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Pirates and Cartels

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Pirates and Cartels

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Chapter 8

Quintero Golf Enclave
2225 Monday, 14 August

Second Lieutenant Graham, in the lead Humvee, turned off of the main road onto a road leading to a cluster of houses. The first two houses were dark, but the third house sitting on a small hill, was lit up. Graham stopped at the driveway, got out and motioned for his platoon to dismount. Teresa and the wimp, riding in the third vehicle, got out and stood near Graham.

Graham led his platoon through the wrought-iron gate and up the driveway toward the imposing, one-level, stone-faced house. As they passed the east end of the home, they saw jagged pieces of glass protruding around the frame of what had been a large picture window. Once a dominant feature that provided a spectacular view of the valley from that end of the house, shards of the window's shattered glass now lay scattered about on the lawn below—the victim of a hurled piano bench that landed on the grass amidst the glass.

The winding driveway curved up toward the house, past topiaried boxwood hedges and the central feature of the front lawn, a sparkling fountain cascading into a shallow pool. At its far end, the driveway ended in a wide, paved area in front of a three-car garage. Several motorcycles and a pickup truck were parked there. Sounds of gunshots came from inside the house, where gang members were amusing themselves by shooting paintings and statues.

A stone walkway led up to a covered front porch that ran the full length of the house. Numerous double-hung windows overlooked the porch, which had once featured, at its center, an impressive entryway—ornately carved double doors embellished with multicolored stained glass inserts. Now the magnificent doors lay in shambles, kicked in by the gang.

Boy, what a pad, Graham thought, using hand signals to order his squad leaders to report to him. Graham ordered the second squad to cover the back and right side of the house. The third squad would cover the first squad's

entrance, and the left side of the house. He ordered his weapons squad to deploy as fire teams with the second and third squads.

As they approached the house, loud noises, accompanied by shouts in Spanish and punctuated by a woman's blood curdling scream, emanated from within, followed by more gunshots. When the woman screamed the second time, Teresa, despite her orders to be quiet and observe, began pointing at the house—indicating she thought someone was in terrible danger. Graham realized she was right. Using hand signals he ordered his first squad leader, Corporal Quail, to advance. Pointing at the civilians, he signaled for them to remain with him. Teresa shook her head.

Now, what the hell is she up to? Graham wondered, glaring in her direction.

The woman returned his look, and in a manner that said not *no*, but *hell no*, pointed toward the house, and then back to herself and Katyal.

Holy crap! Now I get it. The fool woman wants to go with them. Damn it to hell, Graham cursed, gritting his teeth and trying to decide what to do. *So be it,* he finally decided, and, against his better judgment, waved for them to go.

Grinning and ready for action, Teresa gave Graham a thumb's up, grabbed Katyal's coat sleeve, and dragged him with her as she followed the squad.

Quail led three squad members through the low shrubbery and onto the left side of the porch. Crawling under several large windows, the men silently approached the shattered front doors. Quail signaled for two more of his men to take positions on the right side of the main entrance. The remaining squad members crouched behind two large planters near the front steps and on either side of the windows nearest the shattered doors.

Teresa and Katyal crouched in a flowerbed behind some shrubbery, waiting for the squad to enter. While Teresa remained alert with her hand on her weapon, Katyal shivered and made low moaning noises, as he fell to his knees and muddled his pricey suit pants.

Once everyone was in position, Quail held up his left hand with three fingers exposed, then started counting down by raising one, then two fingers. As soon as he raised the third, two privates rushed through the door and moved quickly to either side—each covering a ninety-degree arc. Quail and two more privates followed into the wide hall that led into the interior of the house. To their left they saw a large, sumptuously furnished room, where two gang members were viciously kicking holes in a wall. A third man was

smashing a glass front display case, containing priceless Dresden porcelain vases and figurines.

None of the three *maras* saw or heard the soldiers enter, so they were startled when Quail suddenly shouted, “**ON YOUR KNEES, HANDS BEHIND YOUR HEADS.**”

Expecting to see a cop, all three whirled in the direction of the voice. Hector, the Dresden smasher, drew his weapon first—a Glock he’d taken from the cop he had killed near the entrance. The other two reacted a little more slowly, but they too were reaching for their guns, when short bursts from four M16s ended all of their careers.

While Quail’s squad busied themselves checking the three dead *maras* in the front room, two privates from the second squad had been boosted through the shattered picture window on the far end of the house. After clambering over what remained of the battered grand piano, jammed beneath the window, the privates cleared the large room. Finding no gang members present, they stood looking in consternation at what had once been a beautiful music room. The piano was leaning sideways—its front leg broken and its keyboard bashed to pieces—the apparent victim of a temper tantrum, following a failed attempt to throw the instrument out the window.

As soon as the shooting inside the house stopped, Teresa grabbed Katyal’s coat sleeve, pulled him to his feet, and dragged him with her to follow the soldiers. By the time they reached the front room Quail’s men were checking the *maras*’ bodies and kicking their weapons out of the way. Teresa, who had experienced bloody scenes like the one before them, was unmoved by the gore. But, for Katyal, the smell of blood mixed with gunpowder smoke, combined with the sight of three blood soaked bodies, proved to be too much. Turning white in the face and nearly fainting, he staggered toward Quail, and then, ruining what was left of his expensive suit, abruptly vomited all over himself.

Revolted, Quail stepped around the disheveled man, into the hall, and gave the go signal to the squad, indicating they should proceed clearing the house. Then, turning toward Teresa and pointing to Katyal, he growled, “You deal with him!” and followed his men down the hall.

For several seconds Teresa said nothing—glaring at Katyal in disgust—until, having finally had enough, she shoved him into the hall, and ordered him to get with the program and follow the soldiers. As soon as they started

toward Quail's men, a woman's scream reverberated down the hall. Shouts in Spanish followed, as two *maras* emerged from a room mid-way down the long hall in front of them—one carried a machete, the other held an AK-47. The instant Quail's men saw the weapons they opened fire, cutting both men down.

Right about then, two more wild-eyed *maras*, having most likely heard the gunshots, broke out of a room farther down the hall, saw the soldiers and dead *maras*, and panicked. Turning and racing pell-mell down the hall they fled away from their pursuers—only to meet the two privates from the second squad, who quickly ended their MS-13 careers. For the next few minutes more and more *maras* attempted to flee the house—most jumping out of windows directly into the sights of the second and third squads. Sounds of breaking glass, and gunshots from M16s and AK-47s echoed throughout the house and Quintero's rolling countryside.

Back in the hallway, Teresa and Katyal were several steps behind Quail, when she noted that in the excitement of cutting down the first two *maras*, the squad had missed clearing the first room in the hallway. Placing her ear against the door, she heard moaning and sobbing. Turning to look at Katyal, she placed her finger in front of her lips, signaling for him to be quiet. When she was sure he understood, she positioned him to the left of the door and mimed for him to open the door with his right hand and push it inward—thus keeping him out of the line of fire. Finally Katyal understood and nodded his head.

Quietly taking a position to the right of the door, and using her left hand, Teresa started repeatedly pointing at the door. Eventually Katyal got the message. Violently twisting the doorknob, he shoved the door open, causing it to fly inward and thud against the doorstop. Teresa grimaced, certain he had alerted whoever was inside. But to her surprise, there was no reaction—only deep grunts and sobs coming from the inside room.

Teresa paused for a couple of seconds, and then, grasping her Sig Sauer P226 .40 caliber DAK in a two-handed grip, she stepped into the doorway. Staring in disbelief, she gasped, "*Oh my God!*"

Curious when nothing happened, Katyal, who'd heard Teresa's exclamation, entered, stood frozen beside her, and gaped at the scene in front of him. What the two were seeing was the foot of a king-size bed, but it wasn't the bed that held their attention. No, what they were looking at was the rising and falling butt of a large, naked, hairy man. A woman's two legs

protruded on either side of his knees. The man was uttering primal grunts, and the woman's sobs were coming from beneath him.

"Son of a bitch," Teresa hissed. *I ought to put a hollow point up his hairy ass.* Then she had a better idea.

"Mr. Katyal," she hissed in his ear, "This is your big opportunity. Read that man his rights."

Oblivious to Teresa's statement, Katyal remained frozen, staring at the bed and its occupants, his mouth open.

Teresa realized she had to end the rape, and that the wimp was not going to act. Disgusted with him, and shaking her head in exasperation, she stepped behind Katyal and shoved him in the direction of the bed.

Facing the bed, Teresa shouted, "**STAND UP, HANDS ON YOUR HEAD, YOU'RE UNDER ARREST.**"

"Mr. Katyal, read him his rights."

Teresa's shove had sent Katyal stumbling forward a couple of steps, which placed him closer to the bed. Never having been so afraid, and unable to move or speak, Katyal stood slack-jawed, dumbly staring at what he'd finally realized was a rape in progress. In a courtroom, rape didn't sound so bad. After all, there were always extenuating circumstances providing the rationale for a plea bargain. Now that he was faced with the real thing, he couldn't cope.

The man on the bed had no such problem. Hearing a woman say he was under arrest, he did what any good MS-13 *mara* would do. In the blink of an eye he rolled off the woman and grabbed his machete lying on the floor next to the bed. Uttering a primal scream, he charged toward the door, swinging the machete at the neck of the little man blocking his path. Fortunately for Katyal, the *mara* still has one leg in his pants, which caused him to stumble and strike a glancing blow on Katyal's arm—a fortunate occurrence that prevented Katyal from losing his head, and Captain York from having to explain how he got dead.

As the man charged, Teresa stepped to the side, raised her weapon, and triple tapped him in his head and neck as he fell toward her.

Katyal fainted.

Quintero Golf Enclave
2245 Monday 14 August

Captain York and First Sergeant Peterson, followed by Julian Taylor, walked across the green into a sand trap bunker guarding the green's northeast approach. They could hear the low reports of AK-47s mixed with the sharper reports of M16s, and two explosions coming from the north, where the residential area was located. A few minutes later they heard the roar of motorcycles. York, Peterson, and Taylor took up positions on the northern edge of the bunker and waited. At the far end of the fairway, numerous headlights appeared. While the majority turned toward the road leading to the entrance, what appeared to be ten motorcycles and one vehicle continued toward the green.

"Here they come," Peterson said, chambering a M576 40mm, 00 buckshot round in his M16's M203 grenade launcher. "No point in blowing holes in the green," he added with a chuckle.

"Huh?" Taylor exclaimed, for he had no idea what the sergeant meant.

"Oh, sorry, sir. Forgot you're air force. I just loaded a buckshot round."

"Guess I have a lot to learn about infantry weapons," Taylor replied.

Amused by the exchange, York watched the approaching headlights. *Taylor's all right. Doesn't mind admitting his lack of knowledge. I think I can count on him.* "Get ready, they'll be in range in a few seconds. *Hot damn, just like Iraq.* "We want to turn them towards the gate. Otherwise Lieutenant Watson will bitch about no ducks for his shooting gallery."

Peterson laughed, and Taylor wondered what that was all about, for he hadn't attended the platoon leaders' meeting.

"Peterson, put your buckshot into the leaders, then I'll rake them on full auto. Captain Taylor, aim for the middle of the pack—three-round bursts."

Ten seconds later, York ordered, "Fire!"

Two *maras*, the Blanco brothers, riding Honda motorcycles, were leading the group racing along the fairway—their saddlebags stuffed with stolen jewelry, watches, and gold coins. The SUV held DVD players, golf bags, and other items the gang thought they could sell.

Realizing no one was chasing them, Oscar Blanco, the leader, decided to have some fun on the green, before cutting back to the main road just short of the fence and entry wall. *We'll do some wheelies on the green before we cut out of here*, he decided.

Approaching the eighth green, Oscar was sure they were home free when Sergeant Peterson's charge of double-ought swept him and his brother off their rides and into the next world. The SUV driver swerved, causing three cycles following close behind to impact the Blanco's bikes, and tossing their riders into the rough. A fourth cycle struck Oscar's body, causing the bike's rider to fly into the air, directly into Captain York's first burst. Two more cycles collided. The remaining riders swerved toward the road, following the SUV.

Taylor selected the SUV and began firing three-round bursts into it. His third burst found the driver, and the SUV crashed. Five motorcycles made it to the main road and joined a large group charging toward the entrance. York pressed the key on his radio and said, "A flock of ducks flying your way."

Lieutenant Watson heard York's transmission and signaled his men to get ready. Knowing the large entrance gate in the wall would act like a venturi, Watson had set up a well-planned ambush outside the main entrance that would force the fleeing gang members into a compact column. He had positioned two Humvees forty meters off the road in locations that allowed them to rake the column of baddies, by using *enfilade* fields of fire—gunfire that strikes a body of troops along its whole length—down the road leading away from the main gate. One Humvee mounted an MK-19 grenade launcher, the other an M2 Browning .50 cal. machinegun. Two Humvees mounting M40 light machineguns were deployed at the far end of the killing zone. Peoria police had established a roadblock further down the road behind a small hill. They would get the leftovers.

Watson watched the ragtag bunch of gang members squeezing through the gate. Several collisions occurred, and an SUV hit one motorcycle from behind, knocking it off the road. When the lead element of the fleeing gang members reached the far end of the killing zone, Watson keyed his mike, and said, "Fire."

Two light machineguns started at front of the column and laid lines of lead toward the gate. The MK-19 walked a line of high explosive shells down the center of the column, and the M2 started at the gate and worked toward the head of the column. Less than a minute later the ambush had completed its task. With only four exceptions, the gang members were either dead, wounded, or so disoriented that they were stumbling around in circles.

Watson reported that they had "limited out" on ducks.

Two motorcycles managed to get through, followed by two men on foot. All were captured by the Peoria Police at their roadblock.

Corporal Quail heard three rapid gunshots coming from the room they had just passed. Whirling around, he raced back down the hall, followed by two of his men: their M16s at the ready. Dashing into the room he nearly tripped over Katyal, who lay on the floor just inside the door moaning and holding his bloody left arm. Sprawled face down next to him was a large, naked, man, with blood oozing from the back of his head. Stepping around Katyal, Quail approached Teresa. Still holding her pistol, she was using her left hand to place a blanket over something on the bed. Satisfied she was uninjured, Quail turned his attention to the nude man. A bloody machete lay on the floor next to him. *Hmm—looks like he took a swing at the wimp before he went down*, Quail speculated, as he poked the man with his boot.

Getting no response Quail ordered, “Jones, turn him over.”

Private Jones rolled the body over, exposing a large MS-13 tattooed on the man’s chest. Two purplish holes—one in his forehead and another in his left cheek—plus a third hole in the man’s neck just below his chin, told the story of how he went down. *Holy cow! Well I’m sure the wimp didn’t get him, so it must’ve been the woman. Damn fine shooting’*. Quail laughed.

Soft noises emanating from the bed caught Quail’s attention. It sounded like a woman sobbing. Turning, he saw Teresa standing beside the bed looking down. Quail walked over to see what was going on and saw the woman Teresa had covered with a blanket. Only her face was visible, and it was so bruised and swollen it was impossible to tell her age.

“What happened?” Quail asked.

Shaking her head, Teresa turned to Quail. With her mouth set in a grim line, she replied through clenched teeth, “The SOB was raping her when we came in. I wanted to shoot the bastard right then and there, but instead I followed my training and told him he was under arrest. Then I asked Mr. Katyal to read him his rights—guess he wasn’t interested in being arrested.”

Quail looked from Katyal to the big man’s body on the floor, and then back at Teresa. “Guess not,” Quail said with a smile.

Chapter 22

Trawler *Shazaib*

Gulf of Aden off the Somalia Coast

3:32 a.m., Sunday, September 17th.

A pale crescent moon illuminated the sea, and a light sea breeze blew from the west, creating gentle swells. Intently scanning the western horizon, Abdirashid Ahmed, also known as *Juqraafi*, stood silently on the bridge of his base ship, a captured fishing trawler named *Shazaib*. The *Shazaib* showed no lights, a dark shape on a dark sea, 200 km north of Boosaaso, Somalia.

A few feet to *Juqraafi*'s left stood Amar Ibrahim, a Jordanian national and leader of *al-Shabaab*, the militant wing of the Somalia Council of Islamic Courts. A brutal man, hated and feared by his own men, Ibrahim was, like *Juqraafi*, lost in his thoughts. Ibrahim loathed *Juqraafi*, and the feeling was mutual.

Ibrahim had been in Yemen when the United States launched its nuclear counter attack against the Islamic Empire—the Caliphate. Realizing that a Middle East invasion would follow, he'd bought his way onto a *dhow* bound for Djibouti, Ethiopia. From there he traveled overland to Puntland on Somalia's east coast, the headquarters of the "Eyle Group," one of the main Somalia pirate fleets. On the way he learned of the destruction of Mecca, Medina, Cairo, Khartoum, Baghdad, and Tehran. Two weeks later, Egypt was invaded and conquered. When Ibrahim learned the Crusaders had invaded Saudi Arabia, Islam's birthplace, he swore vengeance. Tonight his vengeance would commence.

Ten days ago an *al-Qaeda* sleeper agent sent word to Ibrahim that the Great Satan had chartered a small ocean liner, the *MV Seabourn Explorer*. The ship's crew of 305 men and women would transport two hundred fifty teachers and engineers—*kafirs* (unbelievers)—to the Saudi Arabian port of *Ad Adman*—*Kafirs* who would violate the Prophet's holy land with their Western methods, teachings and religion. The ship was scheduled to transit the Suez Canal on September 9th.

The thought of such a desecration made Ibrahim's blood boil. Glaring at the sea, he plotted; *I will follow the Prophet's example and do as He did after the Battle of the Ditch. One by one I will behead them, then broadcast the video on the Internet.* Ibrahim's lips curled back, exposing hashish-stained teeth—the personification of pure evil. *But that will remain my secret, until I have the kafirs on land and under my control.*

With his precious intelligence in hand, Ibrahim had located Juqraafi, the “admiral” of the Eyle pirate fleet, and told him about the ship. At first Juqraafi had refused to seize the *Explorer*, saying he didn't have enough men to control the passengers and crew of an ocean liner. Twenty-four men were the most they had ever dealt with. Expecting such a response, Ibrahim had pointed out that a ship full of *kafir* teachers and engineers would be worth a king's ransom, and *humbly* offered to provide as many *jihadi* fighters as required.

Finally, Juqraafi had agreed to allow Ibrahim's men to join his crew, but his decision still rankled like a thorn in his shoe.

Ibrahim turned to Juqraafi, a tall, handsome, bearded, young man, dressed in a dark shirt, blue jeans, and Nike running shoes—his dark blue windbreaker unzipped and fluttering in the light breeze—and asked, “May Allah be praised. When will the ship come into view?”

Juqraafi was in no hurry to answer. He'd been enjoying the sea breeze and the peace only found on a calm sea, beneath a star filled sky. *A perfect night for pirating*, he gloated, thinking of the riches this prize would bring. *Once the ransom is paid I'll retire.* Annoyed that Ibrahim's question had interrupted his reverie, Juqraafi frowned and abruptly turned to look at the heavysset, middle-aged man beside him. Framed by long, flowing hair and an unkempt beard, Ibrahim's face and his piercing black eyes, capped with bushy eyebrows, evoked the very image of a cold-blooded killer.

Just being near him makes my skin crawl, Juqraafi thought before answering, “Anytime now, if your information is correct. As soon as she's sighted, I will move on an intercept course, and then deploy the interceptor boats. Order your fighters not to harm the crew or passengers, and instruct them to avoid damaging the bridge and the steering mechanism at the stern—” Sneering at the *jihadi*, he added, “The rudder at the back of the ship. Both are required if we are to sail the ship to our port.”

Ibrahim scowled at the obvious affront, but Juqraafi had turned back to watch the horizon and did not notice. *Allah be praised. Once back in port I won't need you any more. You're as bad as the kafirs. All you think about is*

money. Things will be different this time. Allah willing, we'll follow His commands and terrorize the kafirs—smite them on the neck and make an example of them. Again Ibrahim's lips curled into an evil sneer. Yes, by Allah. This time we will show the world Allah's wrath. The kafir president of the Great Satan will never destroy Islam. No! He will feel Allah's sword on his neck—and Allah has chosen me as His instrument of retribution.

MV Seabourn Explorer

Gulf of Aden

3:45 a.m.

First Officer Hans Groenig was scanning the sea ahead through powerful binoculars from his position on the bridge. The *Seabourn Explorer* had passed from the Red Sea into the Gulf of Aden, and the lights from the port of Aden were falling behind to the northwest. This was Groenig's first voyage as first officer, and he reminded himself not to become complacent, for pirates infested these waters. The home office had assured Captain Zeller that the war had put a stop to pirate activity. No attacks had occurred during the past month, but Groenig was worried—he didn't want to be the officer of the deck if one occurred.

Radar showed a large boat—probably a fishing trawler—twenty-two miles ahead. The trawler appeared to be stopped, which could mean it was tending its nets, but Groenig had a bad feeling. Checking the instruments, he confirmed they were steady on a course of zero-ninety-two degrees and making sixteen knots. Still he was worried. “New course zero-eight-five,” he ordered the helmsman.

“Aye, aye, sir. Coming port to new heading zero-eight-five degrees. That should put her well to our starboard, sir.”

Groenig grunted a reply as he studied the radar, which showed many other contacts both to port and starboard. However, with a few exceptions, they were all many miles away, closer to the distant shores. Still, the trawler bothered him.

Trawler *Shazaib***03:53 a.m.**

A speck of light appeared on the horizon. Juqraafi watched the speck grow brighter. His pulse quickened as he experienced conflicting feelings of excitement and apprehension. Finally, lowering his cheap binoculars, he pointed to the now visible point of light, and said, "There is our target. She is running farther to the north than I expected."

"Can we catch her?" Ibrahim asked, gripping the railing and squinting into the darkness.

"Yes." Juqraafi replied, advancing the throttles and turning the *Shazaib* onto an intercept course. After several minutes he said, "Have your men assemble near the boats. We'll launch them when we cross her path, and then, if the small boats fail to stop her, I'll turn to the north and be in position to intercept her."

Picking up the radio mike, Juqraafi pressed the transmit key, and said in Arabic, "This is Ali. Nothing here, so I am heading for my favorite spot. Come and join me." The message was his signal for the two smaller mother ships, positioned north of the liner's projected path, to close on the target and launch their wooden skiffs.

Juqraafi slowed to five knots and observed the running lights on his target. As soon as he saw the liner's white mast light centered between its red and green running lights, he pulled the throttles back to idle, placed the drive levers in the neutral position, and quickly left the bridge.

"Lower boats," he ordered the crew.

Ransom money had been used to pay for extensive modifications to the *Shazaib*, a captured Pakistani trawler. Cargo holds previously used to store fish had been converted into crew quarters and a weapons magazine. Ibrahim had installed a 106mm recoilless rifle on the trawler's bow, and mounted two 12.5mm machineguns amidships on the port and starboard sides. The aft deck had been reinforced and now supported two twenty-three foot, fiberglass, center console interceptor boats, each with twin 300 hp Yamaha outboards.

Using davits, the crew slung the two boats over the side and lowered them to the sea's surface. Each boat, crewed by two pirates, mounted a 7.62mm light machinegun and carried eight jihadi fighters, armed with Russian AK-47s, RPGs, and machetes. As soon as the boats were underway, Juqraafi ordered, "Deploy the nets," and returned to the bridge. Turning, he

watched the port and starboard booms swing out and deploy the dummy nets. Each net was weighted and long enough to sink into the water, simulating deployed trawl nets. Satisfied, he pushed the drive levers forward, increased the throttles to obtain a speed of three knots, and steered a course of 120 degrees—giving the impression the ship was trawling.

MV Seabourn Explorer

4:11 a.m.

Groenig watched the radar display as the trawler turned north and then stopped directly in his path. He also noted that two of the smaller contacts to the northeast had turned south and increased speed. A few minutes later, the trawler began moving southeast at a very slow speed, and the two smaller contacts had stopped at a location approximately five nautical miles north of the liner's projected path. Groenig began to sweat, trying to decide if he should wake the captain. The two smaller contacts began to move eastward at two knots.

“What do you think, Karl?” he asked the radar operator.

“Looks like normal trawling to me, sir. Seen this before.”

Groenig rubbed his chin, and then decided to report the activity to the U.S. Navy. When he did, he discovered there were no naval ships within a hundred nautical miles of his position. Again he considered waking the captain, and again he decided not to.

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Pirates and Cartels

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