once upon a time in Sumeria (2)

by eamon byrne

THE man in the tent with the stick points to the chart on the wall and says to us all: the stats point to the end of the war by the end of the fall. A just war, not just oil. Just then Allah's shadow comes over the scene. He's here to stiffen his troops with some courage and hope; they've been accused by the Jews and the enemy's pope. He descends through a mosque window into an atmosphere of fear and funk. Several of his muftis are nursing ak-47s and drinking sweet tea as they pore over maps plotting their plans. They look up at him and stop what they're doing, transfixed. He has a manicured curly beard as black as onyx and he's got up in splendid white saffron robes topped with a purple frizz. His black eyes glare out from above his sunburnt cheekbones and his bearing is erect and proud and his right hand rests on the scabbard of a sabre hanging from an elephant's tail which girds his loins studded with rubys and saphhires. You can all breathe a sigh of relief, gentlemen. Fingers off the triggers. The name's Mohammed. Ali Mohammed. I'm here to steal the show. They bow down obsequious to the boss fella. I warn you, gentlemen, as you're down there, to look up. You must watch out for the big eagle. It's out and about with a cloaca in size would spit a moab in girth a baker's dozen of bunker busters. And there's no use in running away, gentlemen, for it will only come after you. There's no use burying your faces on the floor. You will have to float like a butterfly and sting like my fistic namesake if you want to escape. It's either that or being splat like an ant under a glob of the shit that the satan shat. It's an evil turd the eagle's, all that matters is you don't go being the ant that's splattered. Now rise up off the floor. Rise up and go now and go to be set free. Rally the faithful to prayer. Round up the poets and slaves. We must fill the air with their

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rantings and ravings, swarm out of the mosques and onto the pavings. The Satan is waiting. He covets our savings. He wants them in oil. Don't submit to his cravings. I know it is hard, and our backs to the wall. But if we resist then it proves we have balls. So we must trash him, and bash him, and smash him and flash him. And if he craves dope we can coke him and hash him. But hark! I hear something. Hush. The muftis look around, their eyes wide, mouths agape. There's a growing drone overhead, a fluttering low pitched drone with a chugging bassondo, drowning out the flutter of the many circular fans on the ceiling of the mosque. Ali evaporates softly into thin air, a ghostly figure, his voice fading out in a jumble of last exhortations as his image levitates before finally breaking up and vanishing for good. Float evil turd don't submit poets coke him. *Poof*. Gone. A patriot missile whooshes in and takes out the muftis in one hit. The mosque is saturated with fire and smoke, tinkling bits of Arabic mosaic fall from a gaping wound in the ceiling, and the air is left heavy with the smell of cordite and burning shit.

Barroom!

The ground shakes, and the ground quakes, and a moment later the shock waves break. From deep down under comes a broiling roll of thunder, tearing the upside asunder. Even I'm impressed and I'm a hard-boiled reporter who's seen it all. Well in Okinawa let me tell you it was hell. Ten thousand marines all swell guys doing their duty fell. The Japs were going to fight a suicidal battle to defend their home islands. But next day was a no show. We dropped two bombs and they ran up the white flag. That's shock and awe.

I was at the corner of the Presidential Parade and the road the tyrant made when the moab burst. When a moab bursts, if you are on the ground in the immediate surrounds and are lucky enough to survive then you will be surprised to realise that you have come out of it alive. You will at least know that you have witnessed quite a show. Nearby I saw an Arab with the hood he normally used as a mask aflame and looking quite aghast. Masking his burnt flesh and paling into insignificance his screams, the flash from the explosion showed as an aureole traced in the tenderest beams. I took a careful

note of it, for I am trained to observe and report in the minutest detail. Let me say that although a painful scene it was not without its beauty. Far beyond it streamers of fire radiated chiefly from its lower quadrants, and the lines of falling shrapnel joining them sloped away slightly from the vertical diameter obliquely downwards from left to right and from right to left like the trails of smoke squadrons at an air show make, quadrangular patterns against the sky. That's the only way I can describe it, hard as I try. Of course it was not all just a fireworks display above my head, there were also dreadful things I saw it must be said. Indeed, I had to be careful where I tread. Melted children were seeping through charred cracks of concrete, and those were just the dead. The living had to endure a living hell instead. The burning Arab lay pumping out his flames. I heard him exclaim “Allah is great” as he writhed upon the ground. And I swear by God there nere was Jew nor Christian near to hose him down. But even for this unfortunate survivor there was still the shock of one last eery image to make him spook. For no sooner had he quenched the fire and spoke than he looked up and overhead the giant bird had circled round, come slowly back, and now pierced the tower of smoke. That's when I knew he knew his world was broke. Poor bloke, he sat with head in hands trying not to choke. He probably wasn't aware that in that instant a new order had awoke. It was the end of his miserable third world existence. His, not ours. Our side was okey doke. That was our God up there, looking down on His gook enemies all well and truly coked.

Spooked all right. I decided then and there to add it to the list of graphic thumbnails for the dvd. These included night into day over Dresden and cloud over Nagasaki into thermals and rose coloured flames of napalm as nitrate stock goes too hot through the projector spocks. Old stuff from the old newsreels on the history channel. The mogul puts out an Arab edition: shekels to be made. A Christian sun is eclipsed by a crescent moon. Later looters strip out the fragments left behind from the preceding pillages, and villages are razed as fires burn on the oil lagoons. Been practising this fire magic for a long time. Fire into caves, atomic fire on cities, napalm and chemical

fire. Now the big birds soar in ever widening circles, looking uncannily like pterodactyls from the voracious period. The little birds are perturbed and twitter in the trees being chopped by axes. Reconstruction soon to begin they sing. Death is retreating to its normal place in the cycle of things. Get ready for the taxes.

Black sun, purple prose. My notes, you understand, which I visit regularly. Drunken blurred. Tending to the pompous. But perhaps some truth. Perhaps not all nonsense. Below me, far about, all burning madness. Whiskey stained, my notes, diffused with sadness. I'm going to sleep now and revise this in the morning.

Somebody is alive. Somebody whose address is now. All the others are not. And they cannot turn the now into when. Nobody can turn the when into now. Any idiot is apt to tell you that. Anyone with one shoulder higher than the other, his smile slightly askew, and the level of his blue eyes not quite the same.