

Prologue

Istanbul, Summer, 1988

The young assassin with the boom box stopped to watch the dancing bear. It towered over the summer afternoon crowd on the Bosphorus quayside, pirouetting on its hind legs to the drumbeat of the old Gypsy man who held its chain. But a sudden blast of sound from the boom box caused the beast to stagger, swivel its massive head, and gnash its teeth behind the thick leather muzzle.

“Very amusing,” the middle-aged Russian said when the kid caught up, grinning at the havoc he had created. “Mind turning that damn thing down now?”

The kid reduced the heavy-metal fury a few decibels. The older man said nothing more. The GRU had sent him a *Spetsnaz* cowboy. As a KGB officer, there wasn’t much Major Feliks Ilyinsky could do about that.

It was a generally fucked-up situation. Feliks needed this kid. The alternative—using Bessaraboff, his own KGB protégé, on a wet operation—was a sick joke.

They moved, without further incident, through the little street carnival beside the ferry landing stage of Emirgan on the Bosphorus’s European shore. There were stilt-walkers, a fire-eater, fortune-tellers, and a huge, red-bearded martial artist, nearly as tall as the dancing bear, smashing stacks of roof tiles with his bare hands.

Farther on, a plane tree threw lacy shadows on the gray weather-beaten planking of an old boathouse. The two Russians entered. Behind the counter a swarthy young man lifted a single black brow over puzzled eyes and tried to shout above the cassette player: “A boat? For one hour, two—”

The young assassin pointed his *Spetsnaz*-issue P-6 silenced pistol at the single eyebrow and fired. The muffled shot was drowned out by the shrieking boom box. Ilyinsky made it around

the counter in time to ease the dead weight to the floor, then continued through a swing door.

At the end of the open shed, silhouetted against a bright square of Bosphorus, were two men. One was crouched, shaking a can of spray paint; the other sat at a workbench tinkering with machinery. A half-dozen geriatric wooden motorboats were tethered to the two-fingered dock. The kid joined Ilyinsky, after he shuttered the front.

The painter glanced up in annoyance at the blasting music. “Turn that thing off. You guys hire a boat?”

Ilyinsky nodded. “So where’s Torkom? Torkom, get your ass back here.”

The kid fired successively at both men. Again the plosive coughs of the P-6 were masked by the amplified din. Ilyinsky went forward to examine the objects being painted.

There were a dozen steel cylinders—three a flaky, bilious green; nine a wet chrome yellow. The necks had been fitted with standard SCUBA regulator J-valves. Ilyinsky unscrewed one. Underneath was a fuze pocket. Ilyinsky looked more closely at the metal object in his hand. The “J-valve,” he suspected, was really an electronic timer. The unsprayed tanks bore coded markings indicating manufacture in Shikhany, the principal Soviet chemical weapons facility.

Ilyinsky rang his knuckles on the alloy-steel casing. They were all here—an even dozen unitary bombs, hijacked ten days before from a Bulgarian APC on Warsaw Pact maneuvers in the Dragoman Pass. They contained a new and specially thickened form of VX nerve gas, many times more lethal than anything in Western arsenals. The bombs had been designed as tactical weapons, to be air-dropped or fired as artillery shells. But, disguised and modified with the timers, they had been turned into fiendishly efficient terrorist weapons.

Ilyinsky had spent ten anxious days tracing the hijacking to Armenian separatists—a previously unknown faction which, unlike the Marxist ASALA, was working to overthrow the Soviet Armenian Republic. The last link—leading to this boat house run by three Armenian cousins—had been supplied by a pimply,

fourteen-year-old terrorist in Yerevan, an orphan of the '88 earthquake. The boy had lost all his bravado and screamed everything he knew when Ilyinsky tapped the first finishing nail into his skull. The boy didn't know what mayhem the cousins intended with the canisters, but that question, thank God, was now academic.

"How many people could you kill with all this shit?" the young Spetsnaz asked.

"I don't know. Let's get busy."

Two minutes of concerted effort saw the dozen tanks loaded into a motorboat's back seat. The kid was complaining about yellow paint on his jeans.

"I'll buy you a new pair," Ilyinsky said. "Throw that tarp over the tanks."

As Ilyinsky squatted to free the dock line, a two-meter section of the boathouse wall buckled and splintered open, revealing the red-bearded giant hefting a wrought-iron bench as battering ram. Beside him a normal-size assistant began firing an AK assault rifle.

The young assassin crumpled and Ilyinsky dove into the water, kicking and clawing away from the boathouse.

Long seconds later, nearing blackout, he surfaced and saw the motorboat—*his* motorboat, goddammit—snarling away into the Bosphorus traffic. A rifle barrel flashed in the sun. Ilyinsky gulped air and sank out of sight.

When he rose again, the boat was nowhere to be seen on the busy waterway. Ilyinsky trod the surprisingly cold water several minutes, hoping for a glimpse; but he saw only barges, fishing skiffs, motor yachts, ferries, and, to his left, a Soviet helicopter cruiser coming down from the Black Sea. The Emirgan quayside, meanwhile, had become a bedlam of shouts and sirens.

Finally Ilyinsky gave up the search and swam south with the current. Near the village of Balta Liman he drifted inshore. Somebody else had wanted the canisters, and very badly, he thought, hauling himself onto the dock of a shuttered seaside mansion, or *yali*. But who?

Through the fading colors of evening, a uniformed motorcyclist roared down a street of slums in Uskúdar on Istanbul's Asian shore. A pair of roosters in the middle of the unpaved road broke off their quarrel and scattered as he shot past. The mud-splattered fairing of the big German sports bike bore the insignia of the Turkish National Police.

A dismal block farther on the cyclist heeled sharply, skidding into a crossing, then snarled up through the gear-box, rear tires spewing dirt as they clawed for traction. He was now on a cart path; narrowed further by an open sewer trench and walled in with *geçekondus* or “night houses”—hovels thrown up overnight by the teeming Anatolian immigrant population. The shantytown, like many others fringing the city, was largely unmapped, but the cyclist never hesitated.

He downshifted and dived into an alleyway between two whitewashed shacks, plowing a furrow through a scrawny vegetable patch. Several meters ahead he veered again between flaps of hanging burlap into sudden enveloping darkness, braked to a stop and switched off the motor. He sat a moment, letting his vision adjust to lancets of dusky light that pierced a roof of scrap sheathing. Then he unhelmeted and pulled his goggles down.

“İsmet!” he called into the void. And again, “İsmet! It is Fahri.”

Still there was no answer, only muted sounds from the street, and, somewhere in the distance, a muezzin's ululating call for sundown prayer. The air was rife with smells: the sewer stench outside; bacon fat, frying fish and onions from a nearby cook fire; and, close by, the burning-grass odor of hashish.

Then in the darkness came the slow sibilance of someone snoring. The cyclist dismounted, whipped a flashlight from his leather belt, and stabbed its beam into a dark corner. On a filthy ticking mattress a man sprawled on his side, a big red-bearded Westerner, bare feet and thick forearms protruding from a dirty cotton judo suit. Behind him a dozen large metal canisters were stacked against the wall. Beside the man was a porcelain *narghile*, the water pipe's mouthpiece still clutched in grimy fingers. That, and the fact the man had not been awakened by the motorcycle, indicated narcotic stupor. The cyclist approached slowly, zeroing

the flashlight on the large head. Under the tangled red mane was a fighter's face—leathery, scarred, vein-mapped. The nose was a flattened ruin, the mouth a swollen mass of flesh.

As the cyclist leaned closer, one malevolent eye opened and thick lips curled back over yellow teeth. The cyclist grabbed for his .45, but a huge leg scythed him off his feet. He landed on his gun arm as the bearded man exploded off the mattress. The cyclist swung the heavy flashlight in self-defense, but it was knocked into a corner as huge hands tore at his collar.

The two writhed in darkness. Without a weapon the cyclist knew he was doomed. Then, as they rolled across the earthen floor, the *narghile* shattered beneath them; the bearded man, cut by porcelain shards, grunted in pain and released his death grip. The cyclist wrenched free and regained his feet, but the hulking figure loomed up instantly between him and the burlap doorway.

This time the cyclist was able to unholster his sidearm and swing it toward the huge target. But the bearded man twisted and kicked sideways, his front foot knocking the cyclist's wrist aside as the gun went off.

While the darkness detonated, the cyclist was snatched up like a child and hurled through the air. He slammed into the motorcycle, rolling over with it and beyond into a pasteboard wall that collapsed under his weight. The cyclist kept tumbling, down a short muddy slope, the evening stars wheeling overhead. He came to rest with his face a scant half-meter from crackling flames. On the far side of a cook fire hunkered a wizened old man in a cloth cap, masticating his supper and glancing about fearfully. Next to him a small sheepdog barked furiously.

The cyclist's entire left side, from cheek to hipbone, was one throbbing bruise, and his mouth tasted of his own blood. He looked back and saw the ragged hole in the pasteboard wall suddenly and violently enlarged. Through it, like some overgrown djinni, smashed the massive red-bearded man, bounding down the muddy slope and into the firelight. The cyclist tried to scuttle away, but his back was already against the hot stones of the cook fire. His holster was empty. His brain freewheeled in futile calculation. The dog continued to bark crazily. The red giant danced closer, grinning,

playful, crouching into a martial arts stance. The cyclist called out in prayer to his dead mother. Then out of the night boomed a huge voice:

“John! No!”

The bearded man, on the verge of kicking his helpless victim in the face, halted and turned. Through the same hole a swarthy, mustached young man emerged.

He moved with a swaggering stride down the slope. But as he drew near, he seemed to diminish. The top of his head barely reached the bearded man’s shoulder.

“Ismet, peace be upon you!” said the cyclist with heartfelt relief.

“And upon you, the peace and mercy of Allah, and his blessing.”

Fahri’s bearded assailant, meanwhile, spat and spoke in English. “Ismet, why did you stop me? I was about to kill this Turkish slime. He’s with the fucking police.”

“Yes,” answered the small man in the same tongue. “But Fahri Bayram is also the husband of my cousin and a friend of Kurdistan. You must be more careful, John.” Ismet knelt and helped the cyclist to his feet. “Forgive me, Fahri. This is John Courage, the big Angleesh. He arrived yesterday from Kastellorizo to do a little job for me. You must have startled him. Are you badly hurt?”

Fahri shook his head. He stood up, squared his slight shoulders, and made a show of dusting off his uniform. His beautiful leathers were mud-caked, his face scratched, and blood trickled from one nostril over his pencil-thin mustache and swollen lip. Tomorrow, he was sure, he would be rainbowed with bruises. But he was alive, Allah be praised, and nothing broken.

“No hard feelings,” said John Courage, offering his hand. “But let me give you a piece of advice, Fahri, me lad. Never sneak up on an old soldier.”

A moment later at Ismet’s direction Fahri extracted an envelope from inside his leather jacket. Ismet opened it and unfolded a packet. On top were two glossy black-and-white photographs. One was of a dramatically lovely, dark-haired woman. The other

showed a three-masted square-rigger under full sail. After a moment Ismet handed the packet to the Englishman.

John Courage bent close to the firelight and stared at the photo of the woman. “Holy Christ! You know who this is? Amanda bloody Morgan—only about the most delicious bitch in Christendom! She was right out of drama school when I first laid eyes on her ten, maybe fifteen years ago, as close to me as that mutt over there, half-naked in a West End farce. Of course that was before she started spouting off about nukes and Pakkies and all the rest of it. What’s she gotta be now, near forty I guess, and look how good she looks, eh? What I wouldn’t give to turn her upside down. Christ, Fairy, did you have to bend the frigging snap?”

Ismet pointed to the packet. “John, please read. It is in English.”

“Of course I’ll bloody read it.” Reluctantly he turned from the glossy to the accompanying press release.

From the desk of B.J. Bracey: Media Relations

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AMANDA MORGAN LATEST TO JOIN CAST OF ‘BARBARY!’

British actress Amanda Morgan was announced today as the most recent addition to “Barbary!”, Kronos Ltd.’s big-budget historical miniseries which begins filming soon in exotic Mediterranean locations, from Tunis to Istanbul. Ms. Morgan will be joining an all-star, international cast that already boasts Jason Webb, Britta Milo, A. W. Kohout, Langley Peters and Ray Navidad.

Executive producer Leopold Bouchard revealed the signing of Ms. Morgan Friday from Kronos’ Paris offices, calling it “a master stroke.” “Amanda is a wonderful actress with a worldwide following,” said the producer. “But please don’t ask me about her politics, or whether I’m paying her more than I paid for the ship.” The reference was to the full-scale replica of an 18th-century twenty-four-gun frigate recently constructed in Italy from original U.S. Navy Department plans—at a hefty price tag of \$15 million! The ship, christened the George Washington after the original, is now en route to Istanbul, where principal photography for “Barbary!” will begin early next month.

Ms. Morgan, a past Oscar nominee for “Little Girl Blue” and critically acclaimed for her title role in last year’s PBS series “Rusudan,” will be making her American network television debut in “Barbary!” She will portray the role of Lydia Markham, a celebrated American songstress in the year 1800, who is abducted while on a European tour from the stage of the Paris Opera by agents of the Dey of Aliers, Bobba Mustapha (A. W. Kohout). She is then smuggled, by Gypsy wagon, camel caravan and, in a bizarre plot twist, a U.S. naval vessel to Constantinople, where she is presented to the Sultan as a gift for his harem. Like the legendary kidnapping of Helen of Troy, this incident launches a veritable whirlwind of events, including three naval battles and a heroic rescue attempt by an American privateer captain (Jason Webb).

“Barbary!” is romantic action-adventure in the grand tradition that stretches from “Captain Blood” to the latest Indiana Jones, compiled from historical and original sources. “Of course the emphasis is on entertainment value, and telling a good yarn,” points out veteran British director Jack Woodhull, “but some of the parallels with present-day events are quite remarkable.”

One such involves the voyage of the George Washington from Algiers to Constantinople in the year 1800. It was this journey, in which a U.S. naval vessel was coerced into ferrying tribute (including, perhaps, an American songstress?) from one potentate to another, which caused the United States to escalate the war against the Barbary pirates. “Very few people know that Jefferson was the first American president to advocate the policing of the Mediterranean,” adds Woodhull, “and so we try to point that out.”

The diminutive and dynamic Mr. Bouchard, who comes to the project fresh from the success of last fall’s four-hour blockbuster version of Jules Verne’s “Michael Strogoff, Courier to the Czar,” envisions even greater logistical problems for “Barbary!” “Here we have secured cooperation from four separate governments, not just one as in ‘Strogoff.’”

To underline this claim, Mr. Bouchard introduced Mr. Bekir Yagan of the Turkish Ministry of Trade, who read a special proclamation from his government, citing a 1982 maritime law in granting a one-time, five-hour suspension of all traffic on the Bosphorus waterway, to allow unimpeded filming of the ship not only on the Sea of Marmara, but within the Golden Horn itself. Thanks to this dispensation, the millions of viewers of

“Barbary!” will be treated to the sight of an historic American warship, once again under a cloud of sail, its bowsprit thrusting through the spray toward the graceful minarets of Constantinople.

After several minutes of squinting in the flickering light, the Englishman folded up the pages.

“What do you think, John?” asked Ismet.

Courage scratched his hairy neck. “I like it. You take the ship, and I’ll take Amanda.”



