

VENGEANCE: Prelude to Saddam's War
by
Bob Mendes

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED
NOT FOR DUPLICATION

VENGEANCE: Prelude to Saddam's War. 1995 by InterContinental Publishing. Translated from *VERGELDING: Voorspel tot Saddams oorlog*, by Bob Mendes, copyright [logo] 1992 by Bob Mendes, Belgium.

Printing History:

1st Flemish printing: 1992
2nd Flemish printing: 1992
3rd Flemish printing: 1993
4th Flemish printing: 1993
5th Flemish printing: 1993
6th Flemish printing: 1994

1st American edition: 1995

This edition has been published with the support of the Flemish Community (Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap).

Although based on actual facts and events, this novel is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

MAJOR CHARACTERS, COMPANIES AND INSTITUTIONS IN THIS NOVEL

AT AR RAMADI:

Eliyahn Shasha, *Son of Ezekiel*
Ezekiel Shasha, *Father of Eliyahn and elder of Synagogue Yusuf*
Shasha, *Uncle of Eliyahn, brother of Ezekiel*
Lamon Rakov, *Member of Synagogue*
Menache, *acting Cantor*
Temina Mittel, *12-year-old girl, neighbor of Eliyahn*
Hanna, *her 14-month-old sister*

Dov and Moshe, young men, members of Synagogue

BRUSSELS, 1985:

Major Roger Tharpe, *British Army artillery expert and MI-10 operative*
Jerome Taureau

OPERATION BABYLON:

Michel Moreels, *Belgian, industrial consultant and business agent*
Lea, *his wife*
Dr. Francois Moreels, *his father*
Alice Noudts, *his mother*
Anna Steiner, *Michel's girlfriend*
Gerald (Jerry) Bull, *American scientist*
Major John Clancy, *American, CIA operative*
Dr. Charles Murphy, *Bull's (former) assistant, known to Moreels*
Le Parrain (the Godfather), *Belgian, former Deputy Prime Minister, Union leader, Peek's silent partner*
James Peek, *Belgian, Managing Director of PRB*
Cyril Schrauwen, *Belgian, Michel Moreels' partner and office manager*
Cornelius Crispily, *British, Bull's partner*
Barzad Fazoft, *Iranian-born British journalist, friend of Michel Moreels*
Patrick O'Killick, *Member of Board of Directors, LF*
Saddam Hussein, *Dictator, Leader-President of Iraq (and hundreds of other titles, too numerous to mention)*
General Izzat Ibrahim, *Iraqi, Head of Mukhabarat*
Colonel Saddiq Qazzaz, *Iraqi, Mukhabarat officer, cousin of Saddam's wife and Head of Security for Wodzja Project*
Hussein Kamil, *Iraqi, Minister of Military Industries*
Abdul Emad, *Iraqi, owner-operator of Al-Emad Driving School*
Karin Abdul Emad, *his granddaughter*
Ammad, *Iraqi, an Amn Officer*
Daisy Partridge, *Irish nurse, British Secret Service operative*
Mike Brachfelt, *Israeli, Mossad operative*
Sakkes Sakhadyahn, *Lebanese, arms dealer*

COMPANIES AND INSTITUTIONS:

Amn, *Iraqi Internal Security Service, similar to Nazi-Germany's SD*
Arbroath Holdings, *British munitions factory*
CIA, *Central Intelligence Agency*
Estikhbarat, *Iraqi Military Intelligence Organization*

Ferrosteel, supplier of capacitors
Lightning Fast (LF), Irish airplane manufacturer
Metal Trading, name of Michel Moreels' business
Mossad, Israeli Secret Intelligence Service
Moult Center, British Machine-Tool Manufacturer
Mukhabarat, Secret Service of Iraqi Baath Party, similar to
Nazi-Germany's Gestapo
Poudrerie Royale Belgique (PRB), Belgian munitions factory
Shefshire Foundry, British factory for casting steel pipes
Space Research Corporation (SRC), Bull's Company
Worldwide Somers (WS), British engineering firm

Preface

A "faction-thriller" is a novel in which an important (current) event, such as the wreck of the Herald of Free Enterprise, the nuclear waste scandal, fraudulent tax practices by an ex-government official, or illegal arms trade, is interwoven with a fictional story containing imaginary characters with imaginary traits. I begin with well-known facts, carry out research into the background and motives not (yet) revealed and which haven't been (and may never be) unraveled, and the rest is up to my imagination.

My view of the events is, therefore, not the truth, but

contains enough factual elements to give the reader something to think about. This book was written primarily for the exciting moments I hoped to provide both the reader and myself. No one can or may feel targeted by what is written here, apart from the guilty party or parties--convicted or still at large--and neither I nor my publishers can be held responsible for their actions.

--Bob Mendes

Rose of Baghdad

* 1. Iraq, May 15, 1948

Ar Ramadi, in 1948 still a small insignificant town at the crossroads of the paved highways leading from Baghdad to Syria and Jordan, appeared deserted on May 15 of that year. Above the banks of the Euphrates, smoke from a number of small fires, kindled with water-buffalo dung, hovered like fog over the drab earthen-colored houses.

The Synagogue, a low building of locally baked brick, was situated on the south side of the Jewish Quarter, at the intersection of Sheik Suleiman Street and Said al Wahid.

Eliyahn, the eleven-year-old son of Ezekiel Shasha, squatted behind the barred window of the small room above the Synagogue. In the distance he saw the bowlegged stride of his Uncle Yusuf approaching. Holding a black broad-brimmed hat in place with one hand, Yusuf's free arm agitatedly pumped the air. Eliyahn had never seen his uncle in such a hurry.

In the temple below the congregation was short of a *minyan*. Nine men were present and prayer could not begin before the arrival of a tenth. From the sound of their voices, it was clear the waiting men were in a state of turmoil. Fragments of conversation reached Eliyahn's ears: talk about plundering, about riots, about pogroms. It all sounded very ominous and made him think of the garish posters in the post office that showed the Shiite saints, Ali and Hussein, astride rearing horses, putting their enemies to the sword in pools of blood. He also heard the words "emigration" and "Promised Land," and in his imagination Eliyahn saw himself at the head of an army of Sephardic Jews, capturing the holy sites of East Jerusalem, after an adventurous journey through the burning deserts of western Iraq and Jordan.

His *amo* passed under the window, but when Eliyahn tapped on the pane he didn't even look up. Curious, the boy left the room

and went to the gallery. He peered down through the rails of the balustrade. The instant Yusuf appeared in the doorway of the small temple, the waiting Jews fell silent and looked at him expectantly.

Yusuf mopped the sweat from his forehead and stuffed the handkerchief in his sleeve. His long, narrow face was sharply lined. The *ukht*, the scar of the Rose of Baghdad, was located right under his right ear, making it visible from one side only.

Breathing heavily, Yusuf gasped, "It's war!" He paused a few seconds to calm down, but excitement overtook him and he continued, his voice breaking, "They've invaded the country. Syria, Iraq, Jordan and Egypt. Since four o'clock this morning Egyptian Spitfires have been machine-gunning Tel Aviv, and the Trans-Jordan Arab League is attacking Jerusalem."

As soon as Yusuf stopped speaking, all the men started shouting at the same time, slipping into the local Arabic dialect, a language written in Hebraic letters: a kind of Arabic counterpart to European Yiddish. Eliyahn's father, in particular, was granted no mercy. "Where are the Cellar Zionists now Ezekiel?" they asked heatedly. "What about Operation Ezra? You people were going to save us, remember? You were going to smuggle us into *Eretz Israel*."

The day before, at four in the afternoon, just before the Sabbath began, David Ben-Gurion had declared Israel an autonomous state. There was a great deal of dissension about this among the Jewish community in Ar Ramadi. Some of the Jews present in the temple even went so far as to denounce the declaration of independence. Salmon Rakov, a sixty-year-old businessman who had lost his wife and sons during the pogroms of June 1941 in Baghdad, began wailing, "A new *farhoud* is coming. Mark my words ... another holocaust!"

Ezekiel Shasha's powerful voice cut him off. "Stop lamenting about pogroms. All of you. You too, Salmon. You came here to recite *Kaddish* for your wife and sons." A few smothered protests were uttered, but Ezekiel raised his hands in an appeal for silence. "First our morning prayer. We have a quorum now that *Amo Yusuf* is here. After the morning service we'll talk about Operation Ezra." He looked around and then addressed Menache, the *shohet*, a heavy man with large red hands and a surprisingly high voice. "Will you be our cantor this morning Menache?"

Eliyahn turned back to the window. He was proud that his father had been chosen by the Haganah to lead the underground support group whose mission was to smuggle Iraqi Jews into Israel. They were called the Cellar Zionists because they usually operated out of cellars and blacked-out buildings. Eliyahn did not understand why there was so much disagreement among the adults. Even the smallest child had heard about the atrocities that had occurred on *Kristallnacht* and about the Holocaust in Nazi Germany; according to his father, the same thing was going to happen to the Jews in Iraq. That's why it

surprised him that these older men, Orthodox Jews, so firmly committed to their age-old religious desire to live, or at least to die, in the Holy Land, were the very ones who were so unenthusiastic about emigrating. His father's explanation was that the older Jews took a traditional view of the pogroms, seeing them as a terrible but temporary plague, inevitably to be followed by the resumption of life at its normal pace. The boy only hoped that he himself would reach Israel before the war was over.

From where he sat Eliyahn could see the house and grounds where Temina Mittel, his twelve-year-old playmate, lived with her mother. It had been a couple of years since her father had led a group of thirty young emigrants to Israel, using a new smuggling route for the first time. After Ezekiel Shasha had bribed the Arab chauffeurs, the emigrants, concealed in packing crates as part of a shipment of goods, were loaded into one of the many trucks traveling in a convoy transporting goods from various Iraqi cities to the Mediterranean port of Haifa. Once they arrived, Temina's father had stayed on to help organize illegal immigration into Palestine. Temina and her mother were to have left in a later convoy, but the escape route was cut off by increasing violence before they had a chance to use it.

Eliyahn watched Temina come out of the house. She stopped and raised her head, running her fingers through long curly hair that glistened like new copper in the warm spring sunshine. The *ukht* she bore was still a fresh white scar on her jaw, contrasting sharply with her suntanned complexion. Almost everyone in Ramadi had such a scar. It came from the "Rose of Baghdad," a parasite that nestled in the wound left by the sting of a sandfly. Eliyahn's grandmother had smeared salve on it and warned her not to scratch it, but Temina had been unable to leave it alone. Now she, like everyone else, had a deep star-shaped *ukht*. Hanna, her fourteen-month-old sister, had one too ... right behind her ear. The toddler sat in a high-chair in the shade of an olive tree, playing with a little plush rabbit.

Temina circled the house in her bare feet. She wore a white blouse and a blue and white polka-dot skirt that reached her ankles. Pulling up her skirt, she tucked the ends of the hem into her waistband, partially exposing her slim girlish thighs. He watched with interest as she lifted her blouse over her head, feeling a tingling sensation in his belly as she turned around and he could see her breasts. Eliyahn did not have any sisters and it was seldom that he saw a naked, or almost naked, girl. The paleness of her budding breasts was offset by the suntanned skin of her face and neck. He watched her draw water from the well and set the bucket down next to her.

With her back to him, Temina leaned over and ducked her head into the bucket of water. Taking a large cake of soap, she began to wash her hair. He could not see her breasts any more, but every time she bent forward he caught a glimpse of her thighs all the way up to the white underpants.

His attention was drawn to movement at the end of Sheik Suleiman Street. A group of soldiers appeared, led by an officer in khaki riding a horse. The soldiers wore red and white turbans and dirty smocks over their baggy trousers. Bandoleers were slung across their chests, and some of them had long hand grenades hanging from their sword belts.

The commander shouted out his orders, and his men split up into small groups and moved toward the surrounding houses. With the butts of their long rifles, they pounded on doors until they were opened. While one of their number kept watch, the others forced their way inside.

Eliyahn saw three soldiers approach Temina's house. Like most Iraqis, they had bushy mustaches beneath large flat noses, and their faces shone with the heat and excitement. One of them, a large man wearing the stripes of a sergeant on his sleeve, took a well-aimed kick and knocked the little gate in the fence off its hinges. At his signal one of the two privates with him remained stationed at the front of the house while he and the other man circled its walls. Catching sight of the girl, they froze in their tracks.

Temina was rubbing her hair dry with a large towel. Drops of water, glistening in the sunlight, hung from her white breasts like pearls. One big drop trickled down over her breastbone, across the flat surface of her stomach, and disappeared into the coiled shell of her navel.

The sergeant pulled a scimitar from his sword belt and stealthily crept up on Temina. Slinging his rifle across his back, the private moved to outflank the girl.

At the last second something startled Temina. She looked up and stared wide-eyed into the lust-contorted face of the sergeant confronting her. She reacted instinctively and hurled the damp towel at his head and over the raised sword.

Turning on her heel, Temina started to run away.

She nearly hurled herself into the outstretched arms of the soldier behind her, barely managing to avoid his groping hands.

Like a frightened doe, she dashed back and forth between the two men, moving in the direction of the gate.

She was on the point of escaping when the second private appeared from behind the house and shoved the barrel of his rifle between her legs. Temina stumbled and went sprawling to the ground. She tried to get up, but in a fraction of a second the sergeant stood over her, pressing the point of his scimitar into the flesh under her chin.

Her body tensed.

One of the privates came up behind the girl and jerked her to her feet by her hair.

The sergeant snarled something, and Temina shook her head in protest. The knife twitched ever so slightly, and Eliyahn saw a dark droplet slide across the blade. Temina froze. Then her hands began working at the buttons on her skirt, and the garment

fell around her feet. The private pulled down her white cotton underpants.

Temina stood before them, head forced back by the knife, eyes closed. Naked, white and thin, hands folded in front of her pubic hair.

Again the sergeant gave an order, and the girl turned her back to him. He placed the point of the knife against the back of her neck, forcing Temina to lean forward. Eliyahn saw her slim white buttocks and the fluff of dark hair exposed between them.

The sergeant stuck the weapon back into his sword belt and felt for his fly. Drawing the lower part of the girl's torso up against his body, he made one brutal thrust with his hips. He grabbed her hair with one hand, jerking her head back, while trying to work his way deeper inside. Temina's arms flailed wildly in the air and her head shook, but the rapist had no trouble controlling her. The two privates, evil smirks on their faces, leaned on their rifles and watched.

Eliyahn stared at the scene in horror, but also with fascination. He knew he was witnessing a rape, but had never imagined anything like this. This looked more like a bull mounting a cow.

Like a raging fury, Temina's mother charged into the yard, brandishing a large kitchen knife. Before either of the privates could intervene, she raised her arm and aimed a powerful thrust at the sergeant's back. The blade glanced off the bandoleer, leaving only a bloody slash in his upper arm. Without letting go of Temina, the sergeant lashed out and struck the woman full in the face. She fell backward and didn't get up. Blood trickled from her nose.

The privates tossed their rifles on the ground and pulled Temina's mother to her feet. They whipped the long skirts over her head, leaving her, arms entwined, completely helpless. Throwing her back down, this time on her stomach, one of them tore off her dark-blue frilly knickers. When Eliyahn saw the mottled white skin of her plump behind, he turned his eyes away in shame.

The sergeant had released Temina and was wrapping a handkerchief around his wounded arm. The girl sat on her knees, head bowed, flowing hair reaching to the ground. Suddenly she sprang to her feet and bolted toward the open gate in the fence.

The sergeant picked up one of the rifles lying on the ground and aimed. He took his time. When he fired, Eliyahn barely heard the shot. He saw a small dark stain appear on Temina's back. She faltered, hesitating. After taking three more steps, she collapsed and lay motionless.

Aghast, Eliyahn staggered backward. Turning around, he went storming down the stairs.

Halfway down, he halted. The praying men, clad in fringed talliths and wearing black silk yarmulkes on their heads, sat with their backs to him.

His father stood at the lectern next to the Holy Ark. He looked up, and the expression in his eyes left no doubt as to the strength of the reproof that could be expected later as a result of this inadmissible interruption of the morning service.

Rakov was on the last verses of the Kaddish prayer. He sang, in Aramaic: "May there be abundant peace from heaven and life for us and for all Israel."

The congregation affirmed his song of praise: "Amen."

Ezekiel Shasha could see at a glance that his son was highly agitated. The stern look in his eyes was replaced by an expression of concern. The men engaged in prayer also detected that something was wrong; one by one they turned their heads toward the boy and looked at him questioningly.

Eliyahn stumbled over his words. "Temina. He ... the sergeant ..." The words caught in his throat. He asked himself if it was a sin to say a word like "rape" aloud in the temple. "Soldiers," he said. "The sergeant ..." He was unable to form the word "killed." He gasped. "Her mother too," he ended weakly.

His father asked, "How many soldiers? Where are they?"

"A lot. A whole lot. They're looting the houses. They ... uh ... shot Temina."

The men of the congregation began to pray in Hebrew at the top of their voices, with alternating passages recited by Menache. "Who will live and who will die; who will die at his predestined time and who before his time; who by water and who by fire, who by sword, who by beast ..."

"Be still, every one of you," Ezekiel Shasha ordered sternly. "There is a time to pray and a time to act. Salmon, take the scrolls of the Torah to the shrine and put away the prayer books." He turned toward his son. "Eliyahn! Go upstairs and keep an eye on the soldiers. Warn me if they start coming this way. The others are to leave the Synagogue by the back door."

He gestured to two young men. "Dov and Moshe. Come with me. Help me barricade the front door." He walked down the center aisle, paying no attention to Salmon's protests and those of a few of the older men who refused to leave the Synagogue. They had nowhere to go, they said, only prayer could guarantee salvation.

Eliyahn walked up the stairs and peered out the window. There was no activity to be seen at Temina's house. Little Hanna leaned forward with her head on her arms, as though she were asleep. Only the dark corkscrew curls were lifted by the breeze. Temina still lay in the same place. A small dark pool had formed under her body. Her mother also lay motionless, her head turned aside at a strange angle as if she were ashamed of lying there on her stomach with her bare bottom showing.

The soldiers had evacuated the occupants of the houses in the Jewish Quarter. Most of them were women leading frightened children by the hand; some were carrying sobbing toddlers. Beaten by rifle butts, they were pushed against the blind wall

of the Jewish bakery. Across the street, a dozen soldiers led by an officer formed a line. When he saw the horse rear, Eliyahn thought the cavalryman was going to charge into the crowd, but he managed to control his skittish steed. Raising his saber, he shouted an order. The soldiers shouldered their rifles, and as the saber cleft the air Eliyahn saw little puffs of smoke emerge from the barrels. A fraction of a second later, he heard the shots. Several of the women fell to the ground. Screaming, the survivors scattered, but were restrained by other soldiers who had formed cordons on both sides.

One woman managed to escape. She nimbly ducked under the extended bayonets and bolted down the street in a zigzag line, heading toward the Synagogue. Her blue embroidered scarf, loosened in the scramble, streamed out behind her like a flag in the wind. The soldiers let her go and herded the other women together with their bayonets.

The officer gave a sharp tug on the horse's reins, causing the beast to stamp the ground savagely before thundering after the fleeing woman at breakneck speed. She was within a hundred feet of the Synagogue, but the horse approached at such a pace that it looked like she was standing still. Eliyahn stared, struck dumb with dread, at the thin *ukht*-marked face of the officer, whose dark deep-set eyes held the same bloodthirsty expression seen on the portraits of the Shiite warriors. The sun's rays reflected on the gleaming steel of the slashing saber, making it seem as though the woman were being struck down by a bolt of lightning.

"No!"

Eliyahn turned on his heel and fled from the room, screaming. He was still on the gallery when the front door was torn off its hinges with a deafening crash. In the blink of an eye the Synagogue was filled with dust and scorching smoke. Ezekiel Shasha and the two young men lay in the doorway in the midst of the rubble. In the hole in the wall, where the heavy metal-worked door had been, the sergeant and his two men appeared, rifles at the ready.

"Everybody out!" he shouted in Arabic. "All Jews are being mustered for interrogation."

Ezekiel scrambled to his feet. "This is a temple, sergeant. It's the Sabbath. We're conducting morning services."

"Morning service? My ass!" growled the sergeant. "Martial law has been declared. Outside!"

On the podium Rakov defiantly raised the scrolls of the Torah. Detecting the movement, the privates fired simultaneously. The shots echoed throughout the Synagogue. Aroused into a fever of excitement by the commotion and the smoke and stench of burning gunpowder, the soldiers went on shooting at anything within the area of worship that moved or looked like a human figure. When they stopped, all the Jews were dead except for Ezekiel and his two young helpers. They flattened themselves against the balustrade separating the

women's section of the Synagogue. The sergeant kept them covered with his revolver while the privates reloaded their weapons. He shouted at Ezekiel, but because Eliyahn's ears were still ringing, the sergeant's voice was barely audible. But even though he could not hear the words, Eliyahn knew that his father's life was in danger.

He crept backward into the room from the gallery. Two heavy angular armchairs, traditional Iraqi models upholstered in dark velvet, were against the wall. He shoved one of the chairs aside and pulled the fabric, fastened with tacks, away from the back support. There between the webbing a sten gun was hidden, wrapped in an oil-soaked cloth. He took the submachine gun out of its protective covering and pushed the magazine into position. His father had taught him how to handle the weapon during secret meetings held by the Cellar Zionists in an old British army camp on the plain of Rufadi. Eliyahn knew how it worked and how to clean it, but he had never fired the gun. It took a great deal of strength for the boy to pull the bolt back to cock the weapon. Carrying the gun, ready to fire, he stole back to the gallery.

Father and Dov were now lying face down on the floor close to the wall on the other side of the door, hands clasped at the backs of their necks. At first Eliyahn thought they were dead, but then his father turned his head and looked at Moshe. The young man, hands on his head, was kneeling in the debris in the middle of the doorway, surrounded by the soldiers. The boy saw a mixture of sadness and powerless rage in his father's eyes. No fear.

Eliyahn stuck the barrel of the Sten as far as the magazine between the rails of the balustrade. Trying to cover all three soldiers circling Moshe, he was forced to tilt the gun forward at an awkward angle. Squeezing one eye shut, he tried desperately to draw a bead on his target. He released the safety catch with his thumb.

Below him, the sergeant struck a hard blow to the back of Moshe's head with the barrel of his revolver and asked him where the Jews hid their gold. Moshe shook his head. "We have no gold," he said, "but we do have *ru'ach*, a soul, and that's more than you ungodly murderers will ever have."

"Then go back to your creator, Jew," the sergeant said. Extending his arm, he shot the kneeling man point-blank in the neck.

Moshe's head jolted repulsively and Eliyahn saw a thick red clot explode from his throat.

Overcome with loathing, Eliyahn pulled the trigger. The weapon jerked in his hands. Aiming was out of the question. He cried out when he saw the bodies of the sergeant and one of the privates, but also Moshe's, doing a crazy kind of war dance after being hit by a rain of bullets. His cry changed to a bloodcurdling scream when he realized he no longer had any control over the gun and could not make it stop. Bullets were

flying in all directions. From the corner of his eye he caught a glimpse of a hand grenade rotating toward him through the air, and he tried desperately to aim the jolting sten gun at the other private. Above all the clamor he heard the clinking sound of something landing behind him. It rolled a short distance and exploded in a devastating blast -- just as one of his bullets struck and detonated a grenade hanging from the belt of the soldier below. In a twin outburst of blistering flames and suffocating clouds of dust, the Synagogue's roof, gallery and facade collapsed, crushing both invaders and their victims under the falling debris.

In the silence that followed, dust rising from the ruins mixed with smoke from the dung fires high above the little city.

On the banks of the river, dogs suddenly started to howl. As if to ward off the disaster overshadowing the land, the sound rose, sank and trembled across the lowland plain between the Tigris and the Euphrates, slowly dying out in a series of heartrending cries.

Vergeltungswaffe Drei

** 2. Brussels, 1985

On September 26, 1944, Major Roger Tharpe received orders marked "highly urgent" instructing him to go to a place in the vicinity of Calais described in his marching orders as Mymoyecques Eastern Side. Tharpe had been working as an artillery expert for MI-10, a division of the British Secret Service, since the beginning of World War II. It was his job to evaluate captured German materiel and report, if necessary, on any hitherto unknown features.

After the Allied expeditionary forces began their invasion on June 6, Hitler, in a hysterical radio broadcast, had threatened to destroy England with secret weapons.

On June 13, 1944, the deafening roar of a small German airplane could be heard flying low over the coast of England. Above London, the engine stalled and the aircraft glided to the ground, exploding as it crashed into the neighborhood of Bethel Green.

Among the dead and wounded, the pilot's body was nowhere to be found. It proved to be an unmanned flight, equipped with a pulsejet engine in the tail: a flying bomb.

It was the first V-1, Hitler's heralded *Vergeltungswaffe Eins* (Vengeance Weapon One).

Shortly after noon on September 8, 1944, two V-2s aimed at London were launched from a site on Koekoeks Lane in Wassenaar, the Netherlands.

Vergeltungswaffe Zwei (Vengeance Weapon Two) was a 46-foot-long rocket with a payload weighing 2,200 pounds in its nose. The ballistic missile flew faster than the speed of sound and thundered down from an extremely high altitude, making it (unlike the slower V-1s) impossible for airplanes and anti-aircraft artillery to intercept.

In London, and later in Antwerp, thousands of defenseless citizens were murdered and enormous ravage was created by these brand-new terrorist weapons.

When Major Tharpe arrived in Calais, he was met by a British troop commander who immediately took him to Mymoyecques, by way of Fort Nieulay, in an open jeep over roads badly damaged by the war. As soon as Tharpe saw the gigantic, largely underground construction, he was convinced that this was the ultimate retaliatory weapon announced by Hitler: the V-3, Vengeance weapon 3.

The V-3 was a tremendous gun with a firing tube nearly 500 feet long. This enormous barrel consisted of a series of identical segments with lateral branches angled toward the rear. These side components contained chambers carrying propellant charges that could be ignited in rapid succession. Although the heinous possibilities of the giant gun filled the British major with horror, he was also forced to admire the technical ingenuity of its designers. The V-3 combined the destructive power of the V-2 with the accuracy of a naval gun. With two of these guns, a city like London could be wiped from the face of the earth in less than a month.

Fortunately, British troops had run into the emplacement site, protected against air attack, before the terrorist weapon could be put into action.

Roger Tharpe went to work immediately. Ideally, he would have liked to have the gun fired so he could study its range and muzzle velocity.

But it was on this same day that General Urquard of the 1st British Airborne Division received orders to withdraw his troops from Arnhem. The failure of *Market-Garden*, the airborne operation that Montgomery had hoped would bring a fast end to the war, had created a wave of panic at British Army Headquarters.

In the chaos that followed, one of General Montgomery's staff officers ordered the immediate destruction of the V-3. On September 27, 1944, the largest gun ever built was blown up by a detail of British combat engineers. Major Roger Tharpe had barely been given enough time to make a few measurements and to add some hasty drawings and photographs to his report in an attempt to leave an impression of what he had seen.

But in April 1945 Tharpe had better luck. Following behind the advancing Allied troops, he tracked down the secret plans of the V-3 in Germany, along with the prototype of the Nazi terrorist weapon. The dismantled gun lay beneath the rubble of a bombarded munitions factory, resembling a pile of drainpipes in

a hardware store. Segments of 12-inch caliber, each 6 feet 6 inches long, formed a gun barrel almost 500 feet long when fastened together. Tharpe, still not convinced that a gun made of bolted-together segments could withstand the explosive pressure necessary to fire a projectile 100 miles or more, had several segments assembled and went on to test-fire the weapon. The gun did not explode.

Tharpe's comprehensive report to the head of MI-10 on the unlimited possibilities of *Vergeltungswaffe Drei* was added to the stack of captured Nazi war secrets, filed away and forgotten.

But the British major was left with a passion for long-range guns. After the war Tharpe remained with MI-10 as an artillery expert. During the final years of his military career he was primarily involved with illegal arms traffic, an activity increasingly centered in Brussels.

Taking advantage of an opportunity to retire early, Tharpe left the army in 1980 and became a free-lance armaments adviser. With the use of this convenient calling card, he often acted as middleman in covert actions for the British Secret Service, the CIA and other intelligence agencies belonging to friendly Western nations.

In 1985, on one of his many visits to Brussels, Tharpe met a Frenchman whose obsession for the super gun (he called it the Paris gun) was only exceeded by his phenomenal knowledge of anything and everything having to do with mortars, howitzers and all other types of artillery. When the Frenchman said "Paris gun," he meant not only the *Wilhelmsgeschutz*, a long-range gun built by the Krupp Company with which the Germans had bombarded Paris in 1918 from the then incredible distance of 70 miles, but also Big Bertha, a 17-inch howitzer used with overwhelming success by the Germans in 1914 against the strongholds on the Meuse and at Antwerp.

The initial contact between the British officer and the English-speaking Frenchman, whether accidental or contrived, took place in the elevator of the Garden City Hotel in Brussels and led to a bacchanal in the hotel bar that went on into the small hours of the morning. With every glass of whiskey, the sketches on the beer mats grew more audacious, and the guns destroyed targets even farther away.

The third time they got together Tharpe related his experiences with the V-3. Long before they staggered to the elevator, drunk as skunks, the major had let himself be persuaded to get hold of a copy of his 1945 report, as well as one of the secret plans of *Vergeltungswaffe Drei*, and to deliver them to the Frenchman. The latter was planning to write a book on the history of defense techniques, including a scientific study of armaments.

Three weeks later, in Room 414 of the Garden City Hotel, the major handed over the secret documents to the French pseudo-author for the sum of \$10,000.

This was a profitable transaction for the free-lance adviser, as he had already pocketed an identical honorarium from the Secret Service from whom he had received the dossier.

The fact that the Frenchman had given him a false name was of little consequence to Major Tharpe. The world of artillery held no secrets for him, and he knew enough French to guess at the real name of the so-called Jerome Taureau. *Taureau* is French for *Bull*.

Operation Babylon

*** 3. Getting Acquainted

The flight attendant on Flight PA383 from Johannesburg to London had thick blond hair worn in an upswept style. She was an elegant woman with long shapely legs displayed beneath a skirt that stopped just above the knees and she showed off the Parisian-designed PanAm uniform to great advantage. The nonchalance with which she walked down the aisle of the first-class section, distributing menus without seeming to notice the appreciative glances that followed her, did not mean that she was indifferent to being good-looking and attractive. But she had met too many stereotypes on long-distance flights, too many older men and too few men who interested her.

Therefore it piqued her curiosity that the man seated in 4A disregarded her small courtesies. She had been added to the cabin personnel for the Johannesburg-London segment of the flight and had noticed him the moment he handed her his boarding card. He was not young--she knew he was fifty-two--not tall, not especially attractive, and even his eyes were a indefinable, neutral color. Yet there was something about him that intrigued her. She stopped next to his seat, and as he looked up at her she thought she had discovered the reason; he was distant, hard, and mentally isolated. Strange qualities. Observing him, she noticed the star-shaped scar just above his right cheekbone for the first time.

She gave him the menu and said in a confidential tone, "If I were you, I'd order the chateaubriand. It's excellent."

He handed the menu back to her without looking at it and smiled. "Whatever you say. Rare, please." It was the voice of a man whose thoughts were somewhere else.

She turned and walked back to the galley. Brown, she thought. His eyes are brown, with just a touch of green.

Michel Moreels watched her walk away. His mind mechanically registered the movement of her thighs, the short split in her skirt, the silky black stockings underneath, and a kind of reflex made him aware of how long it had been since he had been to bed with a woman. He turned his head away and stared out the window. A trail of condensation from a jet flying in the opposite direction was silhouetted against the clear blue sky. Thousands of miles away, in that same direction, Lea had waved goodbye to him this morning at Jan Smuts Airport in Johannesburg. If you could call it a goodbye. She had turned and walked away even before he was through the passport checkpoint, a good indication of how both of them felt about their relationship. After going to Johannesburg together to visit her sister, Lea had wanted to stay. A small tumor had been removed from her sister's left breast, a procedure Lea had gone through three years earlier. Lea's operation and subsequent treatment had been successful, but since that time she lived in a state of suppressed anxiety and fanatical vigilance, alert to anything pertaining to her health. Lea was seriously convinced she had a hereditary predisposition to cancer. When her sister's breast had to be removed, Lea saw this as an irreparable mutilation that was bound to happen to her too. This led to her decision to stay on in Johannesburg and look after her sister while she was recuperating.

Michel saw that the meal was being served. Unfastening the catch, he lowered the table top. The stewardess leaned over and set down his tray. The top buttons of her blouse, left casually undone, offered him a quick glimpse of the curve of her full breasts, provocatively emphasizing her femininity. Before she stood up, he caught her eye. He detected neither hesitation nor flirtation. She came back a little later and showed him the label on a bottle of wine. He nodded approvingly and watched her hands as she poured the liquid into his glass. Despite an unexpected shudder of the plane, she did not spill a drop.

"In a little while we're showing a Dustin Hoffman movie," she said. "*Rain Man*. But if you'd prefer an action picture, we also have *Midnight Run*." She spoke English with a South African accent.

He shook his head. "It doesn't matter. I'm really not in the mood for a movie."

She smiled. "It helps to pass the time."

"Exactly what I'm trying to avoid."

She gave him a quizzical look, but he failed to offer an explanation, focusing his attention on the food instead. The steak was tender and juicy, but he had little appetite. After

eating half the meal, he called it quits. Lighting a cigarette, he turned back to the window.

Lea had not said how long she planned to stay in South Africa, and he had not asked. When he met her twenty years ago in Baghdad, she was accompanying her father, then director general of the German parent company of an international steel corporation, to the opening of a wire-drawing mill that Michel had been hired to manage. They married, went to live in Germany, and Michel landed the job he wanted: supervising the foreign divisions. He traveled a lot, driven largely by nervous energy, and in the years that followed he became an acknowledged expert concerning the international trade in products of strategic importance. When his father-in-law died ten years later, he left the German concern and set up his own company as an industrial consultant. Gradually he came to realize that the restlessness plaguing him would not disappear with age. The marriage had produced no children, and neither one of them had been successfully able to accept the inherent differences in their characters. Instead of growing closer together, they drifted further and further apart, and this explained why, through all these years, he had never told her about his association with the University for Peace. With her conservative upbringing, Lea would never be able to live with the idea that her husband belonged to a secret organization. An independent international movement whose aim, similar to that of Amnesty International, was to make public all furtive operations capable of leading to acts of war, insurrection or violence. His contributions to UP were not very impressive; he was little more than an anonymous informant. But in some countries he would be killed if discovered.

The flight attendant approached and asked if he would like a drink. Michel ordered cognac and lit up another cigarette. His dual existence had led to long silences, half truths, and sometimes even lies in his marriage. That had driven a larger wedge between Lea and him than the insignificant infidelities that occasionally occurred during his travels. Thoughtfully and methodically his thoughts glided back through time, but when he reached his childhood years in Iraq, an impenetrable screen descended, just as always.

The lights in the cabin went out. With the exception of Michel, all the passengers were wearing headsets and watching the movie. A few minutes after it started, the stewardess sat down beside him in the empty aisle seat. "Am I disturbing you?" she asked.

He offered her a cigarette. "Yes," he answered, "but that's exactly why you're welcome. When I'm flying, I always seem to be putting my affairs in order. Brooding, actually."

She nodded understandingly. "You're not the only one." She accepted the cigarette and leaned toward the flame from his lighter. "At 30,000 feet everybody has a tendency to

philosophize. It's easier to put things into perspective when you're so far above the ground. By the way, I'm Anna Steiner."

"It's a pleasure to meet you. I'm Michel Moreels."

"I know. You're Belgian, a businessman with an office in Antwerp and you're ... let's see ... fifty-two years old."

"You know quite a bit about me."

"Not really. Only what's on our VIP list. Just enough to want to know more."

"I'm flattered."

Her smile was mischievous. "Maybe there's a tiny bit of self-interest involved, Mr. Moreels."

"Call me Michel."

"All right, Michel. See, this is my last flight for PanAm. I'm going to be working for Kuwait Airways Corporation in Brussels for a little while. I have to help reorganize their passenger relations service."

"You're going to be working in Brussels?"

"Yes. And living there too. I'm not sure for how long. The problem is that I don't know anything about Brussels."

"And you're looking for somebody to show you around?"

"That's right."

He chuckled. "Not afraid I might take advantage of your helpless situation?"

Now she laughed out loud. "That goes both ways."

"What do you mean?"

"You know that in the perfect relationship between a man and a woman they both think they're getting more than they're giving."

He liked her answer. Anna changed the subject. When she asked what he did in his spare time, he grinned and said that he did not do much that lent itself to small talk. So she began telling him about herself. She was a citizen of Great Britain, born and raised in South Africa. She was forty-three years old and had been married to a government official in Pretoria who was more interested in collecting authentic African tribal masks than in his high-spirited young wife. After three years they had gotten an amicable divorce.

Michel and Anna continued their quiet conversation until the movie was over. Every now and then she left him to perform her various duties, and as he waited for her return he stared, deep in thought, at the awkward, flapping gestures of Dustin Hoffman in his brilliant portrayal of a young autistic man. A few minutes before the film ended, she gave his hand a quick squeeze and stood up. "I've got to get back to work, Michel. One of these days I'll be in Belgium to check things out. If it's okay with you, I'll give you a ring."

The plane landed at Heathrow at eight that evening. Anna stood next to the copilot at the front exit to say goodbye to the departing passengers. They shook hands. "I'll be seeing you," he said, and with a nod in the pilot's direction he took off at a brisk pace.

Watching him disappear into the jet-way, Anna suddenly realized that hours of talking to him had given her next to no insight into the man.