

**LANGATA
RULES:
Pirates at
LAT10**

KEN MILLER



Langata Rules: Pirates at Lat 10

by Ken Miller

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For Elliot and Kiera

Foreword

When nation states fail chaos and lawlessness follow. And in our interconnected world the impact of this chaos and lawlessness can quickly spread to touch the lives of people thousands of miles away.

Ken Miller cleverly imbeds these larger, global issues into his story about piracy and insurgency in an unnamed country that sounds all too familiar. The novel is superbly written with well-drawn characters and page-turning suspense, all of which flow from the inability of a nation state to stand up a government capable of enforcing, on even the most basic level, the rule of law among its citizens.

How will the rest of the world respond to the challenges that flow from failed or failing states? Will it be an ad hoc response, simply bouncing around and responding only to specific threats when they rise up and impact us directly? Or will we take a more comprehensive approach, one that focuses on stopping the problem at its source by trying to help prevent states from failing in the first place.

In starting a discussion on these issues, the growing problem of piracy is one result of failing states that quickly captures the attention of the wider world. It strikes the western mind as anachronistic, conjuring up images of old swashbuckling movies, and stories in history about Barbary Coast pirates in the age of Thomas Jefferson. Piracy can't still be happening in our civilized world, can it? And then we notice that it is happening with alarming frequency on a major shipping lane in the India Ocean off the coast of Somalia; happening to American, British, and French ships among others. The daring rescue of a US flag ship captain by United States Navy SEALs in this part of the world also brought the matter further into public view.

Piracy becomes possible, both in the book and in the real world, in large part because a government has failed to provide its citizens with either the rule of law to stop such criminality or the economic means to pursue other options to make a living. The novel shows the crushing poverty in the country and the powerlessness of the people to rise above it or even to protect themselves from the violence thrust down upon them by both government and rebel forces.

This violence and instability frequently spreads to surrounding countries; the failure of one state pushing others in the same direction. East Central Africa offers one heartbreaking example of this violent phenomenon. The genocide in Rwanda, anti-government rebellions in Uganda and parts of the Sudan, and the complete failure of the rule of law in the Eastern Congo have combined to unleash armed conflicts among too many rival militia and guerilla groups to count. The violence creates even more instability, killing thousands of innocent people and

driving millions more from their homes. Even after the initial reasons for a specific conflict fade, it leaves in its wake guerillas who frequently turn to what they know best—violence and theft. They rape and pillage populations already reeling from poverty and war, and the government is powerless to make it stop.

In the case of piracy, the violence and criminality can then quickly impact the lives of people who spend most of their time far from its source. What is the civilized world to do when a nation most in that civilized world had never heard of fails to stop pirates from disrupting our shipping lines and extorting us with ransom demands in exchange for the return of captured vessels?

As is shown in the book, in most cases each impacted party reacts in a very narrow and specific way—they take steps to protect their interests. The owners of the ship want it and its crew back so they pay a trouble shooter to accomplish that objective. The rebels want their guns so they fight to get them back from the pirates.

Piracy in the Indian Ocean, on the vital sea lane that leads into the Red Sea and the Suez Canal, however, has gone beyond one or even a few isolated instances. It is well organized and frequent causing policy makers in the United States and Europe to contemplate a more comprehensive response. Paying ransoms as many shipping companies have done, or ordering raids by Special Forces as both France and the United States have done with varying degrees of success merely treat a symptom of the larger disease. These policy makers, the shipping companies and all the people with a stake in the goods being carried by the ships safely reaching their

destination would dearly like to find a way to stop the pirates from taking the ships in the first place.

Logically, the best way to accomplish this goal would be to stop the problem at its source; go after the pirates where they live and deny them the ability to plan and organize their attacks. But the pirates live in Somalia, a lawless and chaotic state where outsiders cannot safely enter under any circumstances and certainly not to stage a criminal investigation or a military raid. The pirates cannot be found because they are dug into the invisible underbelly of this failed state.

The alternative of Western powers massing their military might in the India Ocean and hitting the pirates group by group as they emerge to attack their prey also faces insurmountable obstacles. The area where the ships travel and the pirates attack is vast and difficult to cover. It would take a very large force to even begin to have a decent chance of catching the pirates in the act, and as it happens the western military forces that would normally be assigned to this task have a lot of other obligations at the moment. Obligations, one could argue, created in the first place by other consequences of failed or failing nation states; consequences vastly more threatening than piracy off the coast of Somalia.

Large scale terrorist attacks on Western targets, or at least the threat of more large scale terrorist attacks and the decisions of policy makers on how best to stop them, have led the overwhelming majority of Western military might to Afghanistan and Iraq. The terrorist groups responsible for those attacks arose out of the toxic combination of a violent, extremist ideology and failing states where the proponents of this ideology found fertile ground to spread

their vile message, recruit followers and in at least two cases, Afghanistan and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan, settle into a failing state to plot and plan their attacks relatively safe from any government authority stopping them.

As chair of the Terrorism subcommittee of the Armed Services Committee in the United States House of Representative, I have worked extensively with the United States Special Operations Command and the Special Operators under that command as they have led the fight in the battle to stop Al Qaeda. Our Special Forces focus on disrupting Al Qaeda terrorist networks, mostly by tracking down and killing or capturing their members and especially their leadership. But the commanders in this effort all agree on one thing—they too are fighting but a symptom of the larger disease, and that disease can only be stopped by a broader counter-insurgency and global development effort that focuses on doing what is necessary to stop states from failing in the first place; to make sure they can provide for their citizens the basic needs of life so those citizens are not so easily persuaded to follow a group that wants to destroy all existing governments. If government works for people, those people won't want to destroy it.

A 2008 report by the Brookings Institute titled, "Index of State Weakness in the Developing World" found 56 nations that could be categorized as failed or failing based on an analysis of the strength of their economy, security, political situation, social welfare provisions and GNI per Capita. Somalia and Afghanistan topped this list. Afghanistan gave Al Qaeda safe haven and directly led to 9/11 while Somalia is the center of the piracy problem in the India Ocean and is also home to key members of Al

Qaeda and to Al Shabab, a rising terrorist organization that has allied itself with Al Qaeda. Imagine if the other 54 nations on this list reach the point of presenting the world with similar threats and you get an idea of the scope of the problem and the degree to which failing states threaten all of us.

Throughout the world, Governments, businesses, and Non-Government Organizations focused on global development do work to confront this problem; to stop states from failing and to lift people out of poverty in the developing world. Some of these efforts are more successful than others, and particularly in recent years all of these entities have learned a great deal about what works and what doesn't work when it comes to reducing global poverty--micro credit, educating women, combating deadly diseases like AIDS, malaria, and Tuberculosis have all emerged as areas where development dollars can best be spent. And a bottom up approach works best. Foreign entities cannot merely descend on some poor country in the world and start telling the people there what they need to do. The culture of a given area matters a great deal in how best to begin building a safer, more prosperous society, and the local population must take ownership of the plans so that they can continue them after the foreigners have left. Lastly, the more stable the government in a given developing country, the better, so efforts to build the capacity of that government to provide basic services for its people works better than bypassing the government and directly funding programs run by outside entities. These and hundreds of other lessons learned in decades of efforts at helping the poorest parts of the world reduce poverty and grow their economies put

us in the best position we have ever been in to truly make a difference in confronting these daunting challenges.

Particularly in the United States, development assistance does need to be better coordinated in order to increase efficiency and effectiveness. Dozens of different agencies within our government control some pieces of our foreign assistance effort. Nobody is in charge of the overall effort, so no clear plan exists, meaning both that the United States fails to get the most out of the dollars it spends and that there is also a lack of planning and coordination between the United States and the hundreds of other entities also working on global development issues.

More than anything global development and efforts to stop nation states from failing depends on popular support in the developing world. Many do offer that support out of a basic sense of the moral duty to do so, but broader support comes from people being confronted with the stark reality that instability anywhere in the world presents at least a potential threat to stability everywhere. Ken Miller's book helps remind us all of that basic truth.

Representative Adam Smith
United State Congress
Washington
2009

Hon. Adam Smith (WA 9), chair of the Subcommittee on
Terrorism and Unconventional Threats of the House
Armed Services Committee

Langata Rules: Pirates at Lat 10

Ken Miller

“By observing behavior in ... Langata as well as in other communities, we can discern a few simple rules... Rule one: prevail. Rule two: do anything necessary to obey rule one.”

“Langata Rules: Normative Behavior in Rapidly Urbanized Neighborhoods,” *Journal of East African Social Science*, V. 23, issue 2, spring 1998.

Chapter One

*At sea, off the Horn of Africa, 10 degrees N Latitude,
Tuesday, near dawn*

“Now!”

Ghedi kicked in the door. Across the cabin Asad smashed the window with his rifle and stepped through the hole, ignoring the scraping glass.

“In the air!” Asad ordered in Ukrainian, pointing his AK-47 at the crewmen. The mate obeyed. The engineer looked dazed, then raised his hands, too, when Ghedi urged him with a kick. Asad said “come” into the mike at his chin, got an answer, and nodded to Ghedi.

While Asad covered the mate and engineer, Ghedi cuffed the men to their stools, tipped the stools to the floor, and pushed them apart. Asad, arms and legs streaked with blood, straddled the engineer to study the controls.

Ghedi went back on deck, and a minute later a speedboat sidled up to the freighter. When someone tossed a rope ladder, Ghedi tied it to the rail. Half a dozen men clambered up the ladder and went below where they subdued the sleeping crew.

The *Odessa* had now changed hands.

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London, Monday night

Margaret Thatcher's left eye bounced off the keyboard and into the pasta. Drew picked it out with his fork and put the eye aside. His Rott mix continued to thrash a plush pull-the-string-and-her-speak Thatcher doll, bits of speeches and stuffing flying around the flat.

"Disgusting, Sabah," Drew said to the dog. Sabah looked up, then returned to snapping Mrs. Thatcher's spinal column.

Drew pushed the pasta away and scrolled his report until he found the fight.

"In English I explained why we needed access to container hold. Mate shook his head, refused to respond orally. I explained again, this time in my basic Serbian. Mate said 'bugger off' in English and started to walk away. I grabbed his shoulder. He took a swing at me. I subdued him as gently as possible, took keys, opened hold."

He grimaced and saved. Sabah came over to hunt crumbs on the coffee table.

"Maybe we need a desk job," Drew told the dog. She ignored him.

Drew stretched a leg and pulled his mobile from his jeans, found a number and dialed.

"Elliot, it's Drew. Sorry it's so late but you...yeah, thanks. Listen, how much detail do you really want in this report?" He stood and started pacing the flat, bobbing his

head as he listened, ending up by a window, looking out on the tree-lined street.

The flat was assertively post-Blitz, the kind of place that fifty years earlier had declared “we’re back and fine, thank you.” The tall windows curved at the top, set off by oak floors and built-up painted mouldings. Nearing thirty, Drew was by far the youngest owner in the building. The flat was practically his whole net worth, but he owned it outright, had re-model plans, and felt at home. For a diplomacy brat with too many postings and boarding schools, feeling at home was a win.

Drew’s mother had been a career diplomat; his father had had neither an obvious job nor a nesting instinct. At a new post the senior Mr. Alexander showed for the first few parties, scheduled Drew’s tennis lessons, and found him a cricket side; then he wandered the bush or mountains with obscure embassy aides. Several times a year he returned to London to stay at his club.

Drew had suspicions, but his father’s air of cheerful distraction made it hard to ask, “Dad, are you a spy?” or “Dad, do you have a second family?” Either scenario—or both in combination—seemed plausible. Drew had been even more hesitant to ask his mother. She’d have gazed thoughtfully, spoken at length, and revealed nothing.

Drew never found out what his dad was doing, and now both parents were gone. He missed them. And could have used advice. His own job was a kind of hybrid of who they may have been: a little covert action, a bit of talking out of jams.

He continued on the phone to Elliot, “Yeah, that’s fine. The fight was short and sweet. He swung at me, I

responded. Right, one...no, not hit him, exactly, incapacitated I would...I dunno, I just did it... mixed, can we just say 'mixed?'...Fine, say Aikido...yeah, that's...I can explain it. I taught it. ...Yes, Elliot, certified...I understand...no, I understand."

More grimacing. Sabah looked vaguely sympathetic, Mrs. Thatcher lying exhausted between her front paws.

"The fight had context is my point, Elliot... Elliot, wait, if I just wandered on board and beat him up, sure, that's one thing, but it's not...yes, exactly, we have a contract for the ship...the contract's very clear, we have the...that's my point. Exactly."

Drew started pacing again. "Okay, so I thought there was danger to life, fine...no, not mine, Elliot. Christ, we got a report they had human...we don't...yes, exactly, humanitarian...perfect, our investors, humanitarian, fine, okay, I'll re-do that bit."

He sat on the sofa, put the phone on speaker and set it down, brought the screen to life and started banging keys. "Okay, I'm doing a motivation part right now, off to you in five...thanks, Elliot...yeah, thank you, okay."

Drew clicked off the phone. "Bloody MarAd," he muttered. He finished the report, e-mailed it, and poured a glass of wine. Mrs. Thatcher said something about labor unrest, and Sabah ripped out her voice box.

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London, Monday, near midnight

"Cab's here. Remember, she has to wash her hair so out of bed, not just awake, actually moving, at 6:30, okay? And she's unpleasant in the morning. Ignore her."

Janet's mother looked up from Adam Dalgliesh. "So you said. And it's in your notes. You realize I've done this before? Got girls off to school?"

Janet kissed her mother's cheek, grabbed her briefcase and purse, and rushed to the cab.

"What will this cost?" Janet asked the driver. When he told her, she gasped. The man half-turned.

"Sorry, really. Tube's much less."

"I know. But the schedule's all wrong. Not your fault." Janet checked for cash, then relaxed in the cab cocoon and watched city lights fight fog as they neared London Centre. Twenty minutes later she dropped her bags, jammed the cab receipt in the expense file, and gulped an espresso from a machine on the counter in back.

"Quiet evening, Will?" she asked. The swing-shift service manager turned to her and stretched, a jumble of plastic solidarity bracelets—Lance Armstrong, breast cancer awareness, freedom for Tibet—sliding down his arm. Will's t-shirt promoted a rally of naked bicycle messengers. Janet started to ask for details but caught herself in time.

"No problems," he said. "Everyone checked in on sched. And in an extra bit of good news they all sounded sober. But what's with you here? Trouble sleeping? No, wait, you missed me."

Janet laughed. "No, but thanks for playing. Tiffie called around seven. Food poisoning, she thinks. Totally laid out. But she said anyone can handle the service desk. Drink espresso and play solitaire's what she told me." She grinned.

“Soon we’ll have a solitaire match to the death. Then you’ll see how easy it is. Ready to take over?” Janet nodded, and Will uploaded his last tracking records to the server, packed his bike bag, and wheeled out the door. Janet booted her computer and in minutes knew something was wrong.

The *Odessa* hadn’t made its hourly report. When her first outbound attempt failed to reach the ship, Janet called her boss at home.

“Harry, it’s Janet. *Odessa* missed her call-in and didn’t take my outbound.”

Waking the boss in the middle of the night didn’t faze Janet. She didn’t care how tired he was or what his wife might think. She held the phone while Harry Charles made waking sounds.

“Okay. Call me when you’ve tried again. Either way.”

“Right. Either way. ‘Night, Harry.” More noises from Charles as he rolled over and went back to sleep.

When her second attempt failed, Janet called again. She could hear the “shh, shh, it’s okay,” of a man slipping out earlier than usual. A moment later the bathroom door shut and the shower started.

“I’m heading in,” Harry said. “Try again per sched. Still draw a blank, roust Drew.”

Charles clicked off the phone and stepped into the shower, dozing for a few precious moments while hot water pounded his head and neck. Harry Charles, a master of waking instantly and a veteran of calls at all hours from border crossings in the Mid-East, embassies in DC and London, or a shooting war in sub-Saharan Africa.

Sometimes Harry worked for his government, a few times for companies and, once, for himself. Tembley was a hybrid, a private company with both government and private money—and chunks of stock and cash for Harry. Which he needed.

His wife's family place in the country gobbled substantial sums each year for pipes and mortar and horses' care. Their Knightsbridge home would gobble, too, if permitted. Add a daughter in med school and a near-clinical addiction to custom-made clothing, and there was never quite enough.

By the time the *Odessa* had broached Denakbe harbor, Harry had called Beirut and alerted Erik Kolsberg, owner of the cargo. The call caught Kolsberg just in at his desk and ruined an otherwise pleasant day.

Soon after the *Odessa* finally docked in Denakbe, Kolsberg called Nairobi and talked to the cargo buyer, Ian Kell, who took the call in the bath, turning his placid morning ritual turbulent.

No one knew what was going on, so no one was happy. In shipping, changes of plan caused stress in the best of circumstances, and ignorance was far from bliss when shipping off the Horn of Africa.

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Before the calls began, Drew had slept and dreamt but also without bliss. In the fragment he recalled, Drew met Tembley investors as he wandered Charing Cross Road in his green corduroy bathrobe. Drew had tossed the robe months before and spent a lot of dream-time puzzling its return.

The investors wore suits, not robes, increasing Drew's anxiety. The investors had set a meeting about unexpected losses, but like Death in the fable of Samarra, were surprised to see Drew a day early. Trying to prep for the meeting, Drew couldn't find his briefing book and was backtracking to the Starbucks near Smith Square in case he left it there. He kept getting lost and looking in the wrong coffee bars. Things were going badly.

So even asleep Drew was stressed. When the phone rang, he jerked upright. Sabah watched from the other side of the bed while Drew fumbled for the phone among books and lamp and reading glasses on the night-stand.

"This is Drew." Sabah dropped her head and went back to sleep, apparently satisfied the situation was under control.

"You have to come in. We lost contact with *Odessa*." No intro from Janet. Drew didn't need one.

"When?" Drew asked, wedging mobile between ear and shoulder. He kicked off the covers and headed to the bath, turned on the shower, and stepped out of his pajama bottoms. The floor tiles were cold, and he curled his toes in defense.

"When?" he asked again.

"Oh, sometime like now would be nice," Janet said. "That's why I'm calling at three-o' bloody-clock in the morning. Harry's on his way, so it will be a party. You simply must come."

"No, I understand; I'm getting dressed. When did we lose contact? Where was she?" Drew looked in the mirror

and decided to skip shaving, then rubbed the stubble on his chin and reconsidered.

“Missed her call-in 30 minutes ago. We tried three out-calls, no response. She should be around the tip of the Horn, lat 10.”

Drew muttered about the Horn of Africa and rubbed his face again. He made a final decision: no shave.

“What?” Janet asked. “Drew, I couldn’t hear you.”

“Nothing. Talking to myself.” Drew jammed his toothbrush in his mouth. “Have any food there?” he asked as he brushed his teeth. It came out “Ab benny ood air?”

“What?” she asked again. “Drew, where are you? Are you at home?”

“Bye,” Drew said and put down the phone. He spit in the sink and stepped into the shower. Sabah jumped down from the bed and sprawled in the doorway to wait for drips.

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At sea, off the Horn of Africa, Tuesday, near dawn

“I have a sharp pain in my chest,” the engineer whispered to the mate. Asad, straddling the man and his stool, glanced down at the sound and stomped the engineer’s knee. As the shriek faded, the mate spoke Ukrainian to Asad, who turned from the control panel and stared blankly. The only Ukrainian Asad spoke was “in the air,” a phrase he had learned for this job, but the mate didn’t know.

“Francais?” Asad asked. The mate shook his head. “English?”

“Little,” the mate answered.

“So?”

“He is, ah, upset,” the mate said. Asad threw open his hands and his eyes widened as if to say, ‘What do you expect? He’s a prisoner of pirates.’

“Upset like heart attack,” the mate went on. Because his hands were cuffed behind his back, the mate dug his chin into his chest a few times to show the location of the upset. Asad gritted his teeth and mumbled to Ghedi.

Kneeling, Ghedi shoved his AK-47 into the engineer’s mouth so fast the man couldn’t part his lips in time. The rifle sight ripped the upper lip, and the engineer choked on blood and teeth knocked back into his throat. Asad knelt and felt the engineer’s pulse, ignoring the choking sounds. He glanced at Ghedi.

“He may be having a heart attack,” he reported. Ghedi nodded sagely, either comfortable with the diagnosis or completely indifferent. Asad turned to the mate. “Does he have medicine?”

The mate asked the engineer in Ukrainian. The engineer tried to respond but the gun barrel in his mouth made him unintelligible. Asad jerked his head at Ghedi, who pulled the gun back.

“Yes, in my bunk,” the engineer said and then threw up dinner, blood, teeth, and bits of flesh from his lip. Asad, vomit on his chest and chin, jumped upright and kicked the engineer between the legs, causing another burst of vomiting.

“In the bunk belonging to the engineer is medicine for his heart,” Asad said into his microphone. “We need the

medicine in the cabin, now.” Soon a man from the second boarding party ran into the cabin, handed a medicine vial to Asad, and backed out of the cabin with a slight bow.

“How much to give?” Asad asked.

“Two,” the mate reported after consulting with the engineer. Asad shook two red capsules out of the vial and bent over the engineer. He opened his own mouth wide, and, finally, the terrified engineer got the message and opened his mouth as well. Asad dropped the capsules down the man’s throat. This time there was choking but no more vomiting.

Asad looked at the mate and threw open his hands again. “So. Now he’s fine. Now quiet.” He turned back to the controls.

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Beirut, Tuesday morning

Soon after Drew woke from his dream, Erik Kolsberg threw an ornate paperweight through the wall of his office. Given construction standards in the building and the heft of the paperweight, breaking the wall wasn’t difficult—but it *was* dramatic.

The paperweight had been a gift from Erik’s son, purchased in India on school break a few years earlier. The trip had been pitched as a step toward spiritual enlightenment, which made Erik instantly suspicious. After learning much time was spent nude on moon-lit beaches, Erik was even more dubious about this so-called East meeting West.

Nonetheless, the paperweight was given in affection, appeared to be brass, and depicted a rajah in battle gear

atop an armored elephant. Until he received the gift, Erik had assumed his son was ignorant of the family business, with vague dinner chat about “import/export” seeming enough to satisfy curiosity. But now Erik wasn’t so sure what his son suspected. “The talk”—if it ever took place—would be awkward. Erik imagined it on his worst days.

“Son, it’s time you know a bit about my company. After all, it’s the family business.” (Affectionate tousling of son’s hair.) “I bribe government officials and military leaders so they’ll sell me weapons. Then I re-sell the arms at enormous profit to drug traffickers, terrorists, and the like. I specialize in motorized weaponry and modestly think I’m a leader in this little niche.”

Awkward hardly described it. Erik never wanted to have that talk with his son. After Harry Charles’ call he wasn’t sure about being in the business at all, market leader or not.

His assistant’s voice came on the phone speaker. “Mr. Kolsberg, your shipper on two. I’ve secured that line.”

“Erik, Harry Charles.” Clip, clip, clip. No wasted words for Harry. Erik saw him instantly: crisp white shirt, bow tie, braces (color complementing tie), expensive suit, handmade shoes.

Erik would usually dismiss a man dressed that way as unprepared for the rough and tumble of “the real world.” But he knew Harry Charles—or at least a credible version—and overlooked the Saville Row veneer.

Erik had seen Harry ruin a lovely three-season pinstripe on the muddy parade-ground of an abandoned Russian army base months earlier, when Erik was

arranging the shipment now on the *Odessa*. They'd met their contact in the bar of a hotel, the kind Russians use—unless they're mobsters or petrocrats. Lots of smoke, two kinds of vodka, and one distinctively ugly colonel. The few hookers and fewer bar patrons gave them a wide berth. The colonel kept pouring shots from an unlabeled bottle he said was premium vodka; Harry and Erik pretended to believe him.

After an hour of shots and increasingly meandering stories about Russian army life, Erik suggested they look at the merchandise. The evening went downhill from there. Three men in military haircuts and civilian clothes met them at the base, and as they walked toward a row of garages, the men insinuated themselves between Erik and Harry. This maneuver completed, the colonel called a halt.

"You," the colonel said to Harry, "Go back to the hotel and bring the money. Erik will stay with us." The colonel pulled a pistol from his holster and gestured with the gun.

Harry had tried explaining they had no cash, then described Erik as an infrequent customer to whom he had no loyalty. When neither argument worked, Harry threw himself at the colonel, both of them landing in the mud. Harry finally emerged on top with the colonel's pistol in his hand, making it easier to complete the transaction.

"Harry. Morning." Clip, clip was fine for Erik too.

"Problem with *Odessa*, I fear. We've lost contact."

Erik glanced at a map on the wall by his desk. A magnet the size of a deck of cards and shaped like a child's bathtub boat sailed near the Horn of Africa, heading south

from the Red Sea. Emblazoned with an O, it was the only magnet on the map.

“Near the Horn?” Erik tried to sound like he was guessing, but he knew exactly where the *Odessa* was. With so much riding on this ship, he practically tracked her by the hour.

“Exactly. Around lat 10.”

“When?”

“Our last try was five minutes ago. She missed her call-in and ignored three tries out. We’ve called for aerial intel.”

“It’s mid-morning there, right?”

“Right,” Harry said.

“Who’d you call for intel?”

“Hamak, Trade Ministry. You know him. We golfed last year in Malaga.” Erik swore under his breath, but Harry heard him. “I know,” he said. “I feel the same way. But it’s protocol. He’s supposed to get an hour’s notice before we step in.”

“Meaning what?” Erik asked.

“We have a contract with a sky eye from Mombassa. It’s up now and headed to the last spot we’re sure of. In case the Ministry is hampered by unforeseen circumstance.”

“Like complete incompetence, you mean.”

Harry chortled.

“What’s your guess, Harry? Bad telecomm? Say that. I’ll feel much better.”

“Don’t think the problem is telecomm, my friend. But really don’t like guessing. Creates nervous strain of which there’s lots already. A stressful business.”

“Right, okay, so say I’m very chilled and took my meds and we’re just shootin’ it.” Erik paused. “Guess, please, Harry. I have only this cargo at sea, nothing else is moving, and I’ve bills to pay. I want to know what’s going on.” He heard Harry sigh.

“She’s taken, Erik. Almost for sure. Don’t know by whom or what they want, not for certain, though in that part of the world we have a few prime suspects. Smart bet, they’ll ask ransom. Far as Tembley’s concerned, the cargo’s only empty boxes deadheading to Mombassa, so I can’t speculate how much they’ll ask. But when we get it sorted, taken she’ll turn out to be.”

That’s when Erik had thrown the paperweight with the rajah on the elephant through the wall.

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Inland East Africa, Tuesday morning

In patches the pipeline barely cleared the rocky ground. Scrub brush grew around the line, using the scarce shadows to nurse new sprouts until the shoots found ways to get upright and gorge on sun. The scrub was more gray than green and tough enough to win the fight for turf with chunks of basalt littering the ground like popcorn spilled under bleachers.

This was camel territory, no roads to speak of, just worn paths connecting the wadis. Even a four-wheel drive could have trouble making much speed. And a horse, fine in the sandy desert, would come up lame in hours after

picking its way over rocks. Besides, only a camel could quickly cover much distance without needing water. And outside of the rainy season—when there could be too much—there was little water anywhere.

Bilal hated camels.

He hated their stench, which he couldn't describe or compare to anything else in his experience. Wrapping the hood of his caftan over his nose and mouth helped, and after a while his nose clogged with sand and grit and he could lower his guard. But he still despised the smell.

Bilal also hated the sounds camels made, like a badly tuned horn in a town's brass band. Each town back home had such a band, he thought, even though he'd only seen one in his life. The ubiquitous bands existed only in his mind, one bit of detail in his idealized picture of home. Bilal had no one to share the image with, but he returned to it on rides, in his tent at night, or sitting through wasted hours of endless yelling by the leadership—part motivational seminar, part prayer service.

During one session, Bilal was so deep in his thoughts of home, he floated off completely. When the leadership's harangue was punctuated by gunfire—a common rhetorical flourish—Bilal covered his head and dove into the lap of the young man squatting next to him. This behavior required a thorough explanation.

More than the smell or the sounds, Bilal hated how—against his will—he became excited when he grabbed hold of the beast's hump to haul himself into the saddle and then grasp the reins. The hump was different from the rest of the camel, he felt: it was bristling and rigid. Bilal kept himself chaste, and the strange stimulus of the camel's

hump bedeviled him. Sometimes after bouncing over the desert, it would take half an hour for his excitement to ease, and all that time he was torn by his compulsion to pray, the need to guide his men, and that insistent urge.

In Gorazde a camel would be a sight for wonder. If a camel came to town, the brass band would have struck up for certain. A wagon bursting with Romany would have led the procession, and there might be a juggler. The women of the village would bake sweet treats, so the fragrance of cinnamon and honey would mask the animal's stench.

Children would run from all corners of the town to see the beast, fathers jogging with sons and daughters on their shoulders. His own little boy would roar with laughter to hear the camel trumpet as if part of the band, and Bilal would have laughed at the boy's delight and thought well of the camel for the pleasure it brought.

In the picture in Bilal's mind the boy was always six, with blousy pants and a solemn little vest over his white shirt, his jet black eyes gleaming. Happy, eager, curious, the perfect little boy. Even a camel was welcome if it brought joy to a boy like that.

But now there was no more little boy, and Bilal was not in Gorazde any more. In fact there was hardly any Gorazde in which to be. Only piles of rubble and piles of dead—and the raped and maimed who wished to die. In his mind Bilal often left the town with the brass band and cheery shops and entered the one with fires in the streets and dogs fighting for whatever scraps they found, a picture of hell only he could see.

So now he was in a land of dirt where camels were not a source of wonder but like giant dogs themselves: filthy, licking, snapping at each other and at him as he led his band among the rocks. Allah made this land for camels, Bilal thought. This truth was obvious. Rocks, scarce water, nothing to eat. But why? Lost in a meditation of why Allah would bother to create such a world, Bilal was startled when a tribesman called out.

Bilal shielded his eyes from the glare of the sunrise but could only see waves of heat undulating across the rocks. He pulled his Steiner binoculars from the pack and put them to his eyes. Praise be to God, he thought. A kilometer in front of them was the pumping station they were sent to find. Somehow, from the vaguest possible directions, the apparent absence of landmarks, and the instincts of his surly scout, they had found it.

Over his shoulder he called to the boy who rode just behind him. "Tell them one jeep," Bilal said to the boy. "No camels. No men outside. No mounted guns." The boy turned his camel and faced the group of men arrayed in an indistinct semi-circle. Against the backdrop of braying, the boy relayed the information to the tribesmen in their dialect.

While the boy talked, Bilal scanned the distance beyond the station. At first he had been troubled by his affection for the Steiners, the way they auto-focused instantly so he could see practically forever. Then the weapons-man explained how the superior optics were a gift from God, and now Bilal relished every chance to use the gift.

"No jeeps approaching," he reported to the boy. "No camels approaching." Again the boy translated, yelling

over a couple of camels snarling at each other and a few men grumbling about back pay. Several other men leaned in with interest and started to add their views on the pay issue.

Bilal turned his camel to face the men. He knew they watched him handle the beast and made judgments on his skill. To hell with them, Bilal thought. These beasts are their mothers. They lick themselves and each other, the sons of whores.

He tried to keep this opinion from coloring his tone of voice. Bilal painstakingly reviewed the plan of attack, even though it had been explained to the men during their rough breakfast around a fire earlier that morning and previously at the base camp with diagrams on a blackboard.

Bilal reminded the men of the two teams they would form as soon as they got within rifle range. Using one of the management tools on which he prided himself, Bilal asked the men to raise their hands when he described the team they would join.

A couple of the men raised their hands for both teams, and another hesitated both times. Bilal glanced at the boy, hoping to discern whether the men were being obstinate or really didn't understand. The boy was intently studying the ground under his camel's head, so Bilal assumed obstinate.

"You," he said, pointing at one of the men who had signaled twice. "Stay with me." Bilal's tone was flat, his voice quiet. He might have been reading road signs aloud. The boy translated.

“You and you, go with him.” He pointed at the leader of the second squad. Again the boy.

Then Bilal stunned them by standing in his stirrups—legs shaking but upright—and shouting, “Our plan will succeed! It is God’s will!”

Bilal dropped into the saddle, jerked the bit to turn the camel, and jammed his heels in the camel’s ribs. The beast took off at a gallop. The boy hurried to finish the translation before he was overrun by tribesmen rushing to stay up with Bilal.

The camels raced over the rocks, sending up puffs of sand and pebbles that cut at the men’s arms and faces. Near the pipeline the band split in two. Bilal, the boy, and a half-dozen others sped straight at the station house, yelling at the tops of their lungs and shooting into the air. Their job was to draw defensive fire from the men inside. The rest of the raiders fanned out along the pipeline, pulling gear from their saddle packs as they rode.

In moments rifle fire snapped from slits in the rock wall of the station house. Bilal raised his hand and his team drew up, spreading their camels apart and lowering them to the ground to create tougher targets. Bilal turned to a rider, nodded urgently, and jabbed his finger toward the station house. Shots kicked rock at the men and the camels, and the beasts snorted and jerked. The rider pulled a rocket launcher from a saddlebag, then with the help of a second man mounted the launcher on his shoulder, loaded a rocket, and fired at the station house.

Some of the camels stood up and whinnied at the burst of noise and the smoke trailing from the rocket. Bilal

struggled to hold the reins as his camel, more agitated than the others, jumped up and whirled in a circle.

Then the beast practically turned a somersault at the boom of the exploding station house. Bilal was yanked forward and landed face down on the rocks. Pushing himself up, he felt for the treasured binoculars still intact around his neck, blinked away the grit in his eyes, and peered through the dust. The excitement of the blast had already replaced his hatred of the camel, and now Bilal was near to making joyous noises as he saw the jagged remnants of the station house emerge through the cloud. He stood and raised his hands in the air and grinned at his squad. They fired their weapons overhead and laughed and cheered. As the other part of the raider band set off a series of smaller explosions and crude gushed over the rocky ground and puddled around the rocks and scrub, Bilal's team rode cautiously toward the rubble in the unlikely event they had work left undone.