

Prophet Motive

by Patrick Meadows

"The situation worldwide is not getting any better.

"Christian missionaries are scattered around the globe. Africa, India, Russia, even the traditional Catholic countries, where Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh Day Adventists are doing their best to spread the Gospel as they know it.

"At the same time the jihadists, claiming to represent the holy interests of the Muslim faith are going about their task in a somewhat more bellicose fashion. Beheading journalists from the West, blowing up schools which allow girls to study, stoning adulterers to death, kidnapping girls as slaves - but you know all that. It's in the news every day.

"The West has only one way to deal with the jihadists, military might, massive murder of civilians to get at the bad guys. We don't even know often who the bad guys are. In Jordan, say, or Syria, or wherever.

"All we know for sure, whoever the bad guys and the good guys are, is that someone else is supplying all sides with the hardware to carry on the conflicts erupting everywhere, all the time.

"I propose that we all meet, put our considerable minds together. There must be a way to bring the savagery to an end before the impending Armageddon desired by Isis achieves the demise of the human race."

This letter was sent encrypted to a small group the self-proclaimed "brights" around the world. A date was set for May. The place decided upon was a new, as yet unopened, luxury hotel high above the Port of Sóller, on the island of Mallorca.

"The owner is a Saudi sympathetic to our project. He is rich and intelligent though not what we call a "bright." He guarantees us privacy for one month. Only his personal bodyguards and other staff will be in residence. We have decided to address each other only by first names when we are in public," said Christopher. "I think most of you know each other, if only by reputation and photos receiving various prizes in your respective fields," he continued. "But if not, soon you will. I think we all speak English, some of us speak French. I hope language does not keep us from our task." He pointed to a full-bearded giant of a man to his right. "In the event we need

help, Vigurny here will help us. He is a polyglot of formidable talent. I believe he even speaks Fortran." A ripple of laughter.

I think we will agree that the human race is in grave danger of perishing, of vanishing from the face of the earth. Think of it! Perhaps the only intelligence in the universe, though there is no way to know for certain if this be the case. But the only such intelligence to have produced a Mozart symphony, surely one of the marvels of the universe.

"Now let's get down to it. I believe that our expert on Ancient Greece wants to tell us what he thinks is going on. Georg?"

"You may think it strange, until you think about it. Euripides' last play gives us a pretty fair picture of what is happening today." Georg wears rimless glasses. Long face and intense almost black eyes. He spoke clear English, but with the taint or lilt of another language. "Oreibasía, sparagmós y omophagia." he said. "Those are the key words to describe events of the last century, especially in the West."

He removed his spectacles and polished them with a handkerchief. "On the one hand, the poet confronts the corrupting effects of continual war between Athens and Sparta, the excesses of contemporary democracy, and the collapse of traditional social and religious values."

He went on in Spanish, apparently unaware he had changed tongues. "Literalmente, sparagmós significa piezas desmembradas, desmenuzadas, violadas o fragmentadas. En sus acepciones de despedazamiento de cuerpos y conducta convulsiva y espasmódica, el término puede indicar desmembración tanto moral socio-política como física y forma."

In sotto voce, Vigurny summarized the phrases.

"Dismemberment, cutting up the moral and body politic."

"And finally," Georg went on, switching back to English, "omophagia may indicate what happens with overpopulation, as suggested by B.F. Skinner in 1950 in his study of rats. There is a possible instance of omophagia in The Bacchae. At one point in the play, the maenads go into a nearby town and carry off the children; it is possible that the maenads then consumed them."

Philippa, a social scientist from the University of Chicago, lifted her hand. "Skinner suggested that cannibalism might be the final result of extreme over-crowding, intermediate earlier stages being extreme aggressive behavior, and homosexuality. There may be a recessive gene that that resurges under *condiciones* of extreme population stress."

"Perhaps, but I am speaking of ancient Greece. Homosexuality was not then considered as repugnant as now to the general population." He replaced his spectacles on his prominent nose. "So

I suggest we look at the West today as Athens, and the East today as Sparta. This at least gives us a point of view." He sat down abruptly and loosened his necktie.

"Thanks, Georg. Any comments, anyone?" A signal from a middle-aged man at the right of the table. "Go ahead."

"With Dionysis we are getting close to the crux of the matter. It seems that religion is poisoning everything. As far back as we can know, it has been the same: Consider each group a gang, or tribe, or whatever. As Dave Logan says in his book Tribal Leadership:

Stage One: Violent groups: e.g. street gangs

Stage Two: Passive aggressive, sarcastic, antagonistic, cynical: e.g. DMV—no innovation, no sense of urgency

Stage Three: "I'm great and you're not": e.g. doctors, professors, attorneys, salespeople—hoarding of knowledge, feeling that others don't have as much ambition or skill as you

Stage Four: "We're great": People invest their self-identity in their tribe—people exhibit tribal pride and have a shared common adversary. People hold each other accountable

Stage Five: "We're going to make history": Teams have short bursts in Stage Five and then drop back to Stage Four.

"Isis is at Stage 5. And no way back."

"Pessimism is forbidden in this conference."

"Not pessimism, realism." He looked around the room. "Unless anyone thinks we can come up with a cure for religion."

Another hand went up. "If that's the problem, let's address ourselves to that for a while."

Thanks, Andrew," Christopher said. "For those not familiar with Andrew, he is the one responsible for ridding the world of smallpox. He is close to developing a vaccine against ebola."

"Seems counterproductive to me," said a large - tall and stout - man at the back of the room. "There are too many of us already. I see this as the cause of all the other crap."

"I think we could call you Tex, with that accent." quipped Christopher.

"Back home they call me Josh, but whatever. The planet is crawling with people, people who want more than there is to have. One good generation of birth control and your problem is solved." He ran his fingers through thick hair. "I say if NASA can make a neutron bomb that kills folks, and leaves buildings standing, they can build a genetic bomb to slow things down for a few years."

A few moans around the room and mumbles from an Indian from Mumbai. "I think we all know where you would start if you could focus those beams the way you wanted."

The Chinese technologist protested as well.

"All right, gentlemen. None of that."

"Josh, that idea is duly noted." He made a brief scribble on a piece of paper. "But I believe we face a little more urgency than that."

Andrew spoke up again. "Fruit bats are believed to be the normal carrier of the virus ebola, able to spread the virus without being affected by it." He spread his hands. "If religion is poisoning people, as suggested, then perhaps we can consider it a sort of virus?"

"My name is John. Like Andrew, I work for the Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics. We are currently working on a vaccine for ebola. If you want to talk about how vaccines are made," he said with a wry smile, "let's do it."

"Hey," put in Josh. "Go for it. Let's step out of the box." Shuffling of feet, murmurs of agreement.

"All right. The things to be considered are vectors, genetic codes...

He rhapsodized for a while and ended by saying he doubted a vaccine for a social ill is feasible.

"Maybe here is a a good place to hear from Jaim. He is one of the leading thinkers in what might be called the Philosophy of Media. He and I sat together on the plane coming over from Shannon, and I think his ideas are worth sharing with the group."

"Thanks, Chris. I will try to be brief. I think some of us are showing signs of hunger. It's lunch time here in Spain, and the best way to get everybody on local time is to forget that it is the middle of the night in Silicon Valley, or bedtime in Tokyo." A shuffling of papers. "Me, I move around so much I can eat anytime of the day or night." Patting his paunch. "And do, obviously."

He looked into a corner of the room. "My job, until I got out of the racket with a pile of money, was to find out what the general public wants and deliver it." He looked at his hands and turned them over as if investigating their use. "That, in theory, is marketing. But things changed. Now we find out what the market has to sell, and then we create a want for it. Then turn that want into a need." He glanced at the faces before him.

"Just think of how obscene our message is. On TV, in film, in magazines, on the web. I'm no prude, far from it. And I don't think it is my age - I'm approaching seventy-five. I believe that sex has got loose in the media, with no limits, far from all propriety.

"You can imagine what Miley Cyrus twerking must look like to a Christian family in a small town in Montana. But put this in front of

a Mujadeen in Afghanistan, or the ISIS in Iraq or Syria, and you have to multiply that reaction by a hundred.”

The geneticist asked his neighbors “What's twerking?” A few younger men and women laughed.

“I don't watch much TV.” he added, blushing.

“That's OK. I only know it because my granddaughter explained it to me when I asked what all the fuss was about. Down in Mexico, a couple of months ago. She even started to demonstrate, but I made her stop.”

“Basically it is an irreverent, provocative dance move that is all the mode,” continued Jaim. “Totally grotesque and indecent to my way of thinking, but a perfect example of how far things have gone. Or look at Madonna. Or Cicciolina. Or even the transparent dresses in fashion shows. It's everywhere, in all the ads for cars, perfume, underwear – you name it”.

“I want to repeat, I'm no prude. I think people should be allowed to do what they want, if it brings no harm to others. But this sexy stuff is very much in your face. I'm trying to look at this from the Muslim viewpoint. Our message is so repellent it must seem like deliberate violence, an attack on a whole religious system.” He looked over at Christopher. “Not that I'm in favor of religion, Chris.”

Jim, the American professor of ethics frowned and said, "Just yesterday I saw on Spanish news a guy having himself filmed kicking the legs out from under a woman waiting for a bus. A joke? Put up on Twitter? Replayed over and over on the national news?" He made a face. "Sounds like nothing, but add it into the mix."

"Hey, I saw that. And what about the performance artist in ARCO. Naked as a jaybird while the king and queen walked by. I wonder how that went over in Timbuktu?"

Christopher broke in. "What you say has a lot of validity, Josh. You're talking causes of the problem, however, not solutions."

He ticked a note on his tablet. "But why not? ISIS is an infection, and we should look for causes, vectors whatever. Any other notions?"

"Local politics is another factor helping ISIS in their cause. We all know that as long as the rulers of a country favor our exploitation of their country, we don't send in the military. As somebody in Washington said, Pinochet is a son of a bitch, but he's *our* son of a bitch. When we went in after Saddam Hussein, we kicked a hornet's nest. Same thing before that, in Kuwait. And before that supporting the Shah in Iran. You can imagine what this all looks like

to an uneducated Muslim. And the uneducated Muslim at the mercy of the clerics.”

“Let them have their Islamic state, or even states if one won't satisfy them. Israel has one. Why not the Muslims?” This a harsh bray from the ecclesiastic rep, a Scot called Sandy with a certain authoritative fame for his books on the history of religion.

Farid answered him. “And leave the Sunnis to murder the Shias?”

“Come on,” said Sandy. They've been killing each other for centuries. We can't even tell them apart. How can we protect people we can't recognize.”

“The Shias could leave?” Jimmy, a young lawyer from Chile, working for the UN and Human Rights. Strictly speaking Jimmy was not permitted to take part in this conference. But Christopher knew him from classes in Brussels and persuaded him to join in without telling his superiors.

“Where to? All the neighboring countries have more refugees than they can handle. And most don't want to take the risk of more terrorists crossing their borders.”

“But at the moment we are bombing hundreds of innocents,” Jimmy said. “Compared to what ISIS is doing, the West is worse, at least in the eyes of the Muslims in the target countries.”

“Look at what's happening right here on this island,” Jimmy went on. “The Catholic church is under fire by adults who were abused by priests when they were kids. The director of the boys choir of Lluch has been suspended and will be investigated not only by the church but by the civil authorities.”

“The same in Ireland, the US, and Belgium – the list goes on and on.”

“So it's only a matter time. The Church is losing credibility, like all religious groups in history. Sooner or later they all go down,” Christopher put in. Somebody laughed. “Sorry. No pun intended.”

“If I follow Jimmy's line of thought, he suggests that the leaders of ISIS should be attacked in the same way,” offered Christopher.

“Put it on the social networks that the British rapper now slitting throats in Iraq left England because he was a known homosexual. That wouldn't matter nowadays in England, except in the Muslim community and certain lower class bars. But where sharia is law, he would be thrown from the rooftop of a building.”

“Start the rumor. Somebody confirms it. Somebody else claims to have incriminating photographs. Suggest that other members of ISIS knew it.”

"Right. The more Jihad John denies it, the more tweets will attack him. Once a meme gets started, there's no end to it. In that sense it *is* like a virus."

"Who's the equivalent of the Pope in ISIS? Make sure this stuff gets highest visibility."

"That's a good start. Who's going to stick his neck out and make the accusation?"

"Here's an idea. Play up what might be called the Scheherezade Syndrome. All these young women have been called out to marry jihadists. How many nights do they get before the lord and master slays them?"

"That's not so far-fetched as it sounds. Some have already gone missing. One family was told their daughter was killed by a "stray" bullet."

"Memes are all right as far as that goes, but not very efficient," Dr. Foege, epidemiologist. "I personally would suggest infecting the ISIS bunch. Infiltrate the North London Boys and the Buttes-Chaumont bunch from Paris and the girls in Madrid going off to Syria to marry ISIS. Infect them with something that will spread throughout their encampments. If they are so keen on suicide, let's help them. Something deadly and quick." said Dr. Foege.

"How can we justify such a thing in terms of ethics?" Jimmy again. The youngest member of the conference, he naturally had a more idealistic attitude than some of the older participants.

There was a noisy discussion about the degeneration of morals in the so-called civilized world. "Young people, and not only young folks in the West, have lost belief in just about everything. You might call it a mysterectomy," Christopher joked. "But seriously, they can't seem to separate games and TV from reality. What's that program where the first scene shows heads being lopped off in the snow?"

"Game of Thrones," Jimmy put in, blushing for knowing it. "Pedro Iglesias gave the king of Spain a set."

"Now that is embarrassing. And illustrates the point. Iglesias might be the head of government one day, and he watches that crap? And Grandpa used to say "What's the world coming to?" Christopher put his tablet to sleep.

"Now let's impose on our most generous host for coos coos," he announced. "And speaking of degeneration, he assures me that the bar is open and alcohol for him is no problem."

There was a collective sigh of relief.

The dining room had a view to the west over the Mediterranean Sea, whitecaps running parallel to the cliffs dropping seventy meters

down to the water. On the other side, floor to ceiling windows looked out over the port.

Nevzat, the Turkish representative, a former student who was present at the Istanbul riots, appreciated the view. "This could be Izmir Bay, but smaller. Beautiful."

From the dining room window they had seen the crowds gathering around the port. Men dressed in the traditional Mallorca costumes were already firing blanks from blunderbuss and pistol. Drinking was lifting the spirits of actors and tourists alike. Outside the port the ketch of the invading Turks could be seen, with several smaller craft. The annual repulsion of the Moors by the Christians was about to begin.

Hanging from the windows on every street were banners. Some were white with a red cross for Christians in that house, others red with a crescent moon to indicate that from that family someone wore black face and dressed as pirates.

The Christians already swarmed along the water front, drinking and firing blanks into the air as they awaited the invasion. When they came, the Turks would carry swords and old fashioned pistols, curved knives in their sashes. The traditional reenactment of the repulsion of the Turks and Algerians brought the tourists to the port in an invasion even greater than the original one in 1561. Local

television cameramen were setting themselves up on balconies and boats.

This year even BBC had a crew down there, filming part of a series on the island.

Outside the narrow mouth of the harbor, the black brigantine hovered on the horizon, waiting for the signal to begin the attack.

The bars along the bay and the dozens of private yachts were poised to enjoy the spectacle.

"All right," said Christopher when they were back in the conference room "let's draw up a list of actions we could implement now, if not sooner. I believe the Scheherezade Syndrome is a good angle, for one. Who can make believable videos of English, French, Italian girls arriving in Iraq and ending up slaves or dead?"

I've been producing make-believe stuff about cars and perfumes for years," Jaim said. "This would be simple. The only question is financing."

"I wouldn't worry about that." This from Josh. "The Texas oil folks have had a joy ride on the price of crude long enough. Time for payback."

"Many girls are actually getting the vaccinations for travel to the jihad territory, can you believe it? What could we inject them with to infect the warriors?"

"I like the idea about homosexual activity among the Jihadists themselves."

"Me too," said Josh. "Probably true anyway. Alone in the desert and bending over all the time."

"Don't be crude, Josh."

"Sounds like an Elvis song to me..." He was shushed by group consent.

"All right. Sorry. I know it's no laughing matter. This business about nine-year-old girls getting married should have an impact also. Play it up big as child abuse in the rank and file, used as a ploy to get pedophiles recruited into ISIS."

"I believe we all agree that violence only begets more violence and recruits more young men and women into the ISIS cause. Of course if the militarists are entering your village you have to fight back. But basically, our war has to be destructive propaganda. Take their terror films and twist them against ISIS."

"Won't work."

"Why not?"

"That scene of slitting throats went viral on the Web. Remember people love horror films, and can't tell the difference between real and unreal. Or don't give a damn, as long as there is gore."

Jaim raised his hand for attention.

"Before coming here, like everybody else I suppose, I did a lot of research. On the subject of propoganda I ran across this." He read from his tablet:

Nazi Germany's leaders harbored half-baked ideas about messaging to North Africa's Muslims. Heinrich Himmler was the Third Reich's most influential advocate of the instrumental use of Islam in war strategy. In the spring of 1943, as Field Marshal Erwin Rommel's army in North Africa stumbled to defeat, Himmler asked the Reich Security Head Office "to find out which passages of the Qur'an provide Muslims with the basis for the opinion that the Führer has already been forecast in the Qur'an and that he has been authorized to complete the work of the Prophet."

Ernst Kaltenbrunner of the Head Office replied with the disappointing news that the Koran had no suitable passages for such a claim, but he suggested that Hitler might be advertised as "the returned 'Isa (Jesus), who is forecast in the Qur'an and who, similar to the figure of the Knight George, defeats the giant and Jew-King Dajjal at the end of the world." Ultimately, the office printed one million copies of an Arabic-language pamphlet that sought to persuade Muslim Arabs to ally with Germany:

O Arabs, do you see that the time of the Dajjal has come? Do you recognize him, the fat, curly-haired Jew who deceives and rules the whole world and who steals the land of the Arabs? O Arabs, do you

know the servant of God? He [Hitler] has already appeared in the world and already turned his lance against the Dajjal and his allies. He will kill the Dajjal, as it is written, destroy his places and cast his allies into hell.

"This didn't do him much good although leaflets in Arabic were distributed throughout Arab communities in North Africa. The Mujadin of today are not going to listen to any propaganda coming from the West any more than Muslims in Hitler's time did."

Claude, the geneticist who had worked CIA projects, cleared his throat. He was a shy man, and had said very little at lunch.

"Except for the idea of spreading disease among the ISIS - dangerous in any case, since it would certainly be uncontrollable - I think all the other suggestions are remotely feasible, but slow and uncertain. I don't believe we have much time to deal with these fanatics. They want Armageddon, and will do anything to get it. And the sooner the better from their point of view."

"I take it you have an idea?" said Christopher.

Claude stood up.

"Josh mentioned the idea before. It may seem far-fetched..."

"Go ahead Claude. We have an hour or so before the fiesta starts."

Claude cleared his throat again.

"Josh, you were on the right track. I almost wondered if you had cottoned onto our secret project. In the late sixties we were working on a project called Pater One, Pater Two. It was controversial from the get-go, and though it was ready to go into operation, it was nixed by White House."

"Never even heard of it."

"That's no surprise. You saw the reaction over reducing population from our Chinese and Indian colleagues. And this was a radical attempt to do just that. We found a way to trigger premature ovulation."

"What's that got to do..."

"Let me finish, please. We could do this remotely from satellites in permanence. We could cover the whole globe with two satellites. The theory was to prevent pregnancy world-wide until population levels reach optimum. Then the electronic signals would be turned off. We saw it work locally."

"Locally? What does that mean?"

"We focused on an area normally registering high pregnancy statistics. In six months gestation was practically zero. I say practically because some newcomers to the target area arrived already pregnant."

"I can guess what sort of neighborhood was chosen for this experiment..."

Claude shrugged. "At the end of the six months, the signals were shut down, and conception returned to normal levels."

"Assuming this could be done from satellites, how does this help us right now?"

There were other murmurs of discontent, for other reasons. Who would control the satellites? Could only certain populations be targeted?

"Hold on. For those and other reasons the program was never put into operation. This was in 1968, when the world population was a little more than three billion, a third of what it is today. Now it would seem more urgent, but I think it would never be allowed. But that is not the point."

"The point being...?"

"About the same time, there was a lot of genetic speculation concerning the XYY deviation."

"Cytogenetics and phenotypes - inheriting criminal chromosomes," Philippa said. "That all turned out to be rubbish!"

"Yes. Mostly. Nevertheless we were looking for ways to detect abnormalities leading to violent behavior. Certain combinations inevitably led to what we called 'intolerance karyotypes.' You will remember there was talk back then of a 'God gene' also, which supposedly led to the necessity of religion in evolution. More rubbish, of course."

Lots of mumbling.

"That's also not the point. The point is my unit developed a way of zapping an entity's chromosomal makeup and delete what we wanted. In nature this happens in meitosis, and is called aneuploidy."

"You're suggesting we zap ISIS armies and delete a chromosome?"

"Or chromosomes. Something like that. But of course we need more than one marker. And it will be a combination of chromosomes we will need to identify. Once we have it, in a matter of weeks we could get to them. If we can have access to the Pater delivery system."

"Let's assume we can get what we need, one way or another. What's the first step?"

"I need a few human samples, to make karyotypes."

"You actually believe these guys will have something genetically in common?"

"Why not? Mostly Arabs. Generations of separation by religious dogma and interbreeding. Aberration, surely, making the 47,XY karyotype. If I can find the common denominator of these bloodthirsty folk, we can zap them. Of course, this would affect only future descendants. But there are other markers we would have to burn. The one that repairs damaged cells, billions every day." He paused. "There are, of course, risks involved."

"Risks?" Such as?"

"In the field we radiate, anyone with those characteristics will

have those chromosomes deleted. And that means most professional soldiers, no matter which side they are on.”

After a moment of stunned silence, they were all talking at once. This seemed like a viable solution, if such a system could in fact work.

“OK folks, listen up,” Greg shouted. “Today we take the train through the mountains of Mallorca to Soller. I told you yesterday a little of the history of the island, from the Romans to the expulsion of the Moors. What we will see today reflects a part of history common not only to the Mediterranean, but Great Britain as well.”

A few late-comers threw themselves into seats in the room dedicated to the BBC Lectures.

“Over the centuries Arabs from the Barbary Coast were disrupting shipping in the Med, stealing cargo, taking men, women and children as slaves. Algeria was the home of many a pirate.”

He looked at his notes. “In 1631 a whole village on the coast of Ireland was taken hostage by corsairs from Algiers and Ottoman troops.”

That caught their attention. “Didn't know about that, eh? It's not in your school textbooks.”

He flipped the page in front of him. “Another little-known fact: in 1803 American president Jefferson sent his marines to their

first overseas engagement - to Tripoli, against the pirates. History repeats itself, as they say."

This was Greg's last cruise for History Magazine, and he was very happy it brought him to the island he knew so well. For years he had come with Sue, the love of his life. This time he managed to get her aboard as his camera-woman. She had a radio show of her own, about Latin music. So they made a good combination. She could do her own voice recording of music and interviews in the various ports-of-call.

"That is all background for what we will see today." He stood up and headed for the door. "Now the bus is waiting to take us to the train station. Off we go."

Philippe finished blowing hair from the neck of a German tourist, and took a break. Today only a few customers wanted their hair cut. He stepped through the door separating his hair salon from his bar. He ordered a *pacharán* and, sipping at it, glanced at the hullabaloo starting in the street outside. Pistol shots into the air, sabers threatening tourists. Blackface Moors dressed like pirates painting stripes on the faces of northerners here for the fiesta. The whole world on the street was already half drunk from raiding the bars on the waterfront.

He watched the three o'clock news. Mostly politics, corruption in government in Andalusia, Palma, Valencia, and now in Madrid.

Headlines of further bombing in Syria. Both sides killing innocents. Philippe shook his head and looked away from the screen to signal his son to bring him another drink.

Then the head of national security came on to announce a change in the level of the terrorist threat.

"This alert is the highest level. We believe a major event will take place soon, perhaps within a week. The buzz is continuous in all the dataflow we are monitoring."

Philippe made a face. Always the same. Get everybody scared. *Keep the public mind off the degenerate political scene.*

"In my opinion, the fiesta is best seen from a distance," Ahmed Bey, the owner of the hotel told the group when they broke up to view the show unfolding below them. "Down there will be bedlam. Everybody is on a major binge. You are welcome to watch with me from the roof terrace."

Most of his colleagues headed for the bar, taking drinks with them to the elevator to the roof, but Christopher said "Thanks. But Richard and I will go down and get into the thick of it."

"This is one of the most emblematic of Spanish fiestas," Greg told his group. "All over the country there are celebrations

commemorating the various defeats of marauding pirates from the Barbary Coast and Turkey. Here in Soller the last was in 1561.”

He opened a brochure picked up from the tourist office and read to his listeners.

During the amazing festival “Es Firó”, the inhabitants of Sóller and Port de Sóller re-enact the invasion of the Turkish and Algerian fleets of pirates and their successful defeat. Held with great passion, this colorful and realistic festival celebrates Sollerics’ cultural heritage while they dress up as both the invaders and the locals, in traditional costumes of the period (1561). Every year, two young girls play the role of ‘Courageous Women’ “Valentes Dones”, who defended themselves from two Turkish pirates during the invasion. Moreover, several historic episodes that recall the bloody fights between the Moors and the Christians take place at specific locations in and around Sóller, those locations gaining a rising importance in the development of the festival. In the afternoon, people gather at the Port to witness an exciting battle between the two sides in which Turkish pirates keep on landing in shore and peasant women arrive from the town in order to help the rest of the population defend their homes. In the meanwhile, shotguns fire and wooden swords and small stone catapults are used. In the evening (in Sóller’s main square) there takes place the final showdown where the invaders are

eventually defeated, songs are sung and the festival ends with an incredible display of fireworks."

He replaced the brochure in his pocket and gestured toward a street climbing up to the right from sea level. "I suggest each of you find a bar you like up that way with a good view of the action. I myself will be making a video with my colleague here. You will all receive a copy of the video compliments of the BBC History Magazine, who sponsor this cruise in the Balearics. We'll meet in front of the *Restaurante El Pirata* at, say," he looked at his watch, "seven thirty. Enjoy."

After the brigantine hoisted sails, she withdrew a little to set a beeline for the narrow entrance and plunged into the harbor on a following wind. She hugged the breakwater under the Port Authority until arriving at the berths for luxury yachts anchored in the bay.

The ship swept along the quays, incendiary grenades exploding on the decks of the pleasure craft, their astonished owners dropping their gin and tonics and jumping overboard. Two lighters drew up alongside the ship. Fifteen or twenty sailors lowered themselves into each of them. Upon reaching the sandy beach, the men spread out, brandishing swords and automatic rifles.

The Mallorcans on shore, in their drunkenness still unaware of what was happening, swept down to engage them in mock battle, firing

muskets into the air. Only when a number of Christians dropped to the sand and remained there did those close by begin to panic.

A general rout spread from the landing left and right along the promenade.

Philippe looked at his watch. A few minutes until Jenny came by for her tint job. He threw the rest of the *pacharán* down his throat and stood up. Still time to have a pee. He went into the back of the bar, entered the toilet, closed the door behind him. The light came on.

Muffled by the closed door he heard more shouting and shooting. He washed his hands and checked his receding hairline, strange when you think about it, since he spent his working days in front of the mirror as he cut and trimmed his customers.

He let himself out of the restroom, ready to cut some hair.

Jenny was already in the chair. Looked like she was asleep. Then in the mirror he saw the top of her head. She had suddenly become a redhead, with a deep part down the middle.

Ducking back into the bar, he yelled for his son. But he wouldn't answer. He was face down behind the bar, a pool of blood spreading under his head.

"Okay Sue, you want me to lug the rig and you just read the action into the mike?"

"Thanks, but you're the motor mouth. Keep talking. If I get tired, I'll hand it over."

"Tough lady." He spread his hands in typical BBC fashion. "Show me the red light? Okay." He started his spiel. "Here we are in the Port of Soller on Mallorca. The traditional *fiesta* celebrating the repulsion of the Turks." He waved an arm toward the sea. "Out there you can see the brigantine with black sails bringing sailors dressed as Turks and Alkgerian pirates..." He stopped in mid-sentence. "Whoa! Looks like they're burning boats behind them."

Sue held the camera on the ship pressing too close to the moorings along the pier.

"Are you getting this, Sue?" "I'm getting it. Let go of my rig! This one is mine."

From the deck of the ship, a Sidewinder missile rose above the Port and zeroed in on the hotel. "Allah akbar!" shouted the captain. "Death to Saudi infidels!"

"Omigod! Get that on camera. Looks like a missile." She whirled around pointing the zoom at the ship. Out of focus, coming for her, was a man in a black headscarf carrying a machine

pistol. Two quick bursts and she dropped to the wharf next to Greg, camera still whirring by her ear.

Christopher and Richard were about halfway along the long downhill slope. The sounds of gunfire and shouts carried up to them. All along the circular bay front the festivities were in full swing.

“Play-acting violence is a favorite pastime these days,” said Christopher. “Why do you reckon that is so?”

“You got me, Chris. But you're right. Ghouls, vampires, zombies—bloodthirsty times. That's for sure. Last Halloween I walked into a restaurant in Cincinnati and all the waiters were covered in blood dressed in what seemed to be rotting clothes. Disgusting.”

“Maybe horror stories are preparing us for something. Or desensitizing us so we can put up with the constant deadly conflicts.”

“No, I think even bombed hospitals to a lot of people are just part of what they see as televised games. Though sometimes I think the games kids play nowadays are preparing them for the battle verging upon us.”

“Probably even the ghastly murders by ISIS are seen as a form of gross entertainment?”

“ISIS is definitely winning the propaganda war. Everything the

West does seem more terrible than what they do. At least in terms of body count.”

“Stoning people to death kind of titillates a certain part of the population. Like public hangings not so long ago. And films of the electric chair, not all that long ago. Remember *The Green Mile*?”

“Yeah, I remember. A masochistic guard, a southern hick, if I recall correctly. I think you're right. Look at all the recruits from around the world, anxious to get into the fray and whack off a few heads.”

“ISIS is definitely winning the propaganda war. No doubt about it. When the news announces their latest outrage, more recruits fly in. They all want in on the gore while the party lasts.”

At that moment the trail of the sidewinder missile rose above the roofline where they were walking. They both stopped in their tracks.

“Is that what I think it is?” asked Christopher.

“Jesus! Looks like a Tomahawk or Sidewinder. Haven't seen one of those since Kuwait.”

Christopher had his phone out dialing a colleague in the hotel.

“Get everybody out of the hotel! Now!”

The phone at the other end went silent. A second later, the sound of the explosion reached them on the street. Then they were running downhill. When they came to an opening after the last house

along the street, they saw two more rockets lifting, headed toward hotels at the other side. Mayhem on the promenade. At Philippe's shop a street led away from the sea.

They turned there and left the sounds of battle behind.

"I think we better hit for the hinterland," said Christopher.

They reached a path heading into the woods behind the port.

Out of breath, driven only by adrenaline, they kept going until only columns of smoke were visible behind them.

"Looks like the Christians will lose this round," he said, pausing for breath near a stone tower left from the days when pirates were always a threat.

"Not funny," said Christopher.

"Not joking."

Their backs to the open sea far below them, they watched the hotel burning, a few people straggling from the building.

"Big mistake," muttered Christopher.

"Which one?"

"Getting so many brights together in the same place. All that talent and brilliance blown away. A new Holocaust is taking place."

"Now what?"

Christopher looked out over the sea. The sun sat on the horizon, flattened into an incandescent oval and sank slowly from sight. The clouds took flame. The indifferent heavens blazed as lovely as ever,

burnishing the sea with a fiery path which seemingly led to two men standing on the precipice.

"Well, you know that diatribe against predictability 'The Black Swan' I'm sure?"

"The Nassim Taleb book? Of course." "Rare events are not computable..."

"Rings a bell."

"This is a rare event, right?"

"You bet. And no one would have predicted it." "Even less can we predict the effect..."

"So..."

"It may seem hard-hearted..." Christopher looked back at the black column of smoke where the hotel moments before had stood. "I suggest we climb up to the old tower there and watch the helicopters arrive. The army won't be far behind. Should be quite a show. International news agencies are going to love it."

"If anybody gets it on camera."

"There's always somebody to get it nowadays, including ISIS, if that's who this is?"

Richard glanced sideways at Christopher. "If not ISIS, who?" A shrug was all the answer he got.

The clattering invented by Sikorsky filled the enclosed valley. Like gigantic dragonflies the copters leaned in toward the

brigantine. Black sails bloomed in red flames, rockets flared up in response, taking down one of the copters.

Already somebody somewhere was calculating where the next big tourist destination would be.

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(13 Nov 2015)