

Chapter 1

Mumbai, India

Weave, dodge, weave, dodge and dodge again.

Have to keep Khan in sight. He seems to be in a hurry to meet his god.

Faith has always been a big deal to the people of India. There are literally hundreds of places of worship dotted all over the city that proves it. Evidence of this belief even extended to miniature temples proudly displayed on dashboards. Cars and trucks are adorned with colourful trimmings to ward off the evil eye, in much the same way that babies and women wore their black beads.

Talking about temples and prayers, I was following an Indian national named Hafiz Khan through the Friday midday crowd, in the Muslim-Quarter of Mumbai. He was part of a sea of white-clothed men who made their way to various city mosques. Predominantly a population of practising Hindus, the city also had a significant Muslim population.

My contact provided a picture of a male, medium height, thin, dark hair, dark skin and dark eyes. Those few scratchy details described just about the entire Indian male population. We also knew he prayed five times a day at a local mosque and dealt in cell phones. The last two bits of information were more useful.

One of the first things that struck me about the city was the smell. Spices, fried foods and open drains assaulted the senses at every turn. Immediately thereafter, you were overcome by the constant movement of people and cars in a symphony that played itself out 'till three in the morning.

Like many other nations, Indians loved to chat. There were seventeen cell phone service providers in Mumbai alone, with myriad talk deals and offers for the bewildered customer. Now imagine the number of retail outlets in Mumbai. Several thousand, I guessed. Patience wasn't one of my best virtues. Besides, staying in India longer than required was suicide for a *pardesi* like me. Temperatures in the forties and close to 100% humidity levels at times were big asks for a foreigner.

I kept my eye on him as he weaved his way down Sardar Vallabhai Patel Road. We battled through throngs of pedestrians in an area known as Chor Bazaar, part of a large and depressing area called Donghri in Mumbai. Formerly the market dealt in stolen merchandise, hence the name ‘*Chor*’, a common name for a thief. Nowadays, it was a market for second-hand goods. The pavements were lined with little stalls selling anything and everything from kitchenware to clothing and toiletries. At fifty-yard intervals, there was a roadside food vendor frying potato *wadas* and an assortment of spicy delicacies. My father always said that, if you had one rupee in your pocket in India, you would never go hungry. The buildings were old and grimy, many of them at least two storeys high. They housed the more formal traders of books, perfumes and electronics.

Khan sported a *kurta* suit – traditional wear for the Friday congregational prayer. The garment was perfect for blending in the busy market place. We made a right turn into Mohammed Ali Road. His gait was smooth and sure, like one who knew exactly where he was going. He kept his head down much of the time. He must have had a lot on his mind.

His determined step was broken when he stopped at a perfume shop, otherwise known as an *attarwala*. There was practically one on every corner. The pure oils of perfume were extracted from flowers and fruit. Western perfume manufacturers blended these oils with alcohols. Due to religious inclination, someone like Khan would never have applied the Western ones with its forbidden alcohol content. He complied strictly with the prophet’s tradition, and only applied the pure oil. For believers like him, that which was considered optional became compulsory. Hard core stuff. Satisfied with his last grooming rite, he was on the move again.

There were a number of mosques in the area, each of which was packed to capacity. From a surveillance point of view, following him was easy with thousands of people around us. Unfortunately, the crowds made it difficult to carry out a quick one on one of ‘how’s your mother’. *Jumah* prayers were usually held between 12:30pm and 1:30pm in most parts of the world. Mumbai was slightly different. Here, mosques held prayers at differing intervals to accommodate the business opening and closing times. Some say it’s due to the sheer number of people, but it was also the Indian way. Business was always more important.

Khan moved like someone on a mission through the dense crowds. Every few moments, he glanced back as if checking for tails. Was it nerves, or a measure of awareness like someone trained would do? We passed the Taj Office Book Depot in Masjid Bandar, opposite the Minara

Mosque. Unlike the name implied, the *Masjid Bandar* railway area was not named after a mosque. Instead, it originated from the Gate of Mercy Synagogue, established due to the efforts of two Jewish British East India army officers after the Anglo Mysore Wars. Tippu Sultan had spared their lives after capture because they were from the *Bani Israel*. Informed by his educated wife that the people of Israel were mentioned in the Holy Book, the Sultan feared a backlash from his Lord if he executed the men.

In Mumbai, hot and steamy was par for the course on any given day. A white linen shirt and cotton khaki trousers with leather sandals was as much covering as I could manage in the oppressive heat. Not the best footwear for sudden pursuit, but staying in character was critical. I tanned easily and, after a few days in Mumbai, my skin had acquired a healthy olive complexion. Over the last while, I had cultivated a thin beard that wasn't out of place with the crowd making its way to the mosque.

Khan was probably no amateur, but I was pretty certain he wouldn't spot me. But you never knew, right? Some guys had a natural feel for this stuff and could smell a tail a mile away. Why was I following this guy again? Information from my contact said he supplied his buddies in Pakistan with intelligence on the ground in Mumbai. His other speciality was engineering cell phones as bomb detonators. As part of his cover, he operated a cell phone shop. You must have seen these Pakistani-owned cell phone shops in London, New York or even Johannesburg, for that matter. Now, the definition of a shop in Mumbai was a lot different to that in London. Here, it was as small as one square metre on a pavement.

He entered the *Jama Masjid* in Sheikh Memon Street. The mosque was built by the *Kokanis* more than two hundred years ago over a massive water tank ten feet deep. At the front gates, one could see scores of young college students shaking hands and wishing each other *Jumah Mubarak*. Khan slipped off his *chapals* and placed it in a plastic bag, just like they did in Mecca and Medina. The Mumbai locals normally dumped theirs outside the doorway. They all looked alike, the *chapals*, that is. How they knew which *chapals* belonged to who was a mystery. Maybe there's a tacit understanding that you take a pair that fits and off you go.

He moved along a long queue to the ablutions area and started with his *wudu*. I followed suit and managed to obtain a spot out of his line of vision. I watched him all the way as I completed the compulsory ablutions prior to prayers. The cleaning was meant to be both physical and spiritual, with supplications made as each body part was washed. Without drying himself, he

proceeded to the main prayer area. This fellow was a real believer, didn't even use a towel, just like the prophet himself.

The Friday midday prayer differed from the other five daily prayers. It was an obligatory communal prayer preceded by a sermon by the *moulana*. On the Indian subcontinent, this was the equivalent of the Arabic '*sheikh*'. Khan made his way to the first *saf*. This front row was normally occupied by regulars, elder faithful and the community's learned men. Not a place where you would find regular old cell phone guys. Something was up.

Khan performed his two units of voluntary prayers prescribed when entering a mosque. The mosque itself was packed, so it was no mean feat to get to the first *saf*. The *moulana* stepped up to the mic wearing the usual long white *thoub* and a fez. He spoke in Urdu, the language of many of India's Muslims. It also indicated he was a man of higher learning.

From two *safs* behind, I saw the appointed collectors get up, each taking one end of a towel and moving down the first row, urging the faithful to donate to the mosque, the imam, roof repairs and the plight of the Palestinians. Khan slipped his hand into his pocket, took out 50 rupees and popped it into the towel. The collectors carried on and the *moulana's* voice rose as he spoke with passion of the contentious Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, one side of which was the Wailing Wall revered by Jews. His talk focussed on Benjamin Netanyahu, who wanted to build more houses for the settlers whilst bulldozing the homes of the Palestinians.

Khan paid no attention to the lecture; instead, he was focussed on a bearded gentleman at the end of the first row. There was nothing gentle in the man's appearance. Even sitting down, one could tell he was big, probably about 250 pounds. Big for an Indian. Most of them were vegetarian in keeping within the constraints of their faith. It took a lot of food to feed a billion people. Looking at it from that angle, this fellow was very well fed.

It was only when he completed his donation that Khan faced forward to the speaker. There were two interesting things to note. One was the big man, and two, the collection towel. The fact that Khan watched so intently made it noteworthy. I wrote that down on my mental notepad and continued with my surveillance. Proceedings carried on without incident and, after the main prayers, Khan made the additional voluntary prayers. Thereafter, he sat supplicating for a short while before getting up and making his way to the exit with his shoe bag. He left the mosque without speaking to anybody, unlike most other people, for whom there was a social aspect to the day. He appeared in a big rush to get to his destination.

My guess was that I'd now seen the inside of a mosque much more than that of a church. I had never been much of a religious type, but, to keep my cover intact, I had to find God. Khan left the mosque, slipped into the crowds and moved at a brisk pace again. I was more than a bit concerned. Had he spotted me? Perhaps I got too close to him in the mosque. Maybe he was just rushing to get lunch. The crowds were so dense I thought I had lost him. For almost two minutes, there was no sign of the man. I picked him up again in Vithalbhai Patel Road near the Charni Station as he left a roadside food vendor selling chicken lollipops and *dosas*. A man has to eat.

Patience was very important in order to conduct good surveillance. He ate as he walked, making my tummy grumble as I followed him. We passed several blocks before he ducked into a side road and entered the Mumbai Mobile store. A municipality sign identified the area as *Girgaum*.

Too many people to wait and get this guy in a quiet alley.

After the store opened, customers swarmed in wanting prepaid airtime. Some waved their hands holding faulty cell phones. Everyone shouted at the same time and there was no queuing system despite a sign on the wall requesting it. It was absolute chaos, but, again, also to my advantage. Each customer received a number tag. A sticker with the same number was pasted on the back of your cell phone. No questions, no names. Perfect.

I crouched a bit lower to make myself appear shorter, making sure that I was not a perceived threat. I was confident nobody would recall my face in the event of an incident. Not only had I found Khan, but his base of operations too.

Chapter 2

Eating before an operation didn't work for me. Hunger focussed the mind and kept that edge going. Now that it was all over, I was ravenous. A taxi stopped for me at a crossing, the driver keen for a fare. I jumped into the little black Tata with the yellow top. There were literally thousands of them in Mumbai and you could travel with ease if you knew the language.

“Shalimar Hotel, *jaldi karo*,” I directed him to make it snappy to the restaurant.

They made a great chilli garlic prawn dish accompanied by a Ferrero Rocher ice cream dessert. I ate my meal slowly, savouring every bite, and washed it all down with a mango *lassi* to counter the potency of the chillies. As usual, I got myself a table facing the door, providing an open line of sight to check for any watchers.

Awareness was a lifesaver.

I powered on my handset and sent my contact an email of visual confirmation of the target. My part of the deal was done. They knew where to get hold of the target. It was a practice of mine to have my cell phone on for only short periods. We've all seen enough movies to know Big Brother was always watching. They could track you by GPS triangulation, CCTV cameras and plain old human assets. I definitely couldn't afford to be found. Big Brother carried a big stick.

With my hunger satisfied, it felt like time to satisfy another desire. Exposure to danger often heightened your sexual senses, but the risk of transmitted diseases somehow dimmed that appetite. I left the restaurant and went past the Regal Cinema near the Gateway of India, opposite the Prince of Wales Museum. There were large life-size posters of a movie called *Don*, starring the great Shah Rukh Khan. SRK, as he was affectionately known, was a master actor in the mould of the evergreen Amitabh Bachan. The movie about Mumbai's underworld was a glossy remake of a prior era epic and thrust the nation's attention onto that seedy underbelly of life in the big city.

A shapely brunette in a short skirt sashayed by, testing my resistance to a quickie in a no-name hotel. I checked my phone again for any follow-up messages. There were three from within the hour, all telling me to proceed to target location and terminate with extreme prejudice. *Bloody hell.*

I acknowledged the instruction. It wasn't necessary to request extra payment. My contact valued his life.

Things had taken an ugly turn.

It was nearing closing time back in London, but, in Mumbai, things worked differently. Most businesses opened between 9 and 10am and close at about 9pm. I flagged down a taxi and took double the time to get there than when I had left. I could never get used to the traffic. The road had five lanes, officially three, with cars and minibuses moving in all directions. How these drivers managed, one wondered, but then I thought back to the *chapals* arrangement at the mosque. There seemed to be a tacit understanding with the drivers too. When one wanted to turn, all he did was hoot and flick his headlights. The other driver would see this and allow him to pass and so on and so on.

Back in Girgaum, I asked the driver to drop me at the Charni Station in Maharishi Karve Road. No sense in letting him know exactly where I wanted to be. It was better to walk the rest of the way than to have the taxi-driver remember letting you off at the scene of tomorrow's main news.

There was a small pharmacy opposite the station. The latest instruction went straight to my head. I had a booming headache brought on by this new twist in events. The bloody stress would kill me sooner than an assassin's bullet. I bought some pills and popped them right there in the pharmacy.

According to my contact, Khan was a really bad apple. Besides supplying detonators to the local terror market, he got involved in the logistics of operations. Like an artist, he was particular about placement and concealment of the explosive device. He was also reportedly a five-times-a-day *namazi*. 'So the guy liked to pray, what's wrong with that, you ask? Apparently, he was a member of the Indian Crescent Movement, a local welfare organisation. As far as the government was concerned, they were terrorists, despite their clean audited financial statements. Records showed that cell phones had been used as detonators in a number of recent bombings. Khan was a problem that needed fixing.

Finding this guy wasn't as hard as I thought it would be. That in itself was a possible cause for concern. Or maybe I was rationalising this too much. Somewhere in my head, there was a little twitch at that thought. Part of the search was getting inside the guy's head and finding out how he would react in a given situation. During my surveillance, nothing sinister or strange had

pinged for me. There was no point in dwelling on the rights and wrongs of the matter now. I had spent the last three months travelling and my discretionary funds were running low.

When I entered the shop, there was one customer in the process of completing his transaction. At approximately twenty square metres in size, the place wasn't big. Glass display cabinets containing the latest handsets were laid out in an L-shape. Samsung had the largest display, followed by Blackberry and Nokia. I turned away, checking some used handsets so the customer couldn't see my face as he left. Khan was now the only one in the shop with me.

If it feels right, then its right, my dad always said.

"What I do for you, Sir; you have ticket?" he asked in broken English, assuming I was a foreigner. Sharp guy.

"I lost my ticket; I was here last week with a Nokia N8. I had a problem with the software."

"You must have ticket, Sir, but okay, I check for you; one minute, please."

He made his way to the back office. Like in many other shops, Bollywood music blared from the speakers, so he didn't hear me slip behind the counter and follow him into the repairs area of the shop. He had his back to me, checking through a box of phones. I closed the space between us and he must have heard some sound, as he quickly turned with a look of surprise on his face. With one hand, I clamped his mouth and, with the other arm, I gained a tight grip around his neck. I placed my left leg around his, locking it in place. Having released the clamp over his mouth, I applied massive pressure to his neck, twisting his head to the right.

"I am only going to ask you once, Khan."

His eyes widened in terror when he heard his name.

"Three things. Listen carefully. What did you put into the towel at the mosque? Who are you working for? Where is the next bomb going off?"

None of those questions were required to be answered. All it did was focus his mind and cause confusion at the same time. It also forced him to ask himself some questions.

Who is this? Why me? What is going on?

"Yes, mate, I know your name and you better speak up, old man. Come on now, we don't have time for a cup of tea."

He struggled to loosen my grip on his neck, so I allowed him some slack to speak.

"I know nothing, *sahib*, I know nothing," he spluttered.

"I am not asking again," I said as I tightened my grip again.

His eyes grew teary as he hissed something that sounded like ‘*Jessie*’ or ‘*Desi*’. I checked my time. Sixty seconds gone. I heard someone call for service from the front and decided any further risk was foolish. The intrusion complicated things. I had what I thought, was a name, and a single name was often enough. It was time to end it.

He was a thin and slightly built guy, surprisingly strong, but no match for me. I tightened the grip on his neck and ripped his head back. His eyes bulged as he struggled for air and rolled back as his neck snapped. There was a great stench as his bowels gave. The body tried to compensate and redirect all its energies to the place of greatest trauma.

My head was pounding and throbbing from the migraine.

This life will kill you, mate, I told myself.

My hands were shaking and my whole body tense, ready for the next attack. The adrenaline burst through my veins as I battled to stabilise my hands to check for a pulse. No problems there; he was gone.

I made sure nothing was touched and did a quick wipe down of all surfaces just to make sure no prints were inadvertently left behind. I checked that the customer had left and slipped out of the shop, face looking down and angled away from oncoming people. Lucky for me, Mumbai had not invested in the thousands of CCTV cameras as London had. It made getting away simpler. Real professionals knew how to slip those cameras, but even real professionals made mistakes.

It was dark outside and there were fewer people around. My heart thumped, my back was drenched in sweat and my hands were still shaking from the adrenaline rush. Luckily, the heat helped my escape into the night. The last thing I wanted was someone who recalled a *pardesi* sweating like a pig in alpine conditions. Everyone was sweating, so one addition to the sweltering masses made no difference at all.

Chapter 3

My consent to carrying out the second part of the contract was decided by the access to the railway.

Always think ahead about the evacuation plan.

Thankfully, Charni Station was within five minutes walking distance. Running flat out would have attracted too much attention. It was normal and normality was exactly what I needed to project. A quick scan of my surroundings indicated everything was calm outside. There were still many people milling around and going about their business. Nobody stood out as possible watchers. Still exercising caution, I took a roundabout way just to check for any tails.

Even though it was close to ten at night, the train was packed with people. Standing room only. We were squashed up against each other like sardines in a can. There were people here from all over the world, so another European-looking person made no difference. Standing out in a crowd was bad news in this trade.

It was weekend the next day and one could see the relief on people's faces. Most of the passengers in the cabin were men dressed in the standard fare of a shirt, trousers and sandals. Dark, with bad teeth and foetid breath. The tourists distinguished themselves by wearing small backpacks and short utility pants. Normally you would never see an Indian person wearing shorts in the city. It just wasn't part of their culture, regardless of the temperature outside. People in the cities had long ago given up on traditional wear. Western clothing was everywhere to be seen.

That went for women too. They stuck together and you could see they were in absolute fear of the lecherous men. Rapes were becoming common place in India. With the increasing urbanisation of the population, gang rapes also weren't unheard of like before. The smell of sweat was overpowering with so many people in a confined space.

Who thought of sex at a time like this, I wondered.

It wasn't hard for most men, though; happens every few seconds. The train zipped down to the end of the line and stopped at Churchgate Station, back in the touristy part of town.

I crossed three roads and made my way to an internet shop, double checking for surveillance. This was difficult enough in a city like Mumbai and even worse at night. I thought I was clear as I entered the shop. There were a few youngsters hanging around, but nobody who seemed

threatening. I paid for thirty minutes and logged onto the internet via a desktop computer in the left corner of the shop, where I had a clear view of the entrance. By this time, the shakes had subsided and I could think clearly.

I used a secure email facility that encrypted the message and sent it confidentially. If someone wanted to read your mail, it was possible to break the encryption if you had the right tools. The intelligence services had them, so I didn't take any chances. Besides encryption, I had worked out my own coding system to secure any messages. The system relied on my receiver knowing how to decode it. This stuff is highly technical and, much of the time, it needs a very good cryptologist to figure out what's going on. I composed a message to my contact.

Parcel delivered. Advance short postage, please.

I always kept my messages simple and to the point. I didn't say anything about 'Jessie' or 'Desi', because I wanted to follow up on that first. I didn't even know what it was. Something didn't add up for me with the operation. His reaction bothered me. For all I knew, he could have grunted his wife's name as his dying words.

Killing had never been the hard part. Living with it was. Those things always screwed with your mind no matter how strong you were mentally. My background information on Hafiz Khan said that he was part of a greater terror group that linked up with Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. It was well known that Al-Qaeda had links in countries like Egypt, Iraq, Morocco and Sudan, but none more so than Pakistan. I had not known of any links to India until this assignment, but, then again, they *were* neighbours. No matter how tough the border controls were, they couldn't plug all the holes.

Some digging was required. It was outside my mandate, but the bloodhound in me sniffed something. Normally, I would have moved on. However, this was India and there was so much history that tied in with my family background. I couldn't just walk away. Maybe it was the thrill of discovering something big; who knew? I would have to follow up on this group who called themselves the Indian Crescent Movement. A good place to start would be that mosque to see if I could pick up the tracks of the big guy there.

Chapter 4

My contact in Mumbai was a man named Malhotra. Undoubtedly, not his real name. We communicated by secure email. In our business, you had to cover your tracks very well or you ended up very dead. He was a go-between for the Congress Party, but nobody important. Naturally, he thought otherwise. They retained my services after getting a recommendation from MI6, for whom I had done some occasional contracts in the past.

It stands to reason the approach wasn't made directly. It more likely worked on the basis of someone who knew someone else who knew of a guy like me who did what I did. I was normally given a package in electronic form. A Guernsey bank account was supplied for payment by electronic transfer. The agreement was '*never in person*' and, therefore, I was safe from facial identification.

When an assignment came up on the Indian subcontinent, Malhotra would make contact and provide the mission essentials. He didn't know what I looked like, but I made sure he knew that I knew what he looked like.

Unlike the man on the street, he was always impeccably dressed. He acted like he was some relation to the queen. A background check revealed he lived alone. He sang 'London bridge is falling down, falling down' in the shower. Every two months, he ordered clothing from the UK. English Blazer was his preferred cologne. He slept with a bowler hat next to his bed and gave the impression that he was in constant contact with MI6. To top it off, he had a personal collection of all the James Bond movies. Special Edition. The guy was a nutter.

My original contact with the Indians was someone called Rajesh Gupta, a Congress Party intermediary like Malhotra. The approach was made through an advertisement placed in an art magazine. Our agreed method of contact. They offered \$75, 000 to find someone and a further \$100, 000 to 'end the matter' if called upon. Good money. Gupta was eventually killed by a Pakistani Inter Service Intelligence agent. His place was taken by Malhotra.

Using a criminal as your role model wasn't the best thing to do, but, to this day, Carlos the Jackal was one of the best exponents of the art of disguise. I changed my hair colour every now and then and augmented this by wearing fashionable spectacles. I varied my spectacles to create

differing looks based on the type of character I wanted people to see. Often small adjustments made a big difference.

The problem was that one had to ensure that one's identity was ironclad and untraceable. Your employers could double cross you and offer you up to the authorities when things went south. Possibly worse, maybe you ended up in a ditch with a bullet in the back of your head. As far as they knew, I was British and my special talent was to find people, very dangerous people.

I was born in the UK, but completed my schooling in Cape Town, South Africa. As a youngster, I loved all sorts of weapons and dreamt of becoming a policeman like many other boys. As it was, conscription into the army for national service changed my life forever. I loved the army, and everything that went with it, especially the weapons training. Guns, knives, and hand to hand combat, I mastered them all. The physicality of training was like a drug and I went at it like someone on a permanent high. The only thing I couldn't deal with was taking orders, a critical aspect to surviving the army.

It was in the African bush that I learnt how to track people. The local *San* people were masters in the art of tracking, surveillance and counter surveillance. Their people had observed the animal kingdom for centuries and drew immeasurable intelligence from it. They could smell their prey over vast distances using wind direction. From its theatre in the sky, an eagle could see a rabbit from a distance of eight kilometres away. I had lapped up the smallest details and came away with lifesaving lessons.

Their knowledge of chemistry, botany and zoology was all learnt in the *bushveld*. They taught me that respect for your target was paramount and learning everything about them was an essential part of coming out on top. Using the principles learnt there, one could apply modern technology to literally find anyone.

After working in the army for a special unit for four years after conscription, I left, embittered by the army's stance against the local black population. They had wanted us to find black opposition leaders loyal to the resistance movement. Thereafter, a kill squad had been sent to take them out. That hadn't sat well with me, so I quit. Many people had warned me about going into an army who helped to oppress their own people. I thought I could make a difference from within. I was wrong.

The apartheid government fell in 1994. Many members of the police and the army had gone into hiding, fearing retribution by the new government led by Nelson Mandela. People with my

skills were in high demand and it wasn't long before there was an approach from the South African Secret Service (SASS). They had heard of my stance in the army and wanted help with finding apartheid criminals who fled mainly to Europe and Australia. Some of them had applied for amnesty in return for a full declaration of their part in crimes against humanity. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was one such vehicle for those who volunteered their criminality. Those who didn't, we eventually found and brought to justice. Soon after the Commission was wound up, I had gone to London to set myself up as an independent contractor. The big money was in Europe.

My rules were simple. No domestic matters, no killing of women and children and cash up front. I was no vigilante or bounty hunter, though. My targets were killers, terrorists and the top brass in organised crime. People governments wanted found, but not necessarily returned, if you know what I mean.

Chapter 5

The next morning, it was time to call a long-time friend, but without resorting to using my cell phone again. India didn't have the old red phone booths like the UK had and even those were disappearing to be replaced by simple transparent Perspex booths. Terrorism had changed everything. Instead, the Indians had little roadside telephone centres called STDs. With the advent of cell phones, even those were fast disappearing. Often, it consisted only of a table and chair with a single telephone. A bright yellow STD board announced the location. There was one across the road from the internet shop of last night.

He picked up almost immediately, as if he was waiting for my call. "Meet me at the Victoria Terminus Station in thirty minutes; we need to talk." I said before putting down again.

I took a taxi to the train station and went to one of the tea houses nearby. Ray arrived twenty minutes later, ordered a brew and met me at my table in the back. The last time I was in Mumbai, we had met at the same place, so I knew he would head straight for it. We shook hands and sat down without any fuss. No great hugs and loud greetings for us. He knew the score and was the consummate professional. I filled him in on what I'd been doing since we last met including my new assignment.

"What's with all this James Bond routine? Why don't you just use BBM like all other people, *bhai*? Blackberry's the way to go, take it from me." He shook his head with disapproval. "Sounds like you've made the rounds in Mumbai. You haven't changed one bit. Always going off half-cocked," he said with a knowing smile.

"Hey, you know me, I don't like following the crowd. And another thing you should know is that I am fully cocked, mate; just ask your sister."

He aimed a slap at my face, but then he caught the joke. We both burst out laughing. I needed that. The stress of the last day's operation had got to me and I was wound up like a corkscrew.

"I was sent to find this guy, but, after I found him, they changed the deal," I said, getting serious again.

He was well aware of my chosen profession, but not of my extra services. He fiddled with his teaspoon and cupped his hands around the glass, feeling the warmth, and I could almost hear the gears grinding in his head as he thought about it.

“What are you going to do now? Go back to Cape Town or London, or are you going to run this thing down? I think you should just leave it alone and move on. How’s the head, by the way? Still getting those headaches?”

He was short and stocky, with straight shiny black hair reaching almost to his shoulders like the *Beatles* of old. Handsome features framed by fashionable stubble ensured a steady supply of female attention. His chair was too small, so he constantly shifted position in an attempt to get comfortable.

“These headaches will be the end of me, I swear,” I said and lit a Marlboro, drawing long on the cigarette before I continued. “When I was at the mosque, I saw the target putting something into the collection towel. I was sure that he had communicated something to someone.” That little mosque episode bothered me. “There was tension on his face as he dipped his hand into the towel. The fact that he watched it as if his life depended on it must mean something. A sort of exchange had probably taken place.”

“Smoking kills too, you know. Then again, my *Dada* is eighty-five years old and still puffs away happily.” He made a show of how his grandfather smoked before turning to me again. “The collection towel money is for the poor and needy,” he countered my theory. “Your imagination was running wild with you again. How do you suppose a secret message would get to its intended recipient? They take the towel to the *moulana*. Or someone from the mosque committee; surely you would know that? He probably pocketed a percentage for himself as a collection commission.”

“He must be in on it or the note was meant for him,” I said, thinking aloud. “But what if it wasn’t a note? I saw him put money into the towel and I watched it drop in. It made a little indentation so it must have been heavier than just some paper currency or a scribbled note.” As I took another drag, I noticed a short fat man across the road with his eyes focussed on our table.

“Okay, let’s say he put something else into the towel with the money. What do you think it could be?” Ray asked as he sipped some tea in that noisy manner that Indians do.

In the UK, we consider that to be rude. In India it’s the accepted way to drink. We forgot that they introduced us to drinking tea, whereas the world seemed to think that drinking tea was an original British pastime. The fat man across the road was gone.

“I don’t know. It’s been bothering me ever since this whole thing happened. You know, nowadays, it’s possible to store huge amounts of information on a little flash drive or mini CD. Maybe it was just a little note folded around a coin.”

“You know, Jessie could be a Christian name,” he mused.

“Yes, I know,” I said, and that deepened the mystery. “Jessie’s normally short for Jessica. Surely it can’t be a family member. Then again, if it is a person, it most likely is a nickname. You know how fond Indians are of nicknames. Desi, was another name used for ‘Indian’ and could have been referring to India, but why would he? It doesn’t make sense to me. I think it was more likely Jessie.” I moved my head from side to side working out the kinks and stretching my legs. We’d been sitting for over an hour and my muscles were taking a little strain. I liked working alone but this was India, so I took a chance to ask him for assistance.

“What are your movements like in the next few days? Do you have time for some sleuthing like in the old days? Some help on this will be useful. It was too easy and there’s no such thing as an easy job. Something about Khan didn’t quite ring true to me.”

I was very comfortable with Ray and could trust him with my life. Maybe it was a good idea to recruit him to my cause. Mumbai’s a big town.

“I have to finish a job for the National Security Guard, but I should be done by the day after tomorrow. Why don’t we agree to meet next Monday at Big B’s? I’m buying, okay?”

“Okay,” I said as I got up from my seat, doing a 360 degree check for surveillance.

I looked around at the people, and saw how they walked, talked and owned their space. I don’t know what it was, but there was something about Mumbai that pushed me away. Was it the danger posed by the operation against Khan? Probably not; danger was like a friend. You missed it if it wasn’t there. Whatever it was, it was like being an alien in a familiar place. A legal alien. A *Sting* song came to mind.

‘I’m an alien, I’m a legal alien, in New York!’

I had a nasty feeling that someone was still watching, but, in a dense city like Mumbai, it’s just about impossible to pick up. Most guys doing surveillance found it hard to avoid being conspicuous. Keeping eye contact was important but there were other ways too. Reflective surfaces like store windows and vehicles were useful, but it’s often being able to read a person’s fine motor movements that told you what they would do next. I did not pick up anything and was satisfied that I could move on knowing that I was still alone. Ray left first and I watched him for

a while to check for any surveillance on him. He was clean. I peeled off towards my hotel, my head throbbing again. Something nagged away at me about the way Khan reacted.