

Robert Judlum



The Icarus Agenda

**ROBERT
LUDLUM**

**THE
ICARUS
AGENDA**



RANDOM HOUSE NEW YORK

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The Aquitaine Progression

The Parsifal Mosaic

The Bourne Identity

The Matarese Circle

The Gemini Contenders

The Holcroft Covenant

The Chancellor Manuscript

The Road to Gandolfo

The Rhinemann Exchange

The Matlock Paper

The Osterman Weekend

The Scarlatti Inheritance

For James Robert Ludlum

Welcome, friend

Have a great life

PREFACE

The silhouetted figure in the doorway rushed into the windowless room. He closed the door and quickly made his way in the dark across the black vinyl floor to the brass table lamp on his left. He switched on the light, the low-wattage bulb creating shadows throughout the confined, paneled study. The room was small and confining but not without ornamentation. The objets d'art, however, were neither from antiquity nor from the progressive stages of historical artistry. Instead, they represented the most contemporary equipment of high technology.

The right wall glistened with the reflection of stainless steel, and the quiet whir of a dust-inhibiting, dust-removing air-conditioning unit ensured pristine cleanliness. The owner and sole occupant of this room crossed to a chair in front of a computer-driven word processor and sat down. He turned on a switch; the screen came alive and he typed in a code. Instantly, the bright green letters responded:

**Ultra Maximum Secure
No Existing Intercepts
Proceed**

The figure hunched over the keyboard, his anxiety at fever pitch, and proceeded to enter his data.

I start this journal now, for the events that follow I believe will alter the course of a nation. A man has come from seemingly nowhere, like an artless messiah without an inkling of his calling or his destiny. He is marked for things beyond his understanding, and if my projections are accurate, this will be a record of his journey. . . . I can only imagine how it began, but I know it began in chaos.

BOOK ONE

Masqat, Oman. Southwest Asia
Tuesday, August 10, 6:30 P.M.

The angry waters of the Oman Gulf were a prelude to the storm racing down through the Strait of Hormuz into the Arabian Sea. It was sundown, marked by the strident prayers nasally intoned by bearded muezzins in the minarets of the port city's mosques. The sky was darkening under the black thunderheads that swirled ominously across the lesser darkness of evening like roving behemoths. Blankets of heat lightning sporadically fired the eastern horizon over the Makran Mountains of Turbat, two hundred miles across the sea in Pakistan. To the north, beyond the borders of Afghanistan, a senseless, brutal war continued. To the west an even more senseless war raged, fought by children led to their deaths by the diseased madman in Iran intent on spreading his malignancy. And to the south there was Lebanon, where men killed without compunction, each faction with religious fervor calling the others terrorists when all—without exception—indulged in barbaric terrorism.

The Middle East, especially Southwest Asia, was on fire, and where the fires had previously been repelled, it was no longer. As the waters of the Gulf of Oman furiously churned this early evening and the skies promised a sweep of ravage, the streets of Masqat, the capital of the Sultanate of Oman, matched the approaching storm. The prayers over, the crowds again converged with flaming torches, streaming out of side streets and alleyways, a column of hysterical protest, the target the floodlit iron gates

of the American embassy. The façade of pink stucco beyond was patrolled by scruffy long-haired children awkwardly gripping automatic weapons. The trigger meant death, but in their wild-eyed zealotry they could not make the connection with that finality, for they were told there was no such thing as death, no matter what their eyes might tell them. The rewards of martyrdom were everything, the more painful the sacrifice, the more glorious the martyr—the pain of their enemies meant nothing. Blindness! *Madness!*

It was the twenty-second day of this insanity, twenty-one days since the civilized world had been forced once again to accept the dreary fact of incoherent fury. Masqat's fanatical ground swell had burst from nowhere and now was suddenly everywhere, and no one knew why. No one, except the analysts of the darker arts of brushfire insurrections, those men and women who spent their days and nights probing, dissecting, finally perceiving the roots of orchestrated revolt. For the key was "orchestrated." Who? Why? What do they really want and how do we stop them?

Facts: Two hundred forty-seven Americans had been rounded up under guns and taken hostage. Eleven had been killed, their corpses thrown out of the embassy windows, each body accompanied by shattering glass, each death via a different window. Someone had told these children how to emphasize each execution with a jolting surprise. Wagers were excitedly made beyond the iron gates by shrieking maniacal bettors mesmerized by blood. Which window was next? Would the corpse be a man or a woman? How much is your judgment *worth?* How *much?* *Bet!*

Above on the open roof was the luxurious embassy pool behind an Arabic latticework not meant for protection against bullets. It was around that pool that the hostages knelt in rows as wandering groups of killers aimed machine pistols at their heads. Two hundred thirty-six frightened, exhausted Americans awaiting execution.

Madness!

Decisions: Despite well-intentioned Israeli offers, keep them out! This was not Entebbe, and all their expertise notwithstanding, the blood Israel had shed in Lebanon would, in Arab eyes, label any attempt an abomination: the United States had financed terrorists to fight terrorists. Unacceptable. A rapid deployment strike force? Who could scale four stories or drop down from helicopters to the roof and stop the executions when the executioners were only too willing to die as martyrs? A naval blockade with a battalion of marines prepared for an invasion of Oman? Beyond a show of overpowering might, to what purpose? The sultan and his ruling ministers were the last people on earth who wanted this violence at the embassy. The peacefully oriented Royal Police tried to contain the hys-

teria, but they were no match for the roving wild bands of agitators. Years of quiescence in the city had not prepared them for such chaos; and to recall the Royal Military from the Yemenite borders could lead to unthinkable problems. The armed forces patrolling that festering sanctuary for international killers were as savage as their enemies. Beyond the inevitable fact that with their return to the capital the borders would collapse in carnage, blood would surely flow through the streets of Masqat and the gutters choke with the innocent and the guilty.

Checkmate.

Solutions: Give in to the stated demands? Impossible, and well understood by those responsible though not by their puppets, the children who believed what they chanted, what they screamed. There was no way governments throughout Europe and the Middle East would release over eight thousand terrorists from such organizations as the Brigade Rosse and the PLO, the Baader-Meinhof and the IRA, and scores of their squabbling, sordid offspring. Continue to tolerate the endless coverage, the probing cameras and reams of copy that riveted the world's attention on the publicity-hungry fanatics? Why not? The constant exposure, no doubt, kept additional hostages from being killed, since the executions had been "temporarily suspended" so that the "oppressor nations" could ponder their choices. To end the news coverage would only inflame the wild-eyed seekers of martyrdom. Silence would create the need for shock. Shock was newsworthy and killing was the ultimate shock.

Who?

What?

How?

Who . . . ? That was the essential question whose answer would lead to a solution—a solution that had to be found within five days. The executions had been suspended for a week, and two days had passed, frantically chewed up as the most knowledgeable leaders of the intelligence services from six nations gathered in London. All had arrived on supersonic aircraft within hours of the decision to pool resources, for each knew its own embassy might be next. Somewhere. They had worked without rest for forty-eight hours. Results: Oman remained an enigma. It had been considered a rock of stability in Southwest Asia, a sultanate with educated, enlightened leadership as close to representative government as a divine family of Islam could permit. The rulers were from a privileged household that apparently respected what Allah had given them—not merely as a birthright, but as a responsibility in the last half of the twentieth century.

Conclusions: The insurrection had been externally programmed. No

more than twenty of the two-hundred-odd unkempt, shrieking youngsters had been specifically identified as Omanis. Therefore, covert-operations officers with sources in every extremist faction in the Mediterranean-Arabian axis went instantly to work, pulling in contacts, bribing, threatening.

"Who *are* they, Aziz? There's only a spitful from Oman, and most of those are considered retarded. Come on, Aziz. Live like a sultan. Name an outrageous price. *Try me!*"

"Six seconds, Mahmet! Six seconds and your right hand is on the floor without a *wrist!* Next goes your left. We're on countdown, *thief.* Give me the information!" *Six, five, four . . . Blood.*

Nothing. Zero. *Madness.*

And then a breakthrough. It came from an ancient muezzin, a holy man whose words and memory were as shaky as his gaunt frame might be in the winds now racing down from Hormuz.

"Do not look where you would logically expect to look. Search elsewhere."

"Where?"

"Where grievances are not born of poverty or abandonment. Where Allah has bestowed favor in this world, although perhaps not in the after one."

"Be clearer, please, most revered muezzin."

"Allah does not will such clarification—His will be done. Perhaps He does not take sides—so be it."

"But surely you must have a *reason* for saying what you're saying!"

"As Allah has given me that reason—His will be done."

"How's that again?"

"Quiet rumors heard in the corners of the mosque. Whispers these old ears were meant to hear. I hear so little I should not have heard them had Allah not willed it so."

"There must be more!"

"The whispers speak of those who will benefit from the bloodshed."

"Who?"

"No names are spoken of, no men of consequence mentioned."

"Any group or organization? *Please!* A sect, a country, a *people?* The Shiites, the Saudis . . . Iraqi, Irani . . . the *Soviets?*"

"No. Neither believers nor unbelievers are talked of, only 'they.'"

"*They?*"

"That is what I hear whispered in the dark corners of the mosque, what Allah wants me to hear—may His will be done. Only the word 'they'."

"Can you identify any of those you *heard?*"

“I am nearly blind, and there is always very little light when these few among so many worshipers speak. I can identify no one. I only know that I must convey what I hear, for it is the will of Allah.”

“Why, *muezzin murderris*? Why is it Allah’s will?”

“The bloodshed must stop. The Koran says that when blood is spilled and justified by impassioned youth, the passions must be examined, for youth—”

“*Forget* it! We’ll send a couple of men back into the mosque with you. Signal us when you hear something!”

“In a month, *ya Shaikh*. I am about to undertake my final pilgrimage to Mecca. You are merely part of my journey. It is the will of—”

“*Goddamnit!*”

“It is your God, *ya Shaikh*. Not mine. Not ours.”

Washington, D.C.

Wednesday, August 11, 11:50 A.M.

The noonday sun beat down on the capital's pavement; the midsummer's air was still with the oppressive heat. Pedestrians walked with uncomfortable determination, men's collars open, ties loosened. Briefcases and purses hung like deadweights while their owners stood impassively at intersections waiting for the lights to change. Although scores of men and women—by and large servants of the government and therefore of the people—may have had urgent matters on their minds, urgency was difficult to summon in the streets. A torpid blanket had descended over the city, numbing those who ventured outside beyond air-conditioned rooms and offices and automobiles.

A traffic accident had taken place at the corner of Twenty-third Street and Virginia Avenue. It was not major in terms of damage or injury, but it was far from minor where tempers were concerned. A taxi had collided with a government limousine emerging from an underground parking ramp of the State Department. Both drivers—righteous, hot, and fearing their superiors—stood by their vehicles accusing each other, yelling in the blistering heat while awaiting the police who had been summoned by a passing government employee. Within moments the traffic was congested; horns blared and angry shouts came from reluctantly opened windows.

The passenger in the cab climbed impatiently out of the backseat. He

was a tall, slender man in his early forties, and seemed out of place in surroundings that included summer suits and neat print dresses and attaché cases. He wore a pair of rumpled khaki trousers, boots and a soiled cotton safari jacket that took the place of a shirt. The effect was that of a man who did not belong in the city, a professional guide, perhaps, who had strayed out of the higher and wilder mountains. Yet his face belied his clothes. It was clean-shaven, his features sharp and clearly defined, his light blue eyes aware, squinting, darting about and assessing the situation as he made his decision. He put his hand on the argumentative driver's shoulder; the man whipped around and the passenger gave him two twenty-dollar bills.

"I have to leave," said the fare.

"Hey, come *on*, mister! You *saw*! That son of a bitch pulled out with no horn, no *nothin*!"

"I'm sorry. I wouldn't be able to help you. I didn't see or hear anything until the collision."

"*Oh*, boy! Big John Q! He don't see and he don't hear! Don't get *involved*, huh?"

"I'm involved," replied the passenger quietly, taking a third twenty-dollar bill and shoving it into the driver's top jacket pocket. "But not here."

The oddly dressed man dodged through the gathering crowd and started down the block toward Third Street—toward the imposing glass doors of the State Department. He was the only person running on the pavement.

The designated situation room in the underground complex at the Department of State was labeled *OHIO-Four-Zero*. Translated, it meant "Oman, maximum alert." Beyond the metal door rows of computers clacked incessantly, and every now and then a machine—having instantaneously cross-checked with the central data bank—emitted a short high-pitched signal announcing new or previously unreported information. Intense men and women studied the printouts, trying to evaluate what they read.

Nothing. Zero. *Madness!*

Inside that large, energized room was another metal door, smaller than the entrance and with no access to the corridor. It was the office of the senior official in charge of the Masqat crisis; at arm's length was a telephone console with links to every seat of power and every source of information in Washington. The current proprietor was a middle-aged

deputy director of Consular Operations, the State Department's little-known arm of covert activities. His name was Frank Swann, and at the moment—a high noon that held no sunlight for him—his head with its prematurely gray hair lay on his folded arms on the top of the desk. He had not had a night's sleep in nearly a week, making do with only such naps as this one.

The console's sharp hum jarred him awake; his right hand shot out. He punched the lighted button and picked up the phone. "Yes? . . . What is it?" Swann shook his head and swallowed air, only partially relieved that the caller was his secretary five stories above. He listened, then spoke wearily. "Who? Congressman—a *congressman*? The last thing I need is a congressman. How the hell did he get *my* name? . . . Never mind, spare me. Tell him I'm in conference—with God, if you like—or go one better and say with the secretary."

"I've prepared him for something like that. It's why I'm calling from your office. I told him I could only reach you on this phone."

Swann blinked. "That's going some distance for my Praetorian Guard, Ivy-the-terrible. Why so far, Ivy?"

"It's what he said, Frank. And also what I had to write down because I couldn't understand him."

"Let's have both."

"He said his business concerned the problem you're involved with—"

"Nobody *knows* what I'm— Forget it. What else?"

"I wrote it down phonetically. He asked me to say the following: '*Ma epham zain*.' Does that make any sense to you, Frank?"

Stunned, Deputy Director Swann again shook his head, trying to clear his mind further, but needing no further clearance for the visitor five floors above. The unknown congressman had just implied in Arabic that he might be of help. "Get a guard and send him down here," Swann said.

Seven minutes later the door of the office in the underground complex was opened by a marine sergeant. The visitor walked in, nodding to his escort as the guard closed the door. Swann rose from his desk apprehensively. The "congressman" hardly lived up to the image of any member of the House of Representatives he had ever seen—at least in Washington. He was dressed in boots and khakis and a summer hunting jacket that had taken too much abuse from the spattering of campfire frying pans. Was he an ill-timed joke?

"Congressman—?" said the deputy director, his voice trailing off for want of a name as he extended his hand.

"Evan Kendrick, Mr. Swann," replied the visitor, approaching the desk