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When Eight Bells Troll

An Alaster McLeen Story Gone Wrong

By: S. Unian Sambar

If the teams in Navarone and Ice Station Zebra could do it, why did they fail in Isfahan? The inside story of where a couple of eagles dared but fell awfully short..

Prologue: Thursday 0800 - 0815

Both offensive and defensive munitions were running out; a few million dollars of airpower were being systematically knocked out of the skies each day; the aircraft carriers and other naval vessels were being indecently threatened by drones and missiles; and boots on the ground were a certain recipe for instant reprisal and decimation. Clearly, desperate circumstances called for desperate measures. The Chief of MI6, Sir Algernon Marmaduke Brayton-Neigh and the CIA's Director, Digger O. Durt, Jr. decided to have a very hush-hush conference (which was hacked into only by the Iranians, the Chinese, the Russians, the North Koreans and a few scammers from a software café in Gurgaon). In a brief and decisive conversation held between eight and a quarter-past on the morning of Thursday the 21st, they decided there was only one way out: a limited and comprehensive covert operation.

To keep things simple, and since no-one would volunteer for the job, it was decided that two individuals were as many as could be conscripted to the cause. Nastiness and expendability being helpful criteria, the choice was narrowed down to the Englishman 'Fierce' Gorman and the American 'Meat' Heckshit. They would be parachuted in the dead of night into Isfahan. They would gain entry into the underground nuclear infrastructure where the enriched uranium was stored. This they would do by convincing the Iranian personnel that this was for their own good, the only thing for them being regime change. Once in possession of the 440 kilograms of enriched uranium, they would signal a Black Hawk helicopter to pick them up and transport them back to safety.

'Fierce' Gorman added a sneer to his lips, and 'Meat' Heckshit a tattoo to his chest.

Sunday 0000 - 0030

For the thousandth time Gorman consulted his wristwatch by the pale wash of the moon shining dimly through a cloudy, starless night. He cursed under his breath. It was eighteen minutes past midnight. The arrangement was that Heckshit, who had been parachuted in an hour earlier, would be there at the stroke of midnight. When HQ said midnight, HQ meant midnight. There *had* to be something holding him up. Gorman sighed and pushed himself further into the protective shadow behind the boulder. As he did so, he felt the cold, hard, comforting pressure of his .33 Stammer-Mandelssohn inside his jacket, a .33 Stammer-Mandelssohn is always comforting when you're unsure of your life expectancy, it's a useful little customer, small and efficient and deadly, only in the game he was playing you're not usually given the time or the chance to use it, the enemy is too clever and cautious and ruthless for that, and by the time you realize that, you have time for everything. An eternity. Isolated in Isfahan, he told himself, that's what you are; and he kept on repeating it in a meaningless litany, over and over again - something, anything, just anything at all to keep out that screeching, shattering dirge of the wind as it crashed through the trees and tore at his ear-drums. It was working itself up into a gale - a likely Force Nine on the Beaufort Scale. He shuddered, pulled his collar up, beat his arms to keep the circulation going, and cursed again as the first warm drops of rain began to fall. Twenty-seven past midnight. Where was Heckshit? It wasn't that HQ wouldn't have instructed him. It wasn't like HQ at all. What the devil was he-? And then realization dawned on him. He could keep waiting. He could wait for an eternity, and Heckshit wouldn't turn up. Heckshit would never turn up anywhere now. Realization dawned, only it dawned too damned late to help him, draw a diagram for me, he told himself, and hit me over the head with a club, and realization will dawn on me every time. Suddenly he tensed and concentrated all his being in his ears. Call it instinct, call it sixth sense, but every warning bell within his system was jangling madly. Impulsively he looked up. Standing directly over him, with its hand gripping a cosh already beginning on its vicious, murderous downswing, towered a figure-still and silent and menacing...

Sunday 0030 - 0400

Gorman raised an arm to protect himself, only to see a smiling, friendly, bearded face peering down at him through the moonlight. "Did you kill my friend?" asked Gorman tersely. "Kill?" said the stranger. "No, I offer him drink. He ask for another. Then another.

Then another. And so many others. He sleep now. Like baby." Gorman knew that HQ had stripped Heckshit of all alcohol in his supplies-just his luck, he supposed, that when he dropped he should have been received by a guard who happened to be carrying a bottle of whisky on him. "Did he-er-tell you what we are doing here?" "Sure," said the guard, with a cheerful grin. "To do regime change! Ah! He wake up!"

Gorman heard a stumbling sound heading toward them, and soon he saw Heckshit weaving and bobbing in the moonlight. "Sold him the story, and he fell for it," burbled Heckshit through a mist of whisky. "Propaganda," he added happily. Gorman thought he would buttress the good work. "Yours is a wicked regime," he told the guard. "Sure," said the guard. "They killed tens of hundreds of protestors," said Gorman. "Sure," said the guard. "Tens of thousands," said Heckshit. "Sure," said the guard. "Hundreds of thousands," said Gorman. "Sure," said the guard. "They'll put you in a hijab before you know it," said Heckshit. "Sure," said the guard. "I now take you to my boss, and you tell him what you told me."

Gorman and Heckshit were taken from boss to boss, each of whom said "Sure!" cheerfully to the notion of regime change, until they reached the very heart of the Isfahan nuclear installation, and found themselves in front of a man who seemed to be the boss of bosses. Heckshit meanwhile had fortified himself from out of several further bottles of whisky provided by the Isfahan personnel at each stage of their journey of proselytization for regime change. By this time, he was in a state of happy slurring. To the chief of the Isfahan nuclear establishment, he said:

"We'll take those 440 kg now. Only way for your people to escape your evil regime."

"Sure," said the chief, like the rest.

"So," slurred Heckshit. "Uranian?"

"Yes, I'm Iranian."

"I mean, Irianium."

"Yes? Pleased to meet you, Ranium."

"No, no, I mean Uranium. Lead us to it. We're taking charge of it."

"You will take it and make regime change?"

"You bet! Say, Gorman, these hicks are really falling for it."

"What I've been saying forever," said Gorman. "Barbaric fellows. Primitive. No culture nor education."

"And that, precisely," said the man in front of them, in fluent English and a reasonable tone of voice, "is where you have got it wrong. Speaking for myself, I have an undergraduate degree from Tehran, a graduate degree from the Sorbonne, and a Ph D from Oxford. Our civilization is five thousand years old. You threaten to bomb us back to the stone age: we do not have to take the trouble of responding to that since you yourselves clearly haven't emerged yet from that age. Arising from all of which, and on a morning which is turning warm, our friends here will transport you to the Iranian coastline and arrange for you to have a pleasant swim in the Gulf of Persia-all the way to where the *USS Gerald Ford* is presently leaking its toilets somewhere into the Mediterranean Sea."

This concludes the account of *Force 2 for Uranium*.

Epilogue: Monday 0800

The following post appeared in *Truth Social* at eight on the morning of the day following *Operation Uranium Hash*:

"ALL BECAUSE OF YOU! That's the end of the Special Relationship! That's the end of NATO! It was your Crazy Idea, you Crazy B_____d Stammer! LOSER! Thank you for your attention. President Rump."

This is a work of satire.

The author, who sometimes writes under the name of S. Subramanian, is a lapsed academic.