billions that are being poured into Russia by the Western governments and free-market entrepreneurs is funnelled through enterprises which our colleague controls. Recently, he has added a new development to oil, the smuggling of nuclear plutonium, uranium and weapons systems, plus nuclear scientists if necessary.

“We are presently in Iran to discuss their plans to purchase nuclear materials and expertise to manufacture a bomb. Frankly we have reservations regarding both the government here, and its policies, as we have about Iraq for different reasons. We can give either government the money, nuclear materials and personnel that they require, as we do for Pakistan. But three rival Muslim countries with nuclear bombing capacity is the stuff of nightmares, not

profits. We would prefer supporting a single unified Muslim entity, with a legitimate political program that ensures world peace and not chaos, which would use the nuclear capability in a reasonable manner. So, if you agree, we will support you in your Muslim revolutionary ambitions, and will use our limitless finances and influence with other Muslim nations to see that they fall in line with you.”

Dave had been listening intently to every word of Fleur’s account with increasing admiration and he said this to Fleur. She smiled and said that her education since her youth in Tibet and China was based on memorization, especially China where every character had to be memorized. Her later Islamic studies were also memorized to a great extent, especially the sharia laws. So it had become natural to remember things and she was particularly interested in her brother’s life, fascinated even as his story unfolded with the mysterious any very influential Janus Club.

She continued: “Tariq obviously was very interested, too, because he enquired of Naka if there was some kind of initiation or screening process, which Naka definitely repudiated, saying that what was decided there was final. If at any time Tariq was seen to fail in their plans, they would naturally look for a suitable alternative – and Tariq would be eliminated. But meanwhile he would be well compensated, and he could choose to work with them in some capacity of his own choosing, with their suggestions for his consideration. He said that they were neither Freemasons nor Murder Incorporated, and proposed they open a secret bank account in the Cayman Islands in Tariq’s name, with an immediate deposit of ten million US dollars for his personal use. When their proposed revolution was successful, they would deposit a further hundred million US dollars. That should enable Tariq to make whatever decisions were necessary, and assure him of their expectation of a long and profitable association.

“What he would like to do Tariq told him after some thought, was to continue with his plans to talk to Muslim revolutionary leaders – for example, in Iraq and Sudan, and with the Saudi Arabian rulers – so that he had a comprehensive grasp of the attitudes of key

individuals in the Middle East. He did not need to visit Algeria, Tunisia or Morocco, as he had met some of these people while he was in Libya. But he would also like to visit the new Muslim Independent States of the former Soviet Union to get a sense of where they stood in their post-Communist circumstances. Finally, he wanted to talk with some Muslim leader in China. Once he had met with these people he should be able to formulate a world plan—or even have decided on the plan that he was already considering.

“Naka had agreed enthusiastically with these plans and said if Tariq let him know when he intended visiting these places and people he would inform them that Tariq had their complete support. Before Tariq left that day Naka would provide him with a safe method to use to communicate with each other. Regarding China, the Janus Club had a member who would provide Tariq with whatever information he required, either in China or in Hong Kong. Also, he would need to have some warning to arrange a safe meeting with a mutually agreed place with a Russian who had direct access to the Central Asian States, and also their nuclear material. Tentatively, Naka suggested Hong Kong, because Evgeny Malenkov, the Russian, could go there to and from China; and Lee Chung-ren, the Chinese, kept a house in Hong Kong. Also, in Hong Kong Tariq would be less conspicuous than in mainland China.

“They talked some more, but effectively that was the gist of the meeting; in many ways the most important in Tariq’s life because of its many future repercussions. One more important matter was decided—the name for their mutual plan for world domination. At Tariq’s suggestion it was agreed that it should be known as the ‘Shambhala Project’. He chose the name ‘Shambhala’ because of its religious and political associations—and because it was a Tibetan messianic legend. Shambhala was the name of a mythical kingdom from which it was believed the saviour of the world would come at a time when the world was in danger of self-destruction. In Tibetan tradition it was believed to exist to the north-west of Tibet in a secret hidden valley which would be accessible in times of urgent need. According to Tibetan Buddhism, at the time of the last of the

twenty-five 'proclaimers' a golden age would be ushered in and all negative forces overcome by one known as Maitreya, 'the Loved One'. The eschatological concept would appeal to Buddhists as well as Jews and Christians in his later plans of world conquest. It also corresponded with the Islamic concept of a Mahdi, or Messiah, to appear in the last days of the world. Tariq said he didn't know why it suddenly popped into his mind at that moment, but it had the right esoteric mixture of religious and political revolutionary utopia."

There was a sudden interruption to their conversation as the aircraft loud-speaker system announced the imminent arrival at Chengdu Airport, cutting short Fleur's history of her brother, Tariq, and she said she would finish what remained of her account later.

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Chengdu was the capital of Sichuan Province, China's last city before the vast mountainous territory of Tibet, the final major departure point for air and road transport to the mysterious kingdom of Tibet. Sichuan meant "four rivers", because of the rivers flowing through the province, including the River Yangtze in the south, which had its own source high in the vast Chang Tang region of Tibet where Dave and the others were going. To the west of Chengdu the fertile plains gave way to the forested foothills of the Minya Kongka mountain range, rising steeply into snow-capped mountains over 20,000-feet in height.

Having to leave the following morning there was no time for them to see anything of Chengdu's famed history and beauty. The old centre of the city had been gutted and rebuilt by the Communist administration and left without any particular distinction, plain concrete structures replacing the old colourfully ornamented buildings still to be seen in the side streets and outskirts of the city. But in the evening prior to departure the party went out as a group to a recommended Chinese restaurant, the Furong, or "Lotus Restaurant", within walking distance of their hotel. There they feasted on the famous Sichuan dishes of duck cooked in medicinal

herbs, soft-fried lotus flowers, the famous “beggar’s chicken” cooked in a clay jacket with olive leaves and orchid petals, and spicy meats with peanut sauce.

Next morning, after an early breakfast of watery rice and tofu porridge, they climbed into the car and utility vehicle arranged by Li and left on their journey to Kangding on the border of Tibet. Li told the others how Mao Zedong’s retreating Chinese Communist “Fourth Red Army”, totalling about 130,000 soldiers, came this way from Kiangsi Province over 8,000 miles through eleven provinces, on their legendary “Long March” over sixty years previously to an unknown Yen-an destination in China’s north-west. They followed a notorious route made famous earlier by a revolutionary Taiping general who had disappeared almost a century before. Mao eulogized the “Long March” in a poem, which Li quoted from memory in Chinese, then translated for them:

“The Red Army fears no hardship on the Long March.
A thousand mountains, ten thousand rivers are nothing.
The Five Ranges are like little winding ripples.
The peaks of Wumeng like clay balls tumbling into the plain.
Washed by the River of Golden Sand, the cloud-covered
cliffs are warm.
Spanning the River Tatu, the iron chains are cold.
The far-off snows of Minchan only bring us joy.
The Army presses through, and we all laugh.”

As they drove through the many miles of rice-fields Li told how the Chinese Communist Party, after the Liberation Army’s occupation of Tibet in 1950, began a major engineering feat of building a highway across Tibet from Chengdu to the Indian-Sikkim border, where there had only been horse trails before. It was now possible to drive to India in less than two weeks what had taken six months by animal transport.

From Chengdu to their first stop at Ya-an it was a hundred miles across the last western plains, and they stopped there for a quick lunch before taking off for the next hundred miles to Kangding.

They left Ya'an in a line of vehicles on the flat monotony through patchwork rice-fields which began to give way to the intricate layered terraced fields rising sharply on each side of the road, where hard-working peasants used every bit of the stepped ground to grow their crops. The mountains rising from the plains ahead of them, with their curling clouds of mist and sharp forested edges, were like the idealized paintings on Chinese scrolls.

Beyond a village named Tien Chuon the paved road suddenly ended in a ordinary packed soil and swung upwards, climbing steeply and steadily in zig-zag turns around increasingly higher mountains. Patches of snow appeared on the shaded parts of the hillsides, and there was a noticeable drop in the temperature when they stopped for a quick break to stretch legs. Li Chi'en, after a long chat with the driver, explained that the locals called the pass ahead of them yin-yang-shan—"the light-dark mountain" because of the stark climatic changes. Approaching from Chengdu the barrier of mountains was dark and ominous with savagely riven gorges; but from the top of the first misty snow-covered 10,000-foot pass the distant snow-covered serried mountain ranges of Tibet were radiant with blue skies and sunshine.

Water dripped steadily from huge 20-30-foot icicles suspended from the rocky out-croppings on the mountainside, foaming streams gushed through narrow channels in ice-locked crevices. Pine forests swept upwards in fantastic patterns of black and white where snow lay thickly on the foliage. Then the road dropped sharply in zig-zag fashion on the far side of the pass, almost as breath-taking in its human construction ingenuity as the magnificent natural beauty of mountain, forests and brawling river.

The small township of Luting, Li recounted, was where one of the most famous of the "Long March" battles took place—memorialized in Mao's poem in the line: "Spanning the River Tatu, the iron chains are cold." The raging foam-lashed river was compressed into a narrow gorge, splitting the town, and had been spanned by a heavy chain-link "bridge" of worn and loose wooden planks high above the raging river.

On the far side the Chinese Nationalists had been entrenched,

and on the near side the Chinese Communists had to get across the swaying treacherous iron-chain contraption now stripped of its wooden planks in order to advance. Hundreds of Communist soldiers had sacrificed their lives as they swung across the chains like demented monkeys, exposed to the withering fire of the Nationalists, and dropping into the raging river below, before their successors were successful in dislodging Chiang Kai Shek's less dedicated soldiers. The river was now spanned by a concrete support bridge, but the rusted chains remained of the former chain-bridge as a monument to heroism.

From Luting to Kangding was twenty miles of majestic scenery as the road climbed upwards again beside the foaming sun-dappled river to Kangding's near 10,000-feet. As they approached the border town, Dave, from his reading of a book by a former missionary, had expected to see a town of colourful wooden houses and traders' caravanserais. He was disappointed to find that the high-way had resulted in making Kangding a bustling small city with anonymous six-story concrete apartment blocks like most Chinese cities.

As they drove through Kangding they had to tilt their heads backwards to look up at the tops of the surrounding mountains circling the city, which, despite its height, was located in a constricted inverted bowl beneath towering peaks. They were surprised to find department stores, radio and television and telephone services, hospital, college and cinema, electricity and running water. There was even a 'bus service instead of the long lines of bell-draped mules and yaks driven by sword- and rifle-wearing Tibetan muleteers. The romantically described wild frontier town of the past had disappeared, engulfed by Chinese concrete uniformity.

But what had not changed was the appearance of the Tibetans. They might have got off their horses and on to 'buses and other transport to trade more cheaply at Chengdu, but in Kangding the Khamba traders were still tall, strongly-built, swaggering men in bulky yak-skin and sheepskin gowns, colourfully girdled at the waist into knee-length, and carelessly worn off the shoulder for easy access to their drinking bowls and ever-present short swords. Their boots were calf-length embroidered felt with leather soles, and their

fur hats were tilted rakishly at the back of their heads. The Tibetan women were dressed in ankle-length gowns, with aprons of brilliantly coloured weave, and wore their hair in long braids with interwoven coloured threads and beads. They walked with the same free-swinging stride as the men accustomed to walking long distances, and they had attractive and smiling gypsy-like Mongolian features.

"No rifles?" Duke asked Li.

"Sensitive subject," Li replied. "The authorities first tried orders against carrying arms but there were minor rebellions all over Tibet, because, to Tibetans, guns and swords and horses are like wives and children. In the places where the Chinese authorities can impose their order, like here in Kangding, the Tibetans do not carry guns—or, at least, long guns; what they have inside their gowns is another matter!—and, anyway, they probably leave the rifles with friends in their camps outside the city. Swords are still a matter of dispute, because the Tibetans use them for cutting meat and wood as well as each other and Chinese."

"Like the Old West back in the States," Duke grinned. "If they can stare down the sheriff they will wear them. I must say some of these guys do look like gunfighters at the OK Corral!"

"That's how they live on the other side of the pass on their own territories—where we're going," Li said sardonically. "At night they literally sleep with their guns as their robes are used as bed-covers for sleeping."

"Must make it uncomfortable for their women-folks", Dyke grinned.

Their hotel was in the centre of Kangding, on the other side of the brawling river which bisected the city. It was a three-storey guest-house rather than a hotel, with erratically "running" hot-and-cold water—and no flush toilets. It had been built on the site of a former Roman Catholic cathedral which the Chinese Communists had demolished, the chatty bell-boy told them.

Once they had checked in and found their rooms Li said he was going to find his colleague in Kangding in order to set up immediate security arrangements and to discuss their onward travel

plans. This was going to be the last accessible chance for the triads to attack as, once they left Kangding for the Tibetan mountains and plateaus, there would be little further opportunity for Chinese to operate. He warned the others to take no risks until he had made the necessary arrangements.

Dave and Duke were now openly registered as Dr and Mrs Wilson and Dr and Mrs Miller, with Li Chi'en as official liaison, on a mission to study animal wildlife in Tibet's northern Chang Tang region. While Fleur was unpacking and preparing to change into warmer clothing Dave said he was going to find Duke and see if he wanted to share a coffee or beer if the hotel had them.

There was no coffee-shop as such, but the cheerful staff in the hotel dining-room was happy to make coffee for them. They were still drinking and talking when Li returned to say that his colleague had already put men on duty, both outside and inside the hotel as temporary staff, in anticipation of their arrival. Everything Li had ordered appeared to have been delivered, and all that was required was for the material to be checked and re-packed for onward transport. The new vehicles were from military supplies, with all official insignia removed, and were ready for use. They could leave anytime. They had only to make a variety of final purchases in Kangding for a possible extended stay in the Chang Tang, and also to provide credibility for their declared objective of wildlife study. They would find plenty of fresh meat to shoot on the grass-lands and mountains, but they needed to take flour and salt, brick-tea and medicine, rolls of cotton and silk, for use and barter among other things in a land where Chinese currency was despised and there were no banks or money-exchanges.

Next day Dave and Duke had a foretaste of what lay ahead as they began packing and moving their baggage in sixty-pound lots. This was the regular size which was loaded on to either side of pack-mules or yaks when they had to transfer from vehicle to animal transport at a later stage. As they moved these sixty-pound bundles Dave and Duke found they were quickly rendered unable to breathe, and, if they persisted, they became dizzy and almost blacked-out.

"It's the altitude," Van said laughingly to the breath-labouring

and disconcerted Duke. "You better get used to it. This is only 10,000 feet above sea-level, and tomorrow we go up to 14,000 feet and more. Right, Fleur?"

"Yes," Fleur agreed. "You have to learn to do everything more slowly than usual. The higher you go the less oxygen there is for your body. It can be very disturbing until you become acclimatized to it. If you run instead of walk, or exert yourself unduly, you will become nauseated or black-out. You will have difficulty sleeping at night and, when you do sleep, you will have vivid dreams and even hallucinations so that you're not sure whether you're awake or asleep. But, as a compensation, once you learn to adapt to the altitude, you will experience the greatest 'high' you've ever known — other than you-know-what, of course," she laughed suggestively. "Which reminds me," she said to the two men, who were looking at her suspiciously to see if she was joking, "when you are doing you-know-what at high altitude you may find yourself unconscious unless you adjust yourselves to the demands of altitude in that, too, with less exertion."

"Do I understand you correctly," said the still-suspicious Dave. "The altitude gives a unique high, but also hinders our ability in certain circumstances to—er—experience it?"

"It's all a question of timing," Fleur confirmed demurely, "as the actress said to the bishop. Think of it this way; you could benefit from lots of practice."

While the others went out sightseeing around the town Dave had arranged to have another session with Fleur to find out the final details of Tariq's Middle East experiences. Now that he had discovered the genesis of Tariq's associations with the nuclear potential and with the Janus Club he was anxious to discover if anything else of importance had emerged from Tariq's other visits. From what he had heard he had an impression of a uniquely intelligent individual who was not fazed by the challenge of taking on the world as well as the Janus Club.

Fleur—or Deki, as she now preferred to be called while in her own country—made herself comfortable with a bowl of steaming yak butter tea, and began her account.

"Where did I leave I leave off? Oh, I remember, with Naka's offer of financial support. Tariq had arranged with Jantara Naka that, in whatever arrangements and introductions he made for Tariq, he was to emphasize that Tariq should be kept as anonymous as possible, with no red-carpet welcomes to draw attention. Tariq should be introduced as a Muslim scholar interested in Islamic religion and Middle East politics, visiting the countries to consult with leading mosque and government dignitaries with a view to attaining Islamic unity.

"The prime target of Islamic militants at that time was Egypt, mainly because of its great population and it was considered the cultural and political centre of the Arab world. From the Iranian Revolution point of view, the prime geopolitical stepping-stone to the overthrow of its secular leaders was Sudan, from which country there was access north and west to Egypt and North Africa, and south to the other countries of Africa.

Sudan, the largest country in Africa in land mass, with a population of 25 million, had a history of militant Islamic fundamentalism. At the end of the nineteenth century a Mohammed Ahmed ibn al-Sayyid proclaimed himself a mahdi, or messiah, and led a revolt against the country's occupying Turkish, Egyptian and British rulers. A century later, in 1989, a military coup overthrew a democratically elected government and, in 1990, declared itself an Islamic State. The next year Iran agreed to supply Sudan with oil and finance, and to send Revolutionary Guards to consolidate its control over the largely twenty-five per cent Christian south of the country. In addition to the major Muslim-Christian division, the country was riven with some five hundred different ethnic groups and the competing loyalties of regional tribes and clans. A country almost a third in size of the United States, it had practically no industry and few natural resources beyond river water and a few untapped oil reserves; poverty, famine and sickness were endemic.

"The most powerful man in Sudan was not the military leader, General Omar Hassan al-Bashir, but one with no official position. He was Hassan Abdallah al-Turabi, leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, and the real power behind the Islamic regime. Turabi

was the most enigmatic of Islam's revolutionary leaders. A Sunni Muslim, he attended a secular university, studied law in London and Paris, and spoke idiomatic English and French. He had served as Attorney-General for a period, and was head of Khartoum University Law School. He had been called 'the Madison Avenue Ayatollah' by Americans, because of his smoothly evasive plausibility. Like his contemporary Islamic Hezbollah revolutionary, Sheikh Fadlallah, he was in his late fifties, of average height, and with a persuasive voice and piercing eyes.

"Turabi was the son of a religious leader and, when his fellow-students were espousing Western forms of rule, Turabi at that time joined the small and powerless Muslim Brotherhood movement. He was primarily interested in Islamic sharia—loosely translated 'the path to the watering place'—rather than the Western law he studied later. The sharia was an accumulation of Islamic laws and practices based on the Koran and knowledge of the Prophet Mohammed's ways. The suave Turabi argued that because Islam did not separate religion from politics, the sharia did not distinguish between sin and civil infraction, and ideally aimed at a just and harmonious society.

"Another major influence on the Sunni Turabi was the principle of jihad. The Prophet Mohammed was opposed to clerical hierarchies, and so he emphasized a government of religion based on personal and direct devotion to God—hence Islam, meaning 'Obedience'. This depending on God for guidance was known as *ijtihad*, meaning the interpretation of the Prophet's laws not covered directly in the traditional sources, rather than the sterile dogmatic assertions of essential conformity. The historical period of *ijtihad* was later declared closed in the tenth century by Sunni Muslims and some Shi'ites, which effectively meant that the sharia was complete and nobody could add any interpretations of their own. Iran, as a Shi'ite stronghold, continued to uphold the principle of *ijtihad* and this justified its arbitrary Khomeini form of Islamic Revolution.

"Turabi preached this in the Sudan, and his *ijtihad* principles permitted him to propagate his revolutionary ideas. He respected Jewish and Christian religions, and Western culture, and said he

wanted Islamic militant movements to have a harmonious relationship with the West. He denounced Muslim sectarianism, and called on all Muslims to 'move forward to a new form of Islam.' Tariq was excited, therefore, at the prospect of meeting Turabi. When Tariq told him his purpose—seeking a synthesis of religion and politics for revolutionary change—Turabi smiled sceptically and asked if that was why Tariq had sought him out, saying mockingly, 'It is said I am behind all Islamic movements in the world, that I wish to replace Communism with Islam'. He neither denied nor confirmed Tariq's statements that Sudan was now a leading centre of revolutionary training for terrorist groups like the Hamas, the Abu Nidal, the Islamic Holy War, as well as a conscripted group known as the 'People Defence Force' to promote revolutions in neighbouring countries.

"When Tariq saw he would get nowhere trying to discuss particulars of Sudan's revolutionary plans Tariq shifted his focus to his own revolutionary principles. Tariq was intrigued to note that Turabi was dressed completely in white, and that he lived in a white stucco and brick building, with a polished white Mercedes outside. So he asked him if this had any symbolic significance. Yes, Turabi acknowledged, it was a visual statement of the need for purity of life demanded by Islam, for righteousness, integrity and justice. It was also a symbolic statement against the oligarchy of the black-robed mullahs.

"How, Tariq challenged him, did he reconcile the parlous social conditions existing in Sudan with the high ideals he and his colleagues were propagating as their Islamic Revolution. Turabi evaded the question with legal skill, beginning with a frank admission of appalling conditions in the country, but then going on to obscuring the issue with blame on history and lack of wealth producing facilities. He claimed that it took time for political and social changes to become apparent to outside observers. He pointed to Iran as an example—unfortunately, in Tariq's opinion—arguing that it was Iran's misfortune that Islam came to power through violent revolution, and not through slower and more democratic processes. Khomeini had allowed his hatred for the Shah to blind him to what was going to be required in effective Islamic political

and social change. Sudan, Turabi claimed, was only seeking to profit from Iran's mistakes.

"It was Turabi who produced a surprise for Tariq with regard to Israel when he said that he saw nothing inherently wrong with peace between a Jewish state and Muslims. Turabi said that the first Islamic State itself had a constitutional document between the Prophet and the Jews of Medina; even a confidential document in which they were constituent members of the state with their own federal independence. However, Turabi did not accept the claims of the present Zionist government, which did not confer legitimate recognition of Israel.

"It was after Tariq's discussions with Turabi that he began to have the glimmerings of an idea for uniting all Muslims. The Muslim leaders he had met so far, and the two he still had to meet—Iraq and Saudi Arabia—all had one thing in common despite their sectarian differences, and that was hatred of Israel. But it was hatred of the modern Zionist Israel, with its Marxist atheistic associations. Historically, as Turabi had said, Jews and Muslims had co-existed with amicable relations. Suppose, for argument's sake, that the modern Israel state were removed en bloc, and the two nations were able to start over again? The thought would not leave Tariq's mind as he became increasingly convinced that he was on the brink of discovering his search for an Archimedes-like principle to move the world to spiritual domination.

"Whatever device he arrived at, he knew it would have to satisfy three criteria: religion, politics and military. All three of these were involved in Israel; in politics remove the present Zionist leaders of both political arms of government by some means: in religion, agreement over the status of Jerusalem, and building the Temple on the Mount beside the Islamic mosque: in military matters, overcoming Israel's nuclear capability. In religion, Turabi argued that it was only a nucleus of 70,000 Jewish exiles returning from captivity in Babylon who changed the Jewish religion from a Moses to a rabbinical recognition of God; a "New Israel" built on the claim to "return to Moses" could be built on the ashes of modern Zionism.

“Tariq felt his excitement mount as his own vision began to take shape. He recalled his conversation with Jantara Naka, and his plan for world domination through economic domination and political manipulation. His goal was control of nuclear capability as a threat to reach that goal. But a threat was only effective if it was believed to be possible of accomplishment. Suppose there was a nuclear strike against Israel by a combined ‘Islamic Nations Force’, followed immediately by an Islamic offer to cooperate in building a New Israel with Jews who were not Zionists?

“Such an action, and the implicit—or even explicit—nuclear threat to other countries, would give unstoppable impetus to the Islamic Revolution world-wide. With Islamic control of nuclear potential, as well as oil, it would be possible Islam could dictate terms to all nations.

“Tariq believed he had now been given the critical instrument to move the world through his recent unique experiences with the Middle East’s leaders and association with the powerful Janus Club with their limitless finances and nuclear contacts. His key rivals would be Asad of Syria and Hussein of Iraq, with their secular ambitions to rule Islam and the world; and Fadlallah and Turabi, with their religious ambitions to be ‘Imam of Islam’ to change the world. The Iranian Shi’ites had given this title to Khomeini, with its suggestive association to the Imam ol-Zaman, ‘the Imam of all Time’, whose arrival signalled the end of history and the beginning of Paradise.

“But Tariq was now convinced he was the one who held the lever! He was the one with access to God. he was the one with spirit power. What he needed now, before he went to visit Iraq and Saudi Arabia, was to consolidate his relationship with the Janus Club, and meet with their associates in Russia, Central Asia and China. He needed that to counter the military influence of Saddam Hussein in the Middle East, and the financial influence of King Fahd of Saudi Arabia, in the Middle East. If they knew that he had the religious support of Fadlallah and Turabi, and the political and financial support of the Janus Club, Central Asian Muslims and China’s Muslims, then his leadership of the Islamic world was assured. Later,

he would give thought as to how world Jewry, Christendom and Buddhism, could be won over into a unified form of association on the basis of agreed spiritual values. He felt he was on his way to fulfil his destiny to change the world.

“Meanwhile, he arranged with Jantara Naka on the secure telephone line to meet with him and his two Russian and Chinese colleagues in Hong Kong. The Regent Hotel, where they met, had every modern luxury and was built, literally, on the harbour on pilings. The two men introduced to Tariq by Jantara Naka were also remarkable. Lee Chung-ren was stocky, his full-fleshed face dominated by a bar of black eye-brows and watchful eyes. He was the top man of all the Chinese secret societies, the triads, operating from Peking to Peru, in every kind of financial and commercial enterprise, legal and illegal. They were also closely involved with all of China’s political and military leaders through their clan and family societies, and had been responsible for the overthrow and installation of successive governments in China for centuries. The Russian, Evgeny Malenkov, was a tall, lean individual, with the military bearing of the former Colonel of KGB he had been. Since the Yeltsin coup he had used his intelligence information to gain control of the five thousand mafia criminal gangs inside Russia, two hundred of them with international connections, the legal corporations set up by the new Russian capitalists, and the illegal smuggling of gold, diamonds, drugs, and nuclear material and personnel from Russia and the Central Asian Independent States. It was said that nothing moved into or out of the old Soviet Union countries without his knowledge and percentage.

“The two men—and Naka, too—represented an awesome amount of power, licit and illicit, and this became immediately apparent in their discussion. Naka had briefed his two colleagues about Tariq, and his proposed plan for world domination, and they had a number of perceptive questions which he quickly cleared up to their satisfaction. Then Tariq explained to them in some detail how it was necessary for geopolitical reasons to have the support of Chinese and Central Asian Muslims to counter the influence of the Middle East’s Asad and Hussein, Fadlallah and Turabi. It would also

help to have the support of other Muslim countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, Indonesia and Malaysia.

“The three Janus Club men were all accustomed to thinking internationally, and between them they were able to draw up a program which would ensure that Tariq held the balance of power in the Muslim world. The most significant contributions, however, came from the Chinese, Lee Chung-ren. It appeared that the after-Deng changes of the Chinese Communist leaders in Beijing was leaving a power vacuum in China which the traditional power-brokers—the military war-lords—were seeking to fill themselves. In the jockeying for control one of the key figures was the Muslim General, Ma Wen-huie. What was significant for their plans was that Ma controlled the north-west region of China with over fifty million Muslims, and where the greatest concentration of industrial and nuclear facilities was located. Tariq told them he wanted an arrangement where there was a separate nuclear launching facility over which he would have total control. It didn't have to be a whole nuclear installation, but it did have to be a single exclusive launching site with his personal staff. The time of the launching of the nuclear device against Israel would be his sole responsibility, not subject to any influence from General Ma or others. Naturally, he would cooperate in every way with General Ma's personal plans for his takeover of the Chinese Government in Peking, but the time and circumstances of the nuclear launch against Israel must be determined by Tariq alone, because it would have to be co-ordinated with his plans for world religious integration of all three major religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. With Zionistic Judaism destroyed the new Biblical Israel would be unified with Islam as it had been for centuries after the Prophet Mohammed's death.

“Tariq outlined a possible scenario for them. He would meet with Saddam Hussein of Iraq, and then the Saudi ruler, King Fahd. Tariq would propose to them a meeting of all Muslim leaders somewhere in the Middle East, during which the key leading rulers of Muslim nations would be briefed by Tariq regarding the proposed nuclear strike against Israel and subsequent plan for world domination. The

series of steps to be taken in each country, to meet the requirements of the coordinated strike, would be discussed, and an outline of the later steps to be taken immediately after the strike had taken place. In this way a unified set of circumstances would be put in motion which would produce the appropriate time and situation for the nuclear device to be launched, and the world prepared for a unified religion.

“Following that meeting Tariq would set up his headquarters in the nuclear facility in the Koko Nor region of north-west China, Tibet and Central Asia, to be officially designated for later publicity reasons as “Shambhala”. But, once the nuclear strike against Israel was completed, his headquarters would be in Babylon in Iraq, subject to agreement with Saddam Hussein or, in the event of Saddam’s demise, his successor. He did not expect any strong objection from Iraq, because it would increase its influence vis-a-vis Iran.

“They spent a few days arranging and confirming the broad outlines of this plan with General Ma, and then Tariq left for his visit to Saudi Arabia and Iraq. Tariq deliberately kept Iraq to the last for reasons of his own which will become evident in time. In a peculiar way Tariq said he found Saudi Arabia like Hong Kong. In the barren island of Hong Kong the two nations of China and Britain had created a financial eldorado. In Saudi Arabia’s barren desert the two races of Europeans and Arabs had also created a financial eldorado. But the parallel ended there. While Hong Kong had no raw material resources, and was a model entrepôt, Saudi Arabia had indigenous oil in vast quantities—but that was all. In Hong Kong the Government interfered very little with the business activities of its citizens so long as they paid the low and standard taxes. In Saudi Arabia the royal family ruled autocratically over the lives of the citizens, and retained the country’s profits for themselves, only providing social ‘benefits’ for a quiescent Muslim population.

“To Tariq Saudi Arabia was the one Muslim country that had never been anything but a classic fundamentalist Islamic State, with the Koran as its constitution, and the sharia as its criminal and civil law. But the conspicuous materialist indulgences of the extensive

ruling royal family had undermined their reputation among modern Muslim fundamentalist militants, and the dictatorial ruling family was becoming increasingly troubled and even afraid. They had poured millions of dollars into the Muslim Brotherhood and other extremist groups in Sudan, Algeria, Tunisia, Syria and Jordan, as well as the Hamas in Israel, in a contemptible attempt to distract their attention from the Islamic violations in Saudi Arabia. But their appeal to the United States for military help in the Persian Gulf War had caused a major rift with other Muslim nations, and their support of Israel peace talks in what was viewed as a meek response to US pressure, further undermined their weakening Muslim sectarian influence. The royal family was in open disagreement with its own senior religious establishment regarding the king's imposed semi-western political reforms, which the militants in the country declared were anti-Islamic.

"The opposition was not just confined to religious institutions, because anti-royal tapes were being sold openly in cassette shops across the country. The blind supreme religious authority of Saudi Arabia, Sheikh Abdel-Aziz ibn Baaz, had also created a crisis over two of his authoritative fatwas, or religious pronouncements. One was his declaration that the earth was flat and whoever said otherwise was an atheist to be punished. The other was affirming the right of Saudi's rulers to pursue normal relations with Israel, and all who opposed this were 'sinful' and should suffer the consequences. A further bizarre complication had erupted in the country when the ruling authorities had taken no immediate action when 47 women drove through the capital in a public protest against their enforced seclusion. Outraged militants demanded retribution for this "shameless flouting of Islamic tradition", in their view. The ruling regime was humiliatingly forced to comply. But there was an insoluble problem facing them—40 per cent of all Saudi private wealth was held by its women; a quarter of the property in Riyadh, the capital, and half the property in the second city of Jeddah, was also owned by women. In a country rapidly becoming bankrupt because of the degeneracy of its rulers, unable to pay its bills nationally or internationally, it was an enormous humiliation. Tariq

was highly amused at their predicament and thought he must tell me about this, as Islamic rights for women was my graduation specialty in the Islamic sharia.

“The deteriorating situation was in the forefront of Tariq’s mind as he waited to speak with his Janus Club-introduced contact, Prince Abdul ibn Fazi. Fazi was one of the Saudi royal family’s renegades, who had unscrupulously used his royal connections to build up a colossal network of criminal enterprises involving drugs, gold, arms, and influence-peddling into a multi-billion dollar empire. He was to introduce Tariq to the appropriate members of the 7,000-strong royal family. Because of his considerable independent, if illicit, wealth Fazi had easy access to the influential members of the ruling elite, who were not averse to using his suspect western contacts for their own personal gains. Tariq’s chief reason for visiting Saudi Arabia was because they had established and financed the influential Islamic Conference, a leading vehicle of Islamic activity, which he planned to use as the forum for his proposed select Muslim discussion about Islamic world domination immediately following the secretly planned Israel nuclear strike.

“There was nothing else that he needed from Saudi’s ruling regime, or its fragmented militants, so his few meetings were bland and uninformative. He was received respectfully, and promised every cooperation with the proposed Conference, but was viewed with a measure of suspicion. This was especially true—and to be expected—of Prince Turk al-Faisal, the Saudi chief of intelligence. It was obvious he knew of Tariq’s experiences, and demonstrations, in Libya, because he reiterated questions relating to them, such as ideas of revolution and spirit power. But he lost interest when it became an intellectual and spiritual explanation.

“For some reason he seemed to think Tariq was involved in the recent “spiritual” revolutionary movement sweeping Afghanistan, the Taliban, meaning ‘seekers after truth’. These were former trained fighters with the mujahedeen during the Afghan-Soviet War, who had lost patience with the post-war corrupt commanders who had taken over the country after the Soviets left. The Taliban movement had emerged from Islamic seminaries in Pakistan operated by

disillusioned and patriotic Afghan refugees, and was based on a strict adherence to the teachings of the Koran.

In less than six months the Taliban had taken over more than 40 per cent of Afghanistan, making big gains in nine of the country's 30 provinces, including Kandahar, the second largest city, and were within a few miles of the capital, Kabul. It was claimed that they numbered 25,000 fighters, with 200 tanks, a dozen fighter planes, and several helicopters, with supporters and supplies increasing daily. In their occupied territories they imposed strict, but not dictatorial, laws. They banned women from working outside their homes, or entering stores with men present, but were scrupulous about having supplies being brought out to them. Men were banned from playing soccer, and had to have short hair-cuts. Tariq told the chief of intelligence that he had news of them but had no contacts, and would have no opinion about them until he had met with their leaders, about which he had no immediate plans..

"Tariq found Iraq to be a completely different set of circumstances from Saudi Arabia. There were signs of conspicuous wealth in the exotic palaces being built by favoured officials or citizens, but mostly the country showed the results of its defeat in the Gulf War and the subsequent strict sanctions which deprived it of the benefits of its oil wealth. The Arab nationalism of Iraq emerged after the Second World War mainly with the writings of Satie al-Husari, who campaigned tirelessly for an 'Arab nation' comprising Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Transjordan and Palestine. His claim for Iraq was that they were direct descendants of the ancient Mesopotamians and Babylonians.

"It was the Saudis, with the Americans, who provided the money and weapons which catapulted Saddam Hussein into the potential leadership of the Arab world, in his ten-year war with Iran and claimed ultimate victory. Nor was this an empty ambition, because it had been articulated by the US Secretary of State that world reliance on the oil resources of the Gulf meant the possibility of a 'dictator (Saddam Hussein) who, acting alone, could strangle the global economic order.' One of the things that had intrigued Tariq about Iraq was Saddam Hussein's obsession with Iraq's 'Babylon'

heritage. What was not widely known was that his development of Iraq's nuclear launching system, although it received so much publicity, was officially named "Project Babylon"; and, in a parallel program for a long-distance "Supergun", the twin-barrels were designated "Big Babylon" and "Baby Babylon".

"Tariq had become interested in the recurrent historical theme of 'Babylon' after he began reading the Bible, he said. The human rebellion against God was said to have begun at Babel, the mother of Babylon, and was due to end at 'Mystery Babylon, the Great City, and also Mother of Harlots'. Babylon was mentioned in no less than eighteen Books of the Bible, often in whole chapters recounting its destiny, and was mentioned more than any other city except Jerusalem. The historical genealogy of Jesus was divided into three sections of fourteen generations, each of them critically polarized between Babylon and Jerusalem. The last days of the world were prophesied to take place in Babylon and Jerusalem.

"It was from Babylon that the idea of an institutional priesthood and idolatrous worship emerged. The family of the first dictator, Nimrod, included Semiramis, his wife, later deified under the name Rhea, and Cybele, Aphrodite of Greece, Venus of Rome, and Diana of the Ephesians. Tammuz, her son, claimed to be born without a human father after Nimrod had died. They became the idolatrous Trinity of the ancient world, and Semiramis and Tammuz, the Queen of Heaven with the 'immaculate conception'. From Babylon had emerged all counterfeit religions with myths of virgin birth, sacrificial death, mother-and-child worship, and resurrection. In Phoenicia, it was called Ashteroth and Tammuz; in Egypt, Isis and Horus; in Greece, Aphrodite and Eros; in Rome, Venus and Cupid; in Europe, Madonna and Child. These were all associated with stellar systems into 'the host of heaven'—sun, moon, planets and stars—and formalized into the zodiac and attributed with supernatural powers.

"In the Christian prophetic Scriptures, this corrupted God-defiant ancient Babylon would be restored in 'the last days of the world', 'the Day of Jehovah', when God would face the world with judgment for its disobedience and wilful sinfulness. At that time

Babylon would be the centre of both human rebellion and divine judgment, the seat of the Great Rebel against God, 'the Antichrist'. Babylon would be where the last Great Apocalypse would begin which would end at Armageddon in a gotterdammerung of slaughter and terror.

"Tariq refreshed his memory regarding both Babylon and Armageddon before going to the interview with Saddam Hussein, and he even memorized the words, still vividly in his mind:

'Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon. The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'It is done!'. Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake. The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine and fury of his wrath . . .'"

"So Tariq wondered why Saddam Hussein was so interested in Babylon? And why would he designate his proposed nuclear strike against Israel as 'Project Babylon'? He decided he would base his approach to the temperamental dictator of Iraq on the subject and significance of Babylon.

"Before Tariq met with him he learned from his discussions with several of Iraqi ministers that they, in association with Brazil, had developed their own satellite system specifically to provide surveillance of Israel, Syria and Iran. Tariq hoped that he might be able to persuade Saddam Hussein to provide him with access to this information, too, for future use. At the same time Tariq had to be careful about how much he would say regarding his own plans to Saddam Hussein who had a sinister record of removing any potential rival to himself by convenient 'accidents'; and he was not just a threat to Saddam's ambition to be a leader of the Arab world, but of the whole world.

"Saddam had never bothered to make himself respected, only

feared; as he manipulated and murdered his way to power he made no attempt to win the affection of his people or share their lives. He imposed his will on Iraq by brutality and terror. He carried a pistol with him during all interviews—even with his colleagues or visiting ministers and diplomats. An Arab writer had said, ‘his profession is death’. Personal ambition and an inflexible will to eliminate any rival were essential elements in his bid to control Iraq, lead the Arab nation—and, hopefully, rule the world. He was reported to have said that the code of the mafia depicted in his favourite film, *The Godfather*, was ‘the ideal code of ethics to which everybody should aspire’.

“So, Tariq met with Saddam Hussein, who immediately tried to establish his personal dominance by directing the conversation into subjects of his choosing. Tariq jolted—and demonstrably displeased—him by interrupting him and declaring he wished to use their time profitably in discussing the nuclear bombing of Israel, a future Islamic Conference to determine world domination, and Babylon. Saddam hesitated between terminating the interview—perhaps shooting Tariq in an unfortunate ‘accident’!—or listening to what interested him. He chose the latter course.

“Without informing him of his connections, Tariq told Saddam the outlines of his plan to bomb Israel as a first step to world domination with a new order in which religion and politics would be united. After this, Saddam was avid for details, but Tariq moved on quickly to Saddam’s obsession—Babylon. Tariq had no specific goal in mind at the time, being primarily concerned to find out how important the subject was to Saddam and for what reason—and if he could use it in the future.

“Saddam was inordinately proud of Babylon’s former glory and, like the modern Jews with their questionable genealogical claims, he claimed Iraq to be directly descended from the ancient Babylonians. For several years he had spent vast amounts of money on restoring many of the earlier Babylonian structures, including the legendary Southern Palace of Nebuchadnezzar, the Processional Way, and the Ishtar Gate. He considered himself a modern Nebuchadnezzar destined to restore the ancient Babylonian empire

and glory, and even had medallions struck with the profiles of each of them on either side. He was not only rebuilding some of the Ancient Babylon, but also building a new city for a modern capital, already being inhabited by a quarter-million people.

“As Saddam Hussein enthusiastically described his vision of a New Babylon from which to rule Arabia—and the world—a part of Tariq’s mind was asking the question: in the event of my plans being successful, who would eventually rule in New Babylon, Saddam Hussein or me? If Tariq’s plans were successful he would need a base from which to control the final stages of world rule after the destruction of Zionist Israel and the planned re-structuring of the world in its new religion-led era of love, righteousness, peace and justice. Mecca was too closely identified with Islam, and Rome too closely identified with Vatican Catholicism. Jerusalem or Babylon were the two most obvious choices, but, after the nuclear strike against Israel, Jerusalem would take some time to rebuild—although eventually it would be the ideal geo-political and geo-religious centre from which to rule the world. Meanwhile, Saddam Hussein would be pursuing his own megalomaniac agenda in Babylon, and would have to be removed at some suitable time.

“Tariq and Saddam had a bizarre conversation before the interview ended. He had heard about his ability to stop sword-cuts and bullets, and he wanted Tariq to teach him his ‘secret’. His bewildered confusion when Tariq explained about prayer, meditation and spirit power, was amusing to see, Tariq said. It was obvious Saddam hadn’t the least idea about spiritual truths or practices. Eventually he seemed to accept that Tariq was either being evasive, or was a charlatan who had deceived others but not him. However, he was sufficiently impressed by their meeting to agree to provide Tariq with every cooperation in satellite surveillance of Israel, and Iraq’s nuclear capability, on condition that Tariq keep him closely informed of developments in the Central Asian “Shambhala” nuclear facility.

“Saddam demanded an approximate date for the strike, but Tariq told him he was still in the process of putting together all the necessary arrangements, including this meeting with him. Tariq said

he estimated that it would only take a few months because all the nuclear hardware potential was already available, the location in Central Asia was already established, the launching system already in place. All that was necessary now was the appropriate organizing of circumstances and the strike time of Zero Hour. As Tariq left Baghdad, he wondered when he would next visit the New Babylon, and in what circumstances.

“That is as much as I can tell you ,” Deki finished her account, “because Tariq presumably went to visit the Central Asian States for discussions and then to the Shamballa installation in remote Chang Tang of Tibet, and I lost contact with him. Now it is time for bed - and other things.”

*

The following day, when Dave and Duke finished packing and stacking the bundles, they went and bought spare cans of gasoline to go with them. The first stage of their journey from Kangding would be on the main highway to Derge, but there, where it went on to Lhasa and India, they would turn north on to the great Chang Tang plateaus of grasslands, scrub, marshlands and snow.

With their preparations completed by mid-afternoon Dave and Duke decided to have a last look at old Kangding where the famous Kham Tibetan tribal revolutionary, Topgyay Pangdathsang, had lived. This was in the western part of the city where a few inns and caravanserais and wine-shops were located for the Tibetan traders who either refused, or could not afford to use, the Chinese trucks to Chengdu. Their mules and yaks and horses were usually staked on an open stretch of ground outside the city, and only brought in when the traders had bought their supplies and were ready for departure across Tibet.

It was the most colourful area as the boisterous, carefree Kham tribesmen, with their rakish and devil-may-care attitudes, drank and roistered and fought in horse-play or tribal rivalry before they left for their long and hazardous journey across the mountains to their homes or tents in distant places in Tibet or trading posts in India.

One of their games was to toss the sixty-pound, yak-hide-covered bundles of tea, which constituted the main item of barter in Tibet, to the top of standing piles stacked in rows twenty-feet high. For departure the Tibetans on top of the piles would throw the yak-hide bundles to those standing below, and they in turn would throw the bundles caught to the Tibetans loading the animals. If the bundles were not caught cleanly at any stage the catcher would be knocked to the ground and in danger of being brained by the next bundle already being tossed. There were gales of laughter as bundles crashed, men fell, restless yaks and mules pirouetted and made it difficult to tie the awkward bundle on to the wooden saddle-frame in time for the next arriving bundle.

"Gee," Duke said admiringly, as they watched, "talk about a work-out! At sixty-pounds a time these guys must have muscles of steel."

"And teeth like iron," Dave added, pointing to where some of the men loading the animals held leather halters in their teeth to keep the animal still while they caught the bundle and loaded it.

"D'you notice, too, these guys are wearing only a cotton shirt," Duke said. "They've pushed their gowns off their shoulders, and don't seem to feel the cold."

They themselves were wearing thermal underwear and heavy woollen sweaters under their wool-lined and hooded anoraks, with wool-lined calf-high boots, and woollen ski-masks leaving only eyes, noses and mouths free.

The laughing Tibetans signalled to Dave and Duke to come and join them, obviously impressed by Duke's huge build. They smilingly refused, aware of how easy it would be to get a wrenched back, if not worse, from the dangerous game.

As they were about to turn away, one of the crowd of Tibetans, who had gathered to watch the bundle-tossing muleteers and the two foreigners, approached Dave and Duke and said something to them. They indicated that they did not understand Tibetan. He looked like a local Tibetan because of his slighter build, and padded Chinese jacket and pants.

Dave tried some of his Chinese learned in Hong Kong but the

man just looked at him blankly, then lifted his hand to his mouth in a drinking gesture.

"I think he's asking if we would like something to drink," Dave said.

"Brilliant," Duke complimented him dryly. "Ask him if it's Coors beer or yak-butter tea."

The man pointed to the inn next to the caravanserai, and invited them to follow him. Dave looked at Duke questioningly, and he shrugged his agreement.

It was a very primitive structure made of loose logs with mud-packed filling. The single main room was hazy with smoke circling lazily upwards to a hole in the roof from a large open fire of wooden logs and yak-dung chips. A huge iron cauldron was suspended on a triangular iron frame over the fire, filled with a creamy coloured liquid. About a dozen people sitting on trestle-supported benches were scattered around the room, most of them men. A Tibetan woman with a huge neck-goitre was pouring out ladles of the boiling fluid into wooden bowls, from which the men slurped noisily, breath-cooling the steaming liquid as they drank.

As Dave and Duke looked around the room the man who had brought them signalled for them to follow him. He led the way into a small room on the far side and they entered to find a table and two wooden trestle benches, with nobody present.

The man invited them to sit, and made the drinking gesture again. Dave was beginning to wonder whether it had been a good idea after all, then decided that the milky fluid was safe as it had been boiling furiously in the cauldron. They sat down and the man left them, closing the door behind him.

"Not much insulation," Duke said, looking around the window-less rooms as they listened to the voices of the people in the next room mingling with the shouts and laughter of the Tibetan muleteers and traders in the caravanserai outside.

"But solid as a fort," Dave noted.

They chatted for a few minutes, then Dave said, "What's happened to our host?" He got up and walked to the door to open

it. It had a simple wooden tongue-in-slot latch, but that rattled uselessly in Dave's hand as he lifted and pushed.

He frowned, and put his shoulder to the door and pushed it against any obstruction, but it remained solid. Duke came over to join him, and together they threw their combined weight against the door but it would not budge. They looked at each other with dawning comprehension.

"We was suckered," said Duke.

"He's gone to fetch the triads," Dave agreed. "He looked as if he was part-Chinese."

"The question is whether they will come as enforcers or as some kind of officials—say, police," Duke said thoughtfully. "If they send officials we can hardly attempt to beat them up and still expect to get away tomorrow. If they are enforcers we can mess them up and say we thought they were robbers."

"Good thinking," Dave said. "Let's make it difficult for them. The door opens outward, either locked on the other side with a large bar-in-slots or an iron hasp-and-padlock, so we can't hide behind it. But if they open it to their left they have to stand on the right, and back a yard or so, and only see the left side of this room. If we stand against the wall here to the left of the door they won't see us as they open it, and we can have a few seconds' advantage. We have to hit them in those few seconds."

Duke had been looking around the room while Dave was talking and, as he finished, Duke walked over to the trestle seat-bench beside the table. Picking it up he smashed it against the table until he had some flat pieces of wood. He took two of the pieces and came back to the door, looking closely at the rough log walls. He nodded and went back to the table, and drew the other trestle-bench to the door and stood on it. He pushed the two flat pieces of shattered wood into holes between the logs above the door, and drove them in deeper with another piece of wood. He tested them with his own weight, and grunted in satisfaction as they remained firm. He stepped off the bench and carried it back to the table. Returning to the door he placed his back against it, inverted his clasped hands, and signed to Dave to climb up on them.

"The idea is for you to stand on the two pieces of wood," he said, "and when they open the door, and are still trying to figure out an empty room, you drop down with your chain and hit them. I step out from behind the door beside you with my toy gun, and we give 'em hell for being anti-social."

"What toy gun?" Dave asked with interest.

Duke was taking off his lined boots and from one he removed a small plastic gun, and from the other a clip of plastic bullets. "Joe's," he explained. "There was no sense in having them in sneakers in Tibet," he grinned, "so I decided to stick them down the sides of my boots in case of a triad emergency. You drop down from the ceiling with your chain, and I jump them with a gun in their faces, and—bingo!—we have the edge."

"Beats workin'" Dave said, unwinding the chain from his trouser belt-loops. "I better get up there right away, for they will be here soon. They won't risk Li getting here first."

Duke boosted him up on to the two short planks and, when Dave signalled that all was well, he took his place behind the door with the small gun hidden in the palm of his hand and the clip of bullets in the other.

A few minutes later there was sudden silence next door, and then a murmur of voices and the sound of the door being opened. As it creaked open Dave dropped to the floor, facing the startled men pushing forward. Before they could recover he was among them with swinging chain raking their faces; and Duke was beside him, his gun pointing at the man he took to be the leader. The man had a gun in his hand and was raising it when Duke shot him between the eyes. As Dave kicked the gun from another man's hand Duke bent down quickly and picked up the dead man's gun from the floor, pocketing his small gun as he swung the captured gun in their faces.

"Now then," he said cheerfully, "let the battle begin." He shot a man who was waving a short sword threateningly, and kicked another man in the groin with a vicious swing of his leg.

The main room was filled with watching people, but Dave and Duke with a quick glance, estimated that most of them were Tibetan customers who showed no sign of helping the men in their room.

There were about a dozen of them, but the shocking suddenness of Dave's and Duke's attack had them reeling and disarrayed and already seeking flight. Duke hit one in the throat with his left hand, knocking him backwards against the boiling cauldron and into the fire, screaming, while he shot another raising his sword to cut down Dave. Dave had his chain bunched into a knuckle-duster and was smashing the faces of the men around him, when he was not using his karate kicks to disarm or disable them.

Suddenly there was a shout from the door in Chinese, and Li appeared with several men in uniform and others in civilian dress. There was silence as the attackers saw they were out-numbered—and by local officials.

"Everything OK?" Li asked, smiling.

"Just having some practice," Duke grinned at him. "What kept you?"

"I had to round up some official witnesses when I got word you'd disappeared," Li said, indicating the people with him, "so we'd have no trouble about leaving tomorrow. Have you finished for the day? You have some admirers, I see." He indicated the grinning watchers. "You better move on while I sort out this situation with the officials."

The Tibetan customers and muleteers crowded around them, laughing and patting them on the shoulders. They obviously approved of the fight and its outcome. Dave and Duke gradually detached themselves from them and walked back through the residential part of the city to their hotel.

"I like these Tibetans," Duke said. "They remind me of the Irish in New York—very friendly and cheerful, but lovin' a good bust-up."

"They're a lot bigger than the Irish," Dave said dryly. "These guys are all about six feet, plus their yak-skin gowns and tall fur-hats. And remember what Li said: they're not only descended from Genghiz Khan, when they're not fighting each other they're killing Chinese and foreigners."

"Even the women are six feet," Duke said laughingly, nodding to where two tall Tibetan women were approaching. The two women had seen the foreigners coming towards them and were gazing at

them with a mixture of sidelong glances and giggling remarks. Like all the Tibetan women seen in Kangding the women moved with easy grace of people accustomed to walking long distances. These two appeared to be wealthy nomads from the quality of their lambskin gowns, the brilliantly woven aprons, the embroidered boots and the long gleaming black hair falling to below their waists in a multiplicity of tight “corn-row” braids ornamented with coloured beads, ribbons and silver ornaments, their heads topped with fox or lynx fur hats. Both were carrying the ever-present Buddhist rosary beads, theirs of alternating colours of jade.

As Dave and Duke came near them the two women stopped walking and shyly turned their faces to the wall, still giggling. Dave and Duke moved to the left to pass them and heard a low voice saying, “Want a good time, fellas?”

Startled, they looked around to see who had spoken, but there was no-one near enough—except the two giggling Tibetan women, their heads bowed and facing the wall. As Dave and Duke made to move on the voice said, “You doan’ wanna party? Short time, long time?”

There was no doubt about it—it was the Tibetan women! As Dave and Duke stared at them the two women turned to face them, convulsed with laughter. To Dave and Duke’s astonishment they saw they were Fleur and Van. When they had recovered from their surprise, and the two women’s near-hysterical laughter, Dave exclaimed, “What in are you doing in that get-up?”

“What do you mean?” Fleur said indignantly. “Can’t I wear my native dress in my own country?” She spun in a circle, her ornamented corn-row braids spreading out in a clinking fan.

Duke had been rendered speechless, just gazing at the exotic and hilarious Van. “You like, sailor?” she asked coquettishly, spinning like Fleur. “I give you cheap time.”

“What d’you do with all that metal?” Duke asked, pointing to the silver ornaments in her hair.

“That is honourable custom,” Fleur said with mock rebuke, “handed down over the centuries. In the Marco Polo book Dave has, it describes how the women were given a piece of silver ornament as

a token of satisfaction from the guests they had pleased during their visits. And the number of silver ornaments in their hair was a sign of the guests' satisfaction with the women's generous hospitality."

"Top that if you can," Duke said to Dave.

"If you're worried about waking the neighbours tonight," Van said to Duke, "don't. This isn't all our own hair." She lifted the many braids or ornamented hair. "It is woven with yak-hair, and the ribbons and ornaments are strung on. Just think of them as wind-chimes."

"Are you really going to dress that like that from now on?" Dave asked Fleur doubtfully.

"Yes," Fleur said seriously. "For one thing it will let the Tibetans know we are not all foreigners and a Chinese. They will also think I am an official like Li, and so will not be so ready to rob or kill. One more important point to remember: from now on I am Deki, not Fleur—that is, when I'm not Mrs Wilson."

"As a matter of interest, how many braids of hair do you have like that?" Dave asked, pointing to both Fleur and Van.

"One hundred-and-eight," Fleur—now—Deki answered him. "The number of faults in human nature and the same auspicious number as beads on both Tibetan and Catholic rosaries." She held up the mixed-jade rosary in her hand. "This will let Tibetans know how devout—and politically correct—I am, even although I married a foreign devil."

Chapter 8

will be available on this site on the 1st November 2010