

# The Placing of Rapture



a novel by

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## Overview

### The Placing of Rapture

A tale of our time. The last great gamble of Jihad.

The action begins on a tiny Scottish island where Harry and his motley team are testing technical's new baby. The British have made a breakthrough but it's a tricky business - how to excite unstable compounds using microwave beams while minimising the collateral impact. We first get to meet the team ('Team Purple') and their leader, Harry.

Then we get to meet the villain of the plot - 'The Sheik' aka Abdul Romanov de Silva. Abdul heads a terrorist group called Al Ma'bar (The Gate). All who enter his circle must knowingly agree, in the name of Allah, that they pass through a one-way portal, beyond which lies only the glorious hereafter. Everything mortal must be left at the Gate. We slowly discover that 'Rapture' is the code name for the 'physics package' (i.e a nuclear bomb) which he is quietly assembling in the Cotswold village of Kemble. Of course, 'Rapture' is also the name of an event in Christianity which, if you are reading this, has not yet happened!

Harry and the British secret services stumble onto the Sheik's plot and the action, laced with panache and happenstance, quickly moves to a tumultuous cliff-hanger as the full meaning of his fiendish plot and the title of this book, are finally revealed.

My people perish through lack of knowledge

*Hosea 4:6*

## Introduction

‘All art is transportation’ Johnny said staring into the middle distance as if addressing a passing ghost. Percy thought it must be the opening line for one of his jokes. Eyeing him with a half-smile and a frown, he waited for the punch line.

‘Yes, transportation,’ Johnny continued, eyes fixed like a demented Shakespearean coter, ‘that is the business we are in. Art is the vehicle which takes people somewhere else, or else whisks them via a different route to somewhere they have been before. Transportation, that’s all it is; - Another place, another time. Maybe you will call it manipulation, maybe you’ll call it seduction, but the result is the same – it takes you away to a place where you get to see the view from somebody else’s balcony.’

*Johnny Need, the Archipelago of Tomorrow.*

# CHAPTER 1

## Bute One

‘If I don’t make it, you know that Harry will.’

Heamas looked around. There he was. Down on the grassy knoll with a peanut butter sandwich in his fist. Grinning as always, the stubble on his chin glistening in the stage lighting of the low afternoon sun. Harry was unconcerned with the approaching night and what it was bringing. He had long since made up his mind: The worst that can happen has already happened.

‘If you lose the thread, think of the Mullah,’ he whispered to Lister.

‘Shuttup and check your settings,’

The box at his waistband was chafing like a pestering child, ‘Check my numbers. Look at me!’

*Now is the season of recovering what is lost, of restoring what belongs.*

The command when it came was just a gasp of air, so subtle Heamas could have missed it if he hadn’t been so trained to listen for just that word.

Blue marble. Bits, just bits. ‘How could there be so many bits?’ Then that haze. And that second that was missing, never more to be recovered. A second shredded to a fog of tiny microseconds that floated in a dust before him. The flash had torn a gasp from his closed lips and left him staring wide-eyed and shivering slightly, like a tuning fork oscillating next to a bass drum. He was wiping a bead of sweat from his brow when Minnie looked up at him, half-smiling:

‘Cor, that was a four on a scale of three, ay?’

‘Yes,’ he proffered, not sure what scale he was measuring this particular slice of reality on. Not inclined to care about it. More inclined to light up a fag or down a whole jug of Harry’s floose-bucket juice. Or drag Minnie by the hair and do something original with her - well original for him anyway.

*What is there but duty and the deep sleep of wisdom?*

## Deerstalker South

The train rumbled softly, lurching every now and then as it headed south along the single line track. The team were slumped like spent bullets around the coiffured plastic table that sufficed for travelling classes such as they.

*It's a long way to Tipperary*, the song sang, and Harry heard it, louder with every creak and clank: *It's a long way from Bute to West One!*

He looked out of the window with a zombie-like stare, transfixed in a perfect storm of thought, totally detached from the wild, passing majesty of what his crumpled tourist map said was Rannoch Moor. In the seat opposite him Heamas lay hidden behind the privy curtains of yesterdays Daily Telegraph, and sat next to him Lister was fidgeting nervously with his mobile telephone, eyes darting in a neurotic spasm left and right, a fox on early morning sentry duty at the entrance to its lair.

Harry thought how nice it would be to travel first class for once, and have a bit more space. He turned his head and looked down.

*I could have a bit more space now if it weren't for the fact I've got Minnie spread eagled half across me.*

Nice as it is to have Minnie's frame in so close a proximity to his, it was not quite so nice, Harry decided, when she is a snorting half dead lump of mitochondrial DNA: She was half sat, half slumped alongside him, in a semi comatose state, falling in and out of sleep, constantly emitting the beginnings of a snore that got suddenly arrested by a gulp, to be followed by a spate of laboured breathing.

The train lurched and shook them all momentarily. As if that caused him to suddenly wake up, Heamas appeared from behind his Telegraph and promptly screwed it into a folded towel before

thrusting it with a sigh into the seat beside him. Lister looked up, frozen for a second in a quizzical stare. Then he closed the cover on his mobile and reached down into his bag to pull out a small A5-size booklet printed on light blue tinted paper. Harry recognised it straight away: *the Temple's monthly Prelims* – the preliminary digest of recent issues distributed by the joint security services liaison unit. Lister would normally have read the dots off it as soon as he had picked it out of his mail drop, but this time the last minute planning for Bute had sidelined this ritual and pushed it to the back of the queue. It was time to get up to speed on the latest supply of gossip and grizzlies.

Harry couldn't stop thinking about the tests. They had turned out much better than he had hoped, and that meant a whole bucket load better than those wet shirts down at West One had postulated the Friday before. 'Let's just give it our best shot. Prove that the idea is nothing more than a blind alley, and then we can get on with something useful' Garret had said privately to Harry.

But the idea had not been a blind alley. The torso-less head that dropped out of the Bute sky and dented the roof of his hire car was testimony to that.

Harry was looking forward to telling Garret about it and watching the imperial smirk fall from his face. Yes it would be nice to burst his bubble for a change instead of it being the other way around.

The snow capped hills behind Tyndrum sailed past his window and Harry was somewhere else, in a fairy tale story of witches and hobbits and valiant men...

Suddenly the mobile burped in his pocket. He took it out and stared at the screen. Talk of the devil. It was Garret sending a text: 'Call when kosher' it simply said.

*Mobiles are not kosher but landline calls to secure numbers are. What on earth does he want with me now. I'll be back in town tomorrow. Oh well, I'll call when we hit Queen Street.*

He checked his wrist watch, another two hours to go on this clanking slow boat. Oh well. Harry had turned his stare back to the passing countryside. The unremitting wilderness floated by like a David Attenborough nature film rolling before his eyes. It failed completely to invade into the wall of perfect peace he felt inside.

*One day, life for me will no doubt resemble this hostile wasteland, but for now ...*

Totally unannounced, Lister exploded in a gaggle of laughter holding up the little blue booklet he had been reading with one hand while pointing to it with the other.

‘Has anyone read these Prelims from September?’ he said in a chuckle. Of course, nobody had. No other human being except Lister ever bothered with them. All heads were now turned toward him, shaking their own version of ‘No’ in uneven unison. Even Minnie sat up, resurrected from her pit of oblivion.

‘Well listen to this then!’ Lister continued.

‘Somebody gets pulled out of the line at Luton Airport. The friskers are patting him down and they notice a wad of something in his pocket. They pull it out and what do ya’ know, it’s a big slab of bright blue putty-like goo wrapped in cellophane.’

*Lister had paraphrased the report into the present tense for dramatic effect. And it was working. The whole team were attentive, eyes bolted to his smiling countenance:*

‘That was it!’ he continued.

‘Yeah, they were convinced. It was Semtex! So, all hell breaks loose and he gets led off to a dark room whereupon it slowly transpires that he’s carrying a new sample of material for the ‘technical lab’ (as he calls it) in Munich, because he works for - wait for it - the Blu-Tack company!’

The team erupt in laughter. Above the waves of their cackles, Lister shouted the postscript:

‘And best of all, he was pulled out of line on a tithel!’

The laughter of their laughter ricocheted around the carriage for a full ten seconds before subsiding to muted chuckles.

*Airport scanners had long been modified to give random alerts when they had a run of 'clean passes' - no real returns from a scan. This supplied an ongoing level of 'conspicuity' – as they called it - to enhance the potential to deter (and deterrence was the scanners job!) Although the upper limit for clean passes could be set between 2 and 99, the default was 10 and most of them had been left set at this. Hence the nickname the 'Titbe'. This meant that at the default setting, there could never be more than 10 clean passes through a security portal.*

The team basked in the ambience of Listers' sport with the Prelims. It was nice to read something harmless for a change. Often the Prelims carried oodles of irony but they were nearly always full of hideous plots being uncovered. Harry thought that the unremitting ugliness of the 'evidence' they contained would have made them best sellers if the Home Officer hadn't slapped the 'Eyes Only' label on them.

*Mans imagination and intelligence called to the service of maximum harm and inhumanity. The cells cry for joy and line up to be worked to dust.*

The team had one and a half hours at Glasgow's' Queen Street before catching their connection to London. Harry found a telephone kiosk and dialled the number. It rang barely once before Garret blurted his standard one syllable retort:

'G' the voice said.

'G – Hi, this is Harry. I got your text. What's up?'

'Ah Harry, thanks for the call back. Everything okay?'

'Every thing *is* okay and in fact it's er...' Harry hesitated for a micro second as he readied the form of words to slap G in the face with. But Garret instantly jumped in to interrupt his flow:

'I understand the test results were positive? - I believe the word *excellent* is appropriate in this instance?'

'er... Yes. Um., how do you know?'

'Lister messaged me via satellite and I have to say this turn of events is very good news.'

'Yes, we exceeded the baselines by a hefty margin.' Harry said, making a stock report on automatic pilot while he tried to both mask his surprise and think it through: *Lister had contacted West One and hadn't told him about it!*

Garret interrupted his line of thought:

'Okay. Well this means we are going to have to pull the stops out. Listen, this program needs to go up a gear. I called you because I believe you have a friend, or had a friend, who could supply transport?'

'What sort of transport?'

'Then *air* sort. We are going to need a faster way to get to and from Bute if we are ever to get this thing working before close of play.

Harry fell silent for a moment.

Yes he had a friend...

*And Yes, First Class is definitely the way to go.*

## JetLine Six

The sun rained in through the tinted windscreen as Jetline six turned onto an easterly heading and continued its climb. It would have been equally true to say that the crew had commanded the aircraft to turn onto an easterly heading, but the fact was the command had been issued to Jetline Six's computers before they had ever left the ground. The entire choreography of their dance through the clouds had been established in a pre-arranged story board of detail, and thus far, neither Captain Gerry nor First Officer Shainan, had felt any need to interfere with the narrative.

Gerry studied the windshield, contemplating a rip in the coaming just above the glass, and wondering how exactly had someone managed to connect a sharp object with it at such an angle? Were they sitting in the captain's seat, perched eating their

dinner in its plastic 'Jetline' tray, when some sudden gut-wrenching turbulence caused a massive excursion of culinary hardware upwards into the coaming?

Maybe it was nothing to do with that at all, but evidence of some love feud played out with one of those pretty stewardesses back there. He pictured the scene: One of them, effervescent in beauty and menace all at the same time, venting a lover's complaint in the cockpit. It was a sure place to get the full attention of your quarry.

'Three eight zero. One to go,' called Shainan from the right hand seat.

'Roger that,' agreed Gerry still lost in a fantasy of what could have caused the rip in the coaming. And in less than another ninety seconds they were there, at three nine zero.

The earth spread out below them like a mat of possibilities. All you could ever wish for is there. It is not here and never will be. Here is a passing wonder, a synthetic moment of freedom. But there in the shop window below is the lush forest of real reality... a crust of sufferings and triumphs, of valour, victories and freedoms. Freedoms all the more succulent when the fiefs of slavery are finally disembowelled. When the full moons and holidays are replaced by the new knowledge... The new reality. 'Flight Level three Nine Zero.'

*Who holds the truer sceptre: the one who looks down and marvels or the one who looks up and desires?*

It was one of those flights that the company manuals hold up as a prize: Completely normal. There was not one ounce of originality about it. Even the patter between Gerry and Shainan and the occasional visiting stewardesses, was limp and inane. It was, in aviation jargon, - in fact in anybody's jargon - just routine with a big 'R'. Although he had known times past when that word had been used to hide a multitude of mini dramas and adrenalin spiked events. This flight was not one of them. It was so boring that Gerry spent the best part of one hour out of the seven playing his version of oxo on the flight management

system. After that, he had reached around into the big black flight bag on the floor behind his seat and pulled out his log book and began bringing it up to date - filling in details of recent flights, including this one, as far as he could. He stared at the vacant notes column. The only distinguishing feature that Gerry could think of was the rip in the coaming. He contemplated the thought of writing some coded note about that and chuckled to himself. So this is what becomes of dreams. I should have stayed sleeping!

They began the approach at five in the morning local time. As they turned toward finals on the easterly runway at Dubai the sun was almost directly ahead of them and Gerry was squinting behind his Raybans as he lined up on the localiser.

‘Further descent with the glide. Call tower now on one one eight daycimal three’ the controller said in Pall Mall English.

‘One one eight three, roger’ Gerry repeated automatically and as an aside for Shainan’s benefit he whispered ‘BBHN,’ thankful to be nearly there. ‘Yep, blessed be his name...’ Shainan responded as he reached over for the flap lever, ‘Flaps twenty five coming down.’

Five seconds later the glideslope needle became active and Gerry throttled back to commence descent. ‘Cabin Crew, seats for landing’ Shainan said over the cabin PA system.

As the big sleepy ship began sliding down the three degree approach slope, the orb of the sun gradually dipped lower back into the twilight, bowing out like a royal waiter retreating from the king’s table. ‘Guess we must be the last before they swap runways’ Gerry said and Shainan nodded in agreement. Soon Air Traffic would have to change runways so that landing aircraft were not blinded by flying toward the rising sun. They had just squeaked in below the twilight. Below them in the morning mist the waterfront slid by and then awakening suburbs of Al Baraha and then the warm, rubber-stained concrete of Dubai International, ‘DXB’ to it’s friends.

As soon as they had taxied in and shut down Gerry switched on his phone and picked up his messages. Out of four there was just one of interest: ‘Angels have wings – The Temple says they need them too. Call H if you fancy driving the bus!’

Like a pavlovian reaction, almost as he read it, he felt his heartbeat quicken and a strange joy invade his spirit, causing a smile to break out on his face. Suddenly he was aware of things that had been screaming at him for so long – Now he could put a name to it. He knew it! How very tired and fed up he had become with flying the big jets. The very thing he had craved for so long - the left hand seat of a big jet, and now it had become no more than a thing of duty, a penance even. Somewhere along the line he had become caught up in maintaining a status quo that was obsolete just because in his world view, it had once held such veneration.

Gerry was excited. Yes he would call his old friend Harry aka H, The Temple Guard at West One and yes, he would drive the bus for them and yes, Blessed be his name!

## Tempesford

‘Aren’t you going to finish your pudding?’

‘No thanks.’

‘You like your puddings... What’s wrong with this one?’

‘Nothing, no – it’s fine. I’ve just had enough thanks.’

Malik got up from the table, a napkin held to his mouth as if he were about to cough. Eyes darting at the three faces around the dinner table, but avoiding mom’s glare.

‘I’m going upstairs’ he said.

‘Okay’ said dad while mom glowered at his receding back. ‘I don’t know what’s the matter with him,’ she said as soon as Malik was out of earshot.

‘Oh leave him alone,’ said dad, frustrated by the interminable sniping.

The bedroom door clicked shut. Malik went to the drawer in the bureau, opened it and drew out the envelope. Eyes ablaze he sat on the small plastic chair at the desk and slid the form out of the envelope. Subscribe in confidence it said. He checked off the box marked 'no referrals' and wrote the name and address on the dotted lines of the form... 'Bud Wiser, 34 The Rising, Tempesford, NW2 4EE.' The joke name won't matter, they must get that all the while he thought.

The internet site became active and for seconds, maybe half a minute, a strange text appeared on the screen:

*There is a school of thought that would have us linger in the leaves, waiting for the sunrise like a robin in autumn. But we have to get out of the nest, fly as high as we can and drop. Drop! The Infidel is moribund and putrid, incapable of seeing the sword's edge. He is adrift on a sea of his shame and will not notice even the mountain falling upon him. Only the fat of his larder is between us and success. Golden ones, do not let your gaze tarry on the storehouse of your oppressor. For the smell of it will be as death your nostrils and acid in your cistern. He runs, chase him! He falls, finish him! He dies, forget him!*

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Gerry called Harry just as the text had suggested. He waited for Shainan and the cabin crew to finish their post flight chores and watched them file out of the ops room one by one. Finally they were all gone. He was alone. His mobile was in his hand. He dialled the number for Harry in London. They had the briefest of chats:

'Harry this is Gerry.'

'You got my text?'

'Just got it.'

A short silence, then Harry simply said:

'Come and see me.'

'Okay I will.' Gerry replied.

'You mean that?'

‘Yes’ said Gerry with a half laugh.

*‘Either he’s desperate or else he thinks I’ve gone flaky.’*

‘Where are you by the way?’

‘Just landed at DXB – Dubai.’

‘When are you due back in the UK?’

‘Wednesday, 1430 local.’

‘At?’

‘Heathrow.’

‘Can we meet?’

‘Yes’

‘How about the Temple at 1630?’

‘Yes that’ll work. If there’s any delay. I’ll call. Otherwise get the coffee going.’

‘See you then’ said Harry before hanging up.’

Gerry liked Harry’s directness. There was no pussy footing around with this outfit like there was with the airline operations people.

## **Whitehall Three**

It was early Thursday morning and the sun shone victorious. A recent shower had scattered crystals of rain droplets that glistened like imperial stardust on the royal carpet of central London. Almost directly opposite the entrance to Horse Guards parade, looking out onto Whitehall, stood the Old War Office building. Looking ever-so slightly in need of a makeover, the big neo-Baroque structure stood gloriously aloof but the truth was that ever since The War Office had been absorbed into the Ministry of Defence in 1964, it had slowly become home to every nondescript homeless fiefdom that existed within the British military.

Heamas was well aware of its history – both illustrious and not so illustrious - as he approached it with another man, a younger and fitter man. Even so, an attentive observer -would

have noticed their perfect stride, and could have correctly divined that both had imbibed a military heritage.

Lieutenant Nellis may have looked confident alongside Heamas but on the inside, he was feeling a little bit nervous. This was all new to him. There had been no formal induction, one day he had a commission with the Air Force and the next he found himself mysteriously subalterned to the Home Office. That was it. The whole thing had left him wondering if the rather abrupt end to his Air Force career had something to do with the ‘accident’ three months ago at the listening post in Cyprus. He was rather hoping nobody quizzed him about it.

‘What goes on here then?’ he asked.

Heamas smiled and cast a glance up to the stone lions bedecking the parapets above them.

‘This Mr. Nellis, contains the parts of government that government doesn’t admit to having. Her Majesties ministry of ghosts and other deniable entities.’

‘Oh, right,’ agreed Nellis with a chuckle.

The easy manner and body language of the two men looked for all the world like they had known each other for years, but in fact they had met for the first time just two hours previous.

*Priority for Lieutenant Albert Nellis, CBO 455. Meet Captain Heamas Stanning at the Northern entrance to Earls Court Tube, 0830 Thursday. Accompany him as he directs. He will brief you about the mission and the assignation. The tag name is Team Purple. Good luck. End.*

The southern line had run on time for once and Nellis was standing at the northern entrance a full seventeen minutes ahead of the appointed time. Suddenly a man in a dusted suede sports coat was stood in front of him wearing an angular dignified jaw, and brandishing the polite smile of those who carry a big stick:

‘Lieutenant Nellis?’

‘Yes. and you...?’

‘Stanning. Captain. Here’s my ID.’ He held up a service card which Nellis scanned with expert brevity before resuming his attention to the Captain’s smile.

‘Let’s go this way’ Heamas pointed and entered a stride at the same time. Nellis fell in along side him. They were headed out of the station toward the street while all the prevailing tide of humanity seemed to be coming at them like a tsunami going the other way.

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Fifteen minutes later they were on the open upper deck of the Tour bus. There was nobody else. Just the two of them, cloistered like thieves toward the rear; at a place where anyone coming up the stairs could be easily seen. Not that anybody was likely to bother. Just as they had boarded the bus, the skies had opened and a rain shower had appeared out of nowhere. Blessings come dressed as curses. The rain ensured the privacy of their chat from the tourists below.

Heamas had unfurled an umbrella just big enough for both their heads, plus a shoulder each. The umbrella had belonged to his daughter and the canopy was playfully segmented in pretty pastel colours. Somewhat unaware of the bizarre picture they were painting, the two men sat in the rain, lost in conversation, with heads inclined together in a holy huddle beneath a gaily coloured umbrella.

*Ding dong. The next stop will be Marble Arch. Full details of all London Sightseeing Tours can be found at double u, double u double u the original tour dot com...*

‘It’s all to do with resonance.’ Heamas said in his *your account is approved* monotone, ‘the geeks tell me it’s about electro-magnetic frequencies – two of them together forming what they call a dissonance.’

Nellis looked at Heamas.

*Look, this is what a blank expression looks like.*

‘Oh’ he said with maximum feigned excitement, and then popping his head around the edge of the umbrella, looked up at the overcast sky for inspiration. Or pigeons? Either one would do.

‘Resonance,’ he repeated finally, ‘and er - dissonance which is sort of resonance gone wrong isn’t it?’

‘Yes, you’ve got it. Dissonance. In this case two frequencies interfering with each other in such a way that the resultant is the resonant frequency of the target material. And then – bingo! Maximum RMX.

‘RMX?’ quizzed Nellis.

‘That’s the acronym for the technology – RMX. It stands for Remote Molecular Excitation.’

‘Wow, sexy name.’

*The bus stopped suddenly with a screech, and a car horn blasted. The two men looked up. Somebody shouted something that sounded like it was a foreign language, while somebody much closer shouted back. The two men sat rigid, watching. Most of all listening, every sense on full throttle. There was a jerk of transmission and the bus moved off again. End of alert.*

Heamas sighed and continued. He was enjoying playing the part of a schoolmaster:

‘When tuned to the resonant frequency of an explosive chemical, an RMX beam can cause the material to go unstable, in short to blow up. For a long while the boffins were bent on applying the technology to the nuclear side. Remotely exciting a chemical blanket was thought to offer more reliability and possibly a higher yield than the chemical lens of a shaped charge. Then somebody had the whizzo idea of using it from a distance as a trigger, to make things go bang before they were intended to – that is to use it as a pre-emptive weapon against the jihadists. We are at the stage now where we know this is technically viable. So the whole effort has now moved to developing a mobile transmitter for the beam, plus also to research the possible collateral effects on other materials caught in the RMX spotlight.

‘Wow’ said Nellis.

The bus lurched as it turned into Marylebone Road and a lady’s head popped above the parapet of the stairwell. She stared for a moment at the two men looking at her, huddled together under a dapper umbrella, in what looked like an embrace...

‘No hun, we’ll be okay in the lower saloon’ she shouted in a wide Texan drawl as she disappeared back down the stairs.

Heamas smiled.

‘Where was I?’ he said...

‘Ah yes - the white coats had been working on it for ages. By the time we got roped in they were using a test facility way up north - a remote uninhabited island off the Bute isthmus. I don’t know why it was up there – maybe it was the nuclear side of it, but Wiltshire would have been so much better. Anyway, the meeting we are having today is to gather everybody together and make sure we are all on the same page. That is the team and ... new additions to it.’ He nodded pointedly to Nellis, and then fixed him in a stare.

The two man sat with eyes locked together for a full ten seconds while the elephant in the room stumbled around like a drunkard. Finally Nellis broke the silence:

‘Yes, I know what you mean. Why me!

‘This stuff is way outside my field. I’m into communications, that’s my thing. But then, maybe it’sss..’ he tapered off staring into space.

‘You mentioned Jihad, didn’t you?’

‘Yes’

‘Maybe that it. Maybe the reason I’m here is the Arab speak.’

‘You speak Arabic?’ asked Heamas smiling widely.

‘Yes.’

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