

# **THE SHADOW GAME**

**A TEAM WALKER NOVEL**

**RODGER CARLYLE**

This is a work of fiction. The names, characters, entities, and events are products of the author's imagination and bear no relation to any living person or are used fictitiously.

THE SHADOW GAME. Copyright © 2023 by Rodger Carlyle. All rights reserved.

The Library of Congress Control Number: 2023912772

Published in the United States by Verity Books, an imprint of Comsult, LLC, Anchorage, Alaska. Inquiries may be directed to [comsualaska@gmail.com](mailto:comsualaska@gmail.com).

All rights reserved. Except for brief passages quoted in newspaper, magazine, radio, television or online reviews, no portion of this book may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical including photocopying, recording, or information storage or retrieval systems without the prior written permission of the author and/or Comsult, LLC.

First published in 2023.

ISBN 978-1-960268-07-5 (paperback)

ISBN 978-1-960268-06-8 (e-book)

Cover design and formatting: Damonza

## Books by Rodger Carlyle

### THE TEAM WALKER SERIES

*The Eel And The Angel*

*The Shadow Game*

### THE CHAD GRITT SERIES

*Enemy Patriots*

*The Opposite Of Trust*

*Two Civil Wars*

### NONFICTION

*Awake*

*Still Common Sense*



## Preface

The two Land Rovers in front of him began to slow. Thankful that he'd finally caught up to them Ahmed flashed his lights one more time and released his foot from the accelerator. Something streaked down from the sky followed by a second streak.

Instantly, the two vehicles in front of him disintegrated, their doors, windows and hoods flying through the air. Before he could touch the brakes, the blast flipped his Mercedes into the air and then it cartwheeled. Ahmed was still conscious when everything finally came to rest. He reached for his cellphone, or at least he tried, but neither arm would respond to his efforts. Then, everything around him went dark.



## Chapter 1

**F**ARID'S LIFE WAS only possible because of the kind of money his professor father and later his widowed mother could have never afforded. Until graduation day, all he knew about the uncle who provided him with a privileged lifestyle was that his mother had begged Farid to follow the uncle's wishes. Topping the list was to study and succeed in school, followed by learning how politics worked in Europe and in the United States, ignoring the trauma of his early life in Isfahan and Beirut, preparing for a successful international business career, and recognizing the debt to those who funded his life and be prepared to pay it back.

The smile on his mother's face as they left the ceremony made what admittedly was not a difficult existence even more worthwhile. As they slid into the limo next to his uncle, she lifted his right hand and kissed all of his fingers, reciting a prayer in Farsi. She rarely spoke in Farsi, although she made sure that her son learned the language as well as Arabic and the English he used every

day. He mastered French while attending exclusive preparatory schools.

The brutal humidity of an unusually scorching English day made the limo's air conditioning welcome.

His uncle smiled as the driver worked his way through the crowded streets to the private airport where a Eurocopter waited to deliver them across the English Channel. There would be no record of the flight. The pilots would hug the ocean on the return to France, but nothing seemed out of line to the young man.

The uncle had trusted and encouraged Farid's intellect. Farid's lack of personal discipline came with the British education. It was a risk, but one that his uncle prayed Farid could control.

"Tell me of the job offer?" offered Karim. He smiled at Leila, his sister-in-law.

"WILTON Limited is a global freight company, with twenty-some offices around the world. They started in marine shipping but when a new investment group took control a year ago, WILTON became interested in aviation. I'll be the primary assistant to the operational vice-president," answered Farid, wiping beads of sweat from his forehead. "They see great growth potential in the Middle East. They also do contract work for governments." Farid opened the tiny refrigerator across from his seat and considered opening a bottle of champagne, but instead grabbed a bottled water. He guessed that his acquired taste for alcohol wouldn't go over well with his uncle.

"And they accepted that I would not be able to start work for a month," he added. They have staff from all over the world, all with different customs. They didn't



bat an eye when I told them that it was expected that I reconnect with my family before rushing out into the world. They really want me, someone who speaks multiple languages fluently, with an Oxford MBA.

“Would you be based here in England?” asked Karim.

“Maybe. Their main offices are here, but the majority of their business operations are in America. I will be expected to travel a lot. That will not make Sarah very happy.”

“I am sure that she isn’t happy today,” said Farid’s mother. “I’m sure that she planned on celebrating your success with you. It is a bit unfair to sweep you out of London the very day that you graduate.”

“I told her weeks ago that you planned to bring family and old friends together for a short celebration in Paris,” replied Farid. “Sarah is spending the next five days with her parents. Her grandfather owns a summer home right on the coast in Wales. It’s a nice get away from the family business in the states.”

“And she accepted being left out of our celebration?” asked Karim.

“She was okay with it,” answered Farid. “She isn’t much on traditional Moslem celebrations. Not enough champagne.”

Karim felt his mother squeeze his hand and watched as she wiped a tear from the corner of her eye. “We will discuss the celebration on the helicopter.”

From Biggin Hill Airport to Karim’s estate north of Paris was less than two hours. They were barely off the ground when Karim opened the MacBook he carried and tapped a few commands. As the first photograph opened, he handed the computer to Leila.

“I have some photographs to show you, my son. They will be difficult, but it is important that you see them.”

The image was of two Land Rovers, reduced to scrap and a third car, a Mercedes upside down on a narrow highway. The Land Rovers were torn and twisted almost beyond recognition. The glass was blown out of the Mercedes, its doors forced open. There was blood everywhere. Leila pressed a key on the computer. The next picture was of a man with twisted limbs on a stretcher being loaded into an ambulance. Leila’s hands froze over the keyboard. Farid’s uncle reached across and tapped another key on the laptop.

The next image was of four torn bodies and smashed heads held together by fabric.

“The one on the left in the rear was your father,” said Leila.

The next picture was of a small funeral celebration at a location just outside of Beirut where Farid had spent a dozen years of his life. An early life filled with fears and distrust fueled by conflict between the Shia and Suni power brokers in Lebanon, Israeli threats and conflict involving the handful of Christians who somehow remained. Farid recognized the Suni Mullah from his early days in the mosque, the same man who had pressed his mother to leave the country and accept the invitation of her brother-in-law in Paris.

The following photo was of a much larger funeral and the next picture an even larger one. Farid didn’t recognize the location of either.

“Save your questions my son,” said Leila. “They will all be answered by tonight. You will meet those who can enlighten you, men from across the Middle East.”

Farid had expected a large group to greet the helicopter. Instead, one graying man dressed all in black waited in a four-person golf cart. It was the same man who often accompanied his uncle on his trips to England. The man nodded to Karim and Farid as he helped Leila into the cart. He said nothing, as expected, since in the half-dozen times Farid had been around Ahmed, they had exchanged maybe a dozen words.

The five-minute cart ride from the helicopter to the home seemed to go on forever. In the last few years, Farid seldom heard about his father. He had been the love of his mother's life and his uncle's closest brother. He knew that his father had died in a terrorist attack only a few years before. Never had anyone shared the photographs he'd just seen or been willing to discuss the death. Why now on a day of celebration?

Ahmed hurried Farid, his mother and Karim past the butler and the two maids waiting near the door, almost racing to reach the library. Throwing open the doors to the cavernous room he repeated "Our day is finally come," first in English, then Farsi and finally in Arabic. He quietly closed the door and waited as the others moved into the room.

Instead of the large family gathering Farid expected, three men, all about sixty, wearing suits rose from heavy leather chairs. Karim slowed, shaking hands with each as he introduced his nephew.

"Reza here is the primary banker of the group you are being introduced to. He was born in Liverpool." The man was small and almost bald, his suit tailored but crumpled. Reza held a pair of bottle thick glasses in his left hand.

"Salman is the primary strategist of our movement.

His father is an advisor to the Saudi crown family.” This man was the opposite of Reza; tall and lean like a leopard, he wore a nondescript brown suit that might have come right off the rack at Harrods.

“Mohamed is the liaison with our Iranian partners. Like your mother, father, and uncles, he was one of the Suni who left Iran when the Shah fell.” Mohamed’s smile gave away crooked teeth above a simple blue tie that clashed with his tan cotton suit.

Farid greeted each with a different response. The European greeting was followed by the traditional Salam Alaikum Arabic greeting and then simply Salam, standard in Iran.

“English would be easiest for your conversation,” offered his mother to Farid. “All of us have waited years for this moment. You will make us all proud. Now, please excuse me.” Ahmed held the door for her as she rushed from the room.

“And I am the leader of this small group,” announced Ahmed. “I am the eldest brother of your father and of Karim. I am the man on the stretcher in the photos you studied on your trip across the English Channel. I am also the one man alive who sits at the left hand of the leaders of many groups committed to raising the influence of true believers in the world. I am close to even those who I disagree with, believing in that old Arab proverb, *The enemy of my enemy is my friend*. Your father hated that saying. He dreamed of a Middle East united by the words of the Prophet, with friends across the world.

Karim watched his nephew carefully, sensing shock on the young man’s face. “We are not hypocrites, Farid. We are modern men, living in a modern world. We do not

begrudge the Europeans their culture in their lands or the Asians the life they have always known in their countries. We move comfortably in those worlds. What we seek is the same for people in the Middle East. Your father mistakenly believed that the Suni and Shia were seeking the same thing. Many of the leaders of Jihad were lunatics. He gave his life supporting the Iranians in their efforts to convince the Americans to go home and to embrace the other Moslem sects. They betrayed him just like they betrayed our family years before. Many remain unwilling to give up their ancient dream of making the Shia faith the only true faith of the believers.”

Farid stood stone still trying to take it all in. He had not prepared for anything except a celebration. The others remained still until he dropped into one of the leather chairs next to the massive fireplace.

Karim took the chair next to him. “Your father was the intellect in the family. He was the student and the pragmatic optimist who dedicated his life to you and your mother, but also to recreating the glory of the Middle East, one stolen by outsiders and sabotaged by a centuries old conflict that has no meaning in the modern word. While I worked at making money, your father was committed to changing the world. He was a university professor. Ahmed had been an officer in the Iranian army under the Shah. He was committed to your father’s vision and as the eldest brother, to trying to help your father in spite of his propensity to trust everyone he met.”

“Tell me of my father’s death. Tell me of the other funerals.”

“Your father was asked by the leader of what became known as the ISIS Caliphate, to come to Iraq. Your father,

born in the holiest city in Iran like your mother, the so-called Emir believed that he could bridge the gap between the Caliphate and the Iranian militias that were fighting beside the Americans to destroy the Islamic State. Your father always believed that the schism between the branches of Islam was silly, a centuries-old spat over who rightfully inherited the leadership of Mohamed's movement. He believed that both could unite realizing that the word was the only thing that was important. He believed that the western powers were exploiting the ancient disagreement to slowly take wealth from the land and warp the minds of the faithful."

Karim continued, "the first funeral picture was the one in Lebanon, the one you attended. The second was held in Syria on the one day when the ISIS fighters and Iranian militia members put down their arms to celebrate the new martyrs. The last was in Tehran where your father was eulogized along with the Revolutionary Guard Corps members and militia members killed by the American air strikes. The Iranian regime paid tribute to his death even as they worked tirelessly to destroy his message.

Karim slid his chair closer to his nephew. "I am sorry that I never introduced you to Ahmed, your other uncle. We believed that keeping you focused on your studies was more important than challenging you to launch yourself into a rightful reprisal for the traitorous death of your father. Ahmed is still focused on righting that wrong on the movement and our family. We were afraid that he would share too much and set you off on a personal jihad before you were ready. But now you are here, prepared and positioned to help us make this all right."

Farid ran through the math in his mind. Much of what he was hearing was old history to a man of twenty-four.

The seriousness of the moment clicked into his brain as he realized how patiently those present waited. If he'd been a perfect student, he would have finished his education in three years, not five.

“And, young man, you will perhaps put an end to both the Shia-Suni conflict and the dominance of the Americans in our lands,” said Salman lighting a small thin cigar. “There should be no one country representing the faithful. Each should select their own leaders, with only one pre-condition: faith must be central to the culture of the nations. Some may adopt democratic forms of government while others may remain comfortable with monarchy. But for that to happen, the extremes of the Iranian government and its power must be destroyed, and the Americans and other western powers must realize that meddling in the affairs of our lands is more costly than it is worth. We should be free to evolve as we see fit. Our family dedicated years to that vision. Only seven years ago, your father gave his life to it.”

Farid watched as the small balding man from Liverpool used a cane to rise. “On equal terms, we will engage with the world. We can be a power for peace across the globe. But our window is closing. With the enormous mineral wealth of our region, we should be the financial center of the world. The world needs our oil and gas, but the damned Russians have spent two decades convincing the West that fossil fuels are bad instead of working with us to reduce their impact on the environment. If we do not act soon, reliance on our one great advantage will be diminished to the point where we become unimportant.”

“And why have the Russians done what they have done?” asked Farid.

“Because the idiot leading the country has not figured out that we are in the twenty-first century, not the 1700s. He is obsessed with destroying the west, especially the U.S., and one of his strategies is to use propaganda to get them to weaken themselves. He encourages them to abandon fossil fuels even as he knows that it is impossible for perhaps another century. He still believes that territory is power. Putin is sitting on the richest mineral wealth in the world with a small, educated population and cannot see how powerful his country could be in 100 years if they just develop it. Instead, he seeks power only from conquest like some ancient warlord. His fiasco in Ukraine set Russia back decades. The good news is he has extended the window for our plans by accident. Russian petroleum deliveries are way down, and in the West, their own weakened oil industry is incapable of supplying the needs. Our region alone is keeping the world’s economy operating.”

Farid’s initial shock was wearing off. “I understand the responsibility of a son to avenge a father’s murder. I am my father’s son. But you still haven’t told me of my father’s actual death.”

Ahmed leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes before speaking. “The caliphate was crumbling, unable to overcome the power of the Americans, the Russians helping a dictator in Syria and the weak Iraqi army supported by Iranian controlled militias. Your father was touring each Shia militia, one at a time in hopes of getting them to stop killing fellow Muslims. He wasn’t part of the caliphate, just an advisor. I was traveling with him, to coordinate security. The militias, upon orders from Tehran were ratcheting up attacks on the Americans which would have been okay except that at the same time



they were working with the same Americans to destroy the Islamic State fighters once and for all. Most of your father's meetings degenerated into diatribes against the Americans. To those militias controlled by Iran, the only enemy worse were the fighters united under Suni banners, especially the ISIS black flag."

Ahmed stood and strode purposefully over to a bookcase, removing a large binder. He opened it and handed it to Farid. "Read the article under the green tab."

It took Farid a minute to read a New York Times article on an American strike to kill the leader of the leader of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps. The Americans had used a missile equipped drone to kill the man they blamed for planning most of the attacks on Americans across Iraq and Syria.

"I read about the attack on General Soleimani. Frankly, I think the world is better off without him," offered Farid.

"Later in the article, you will read about other strikes the same day. The Americans went after the leadership of several of the Iranian backed militias. They knew that there was a conference planned for that day and attacked several of the militia leaders while they traveled."

"I think I knew about that too," offered Farid.

"What you didn't know was that one militia leader was late leaving. He was delayed by a meeting with your father; a very heated meeting, one where your father was accused of actually helping kill militia members and of siding with the Americans." Ahmed seemed to wipe away a tear.

"As they wrapped up, a messenger whispered into the ear of the Shia leader. I believe he told the leader about attacks on other militias. The leader excused himself for a

few minutes, I believe to phone Iran for advice. He looked rattled when he returned but offered to help us.

Instead of traveling himself he called your father into his office and told him that if he hurried, he might be able to catch the last couple of hours of a militia executive meeting where he could plead his case. He offered his car and driver as well as bodyguards to escort him to the meeting. He sent your father out knowing that any convoy from the compound might be a target. Instead of hitting the militia leader the Americans killed your father.”

“But they didn’t kill you,” said Farid, his face twisted.

“I left the building to give your father privacy in his discussions. Outside I heard rumors of the attacks and walked across the compound to the militia’s intelligence headquarters. Returning, I heard your father had rushed out, trying to save something from a disastrous day. We always traveled with our phones shut off to avoid being tracked, so my only hope was to catch up. I commandeered a Mercedes at gunpoint and raced after them. The Land Rovers were coasting to a stop when the missiles hit. I wasn’t targeted, just too close to avoid the destruction.”

Karim handed his older brother a clean handkerchief from his lapel pocket as he watched him fight off the tears forming in his eyes. “Farid, both the Americans and the Iranians are responsible for your father’s death. Both are in the way of the lands we want to return to our people. We have a plan to target both, to right this wrong. And if we are successful, we may just land the one blow that makes our world whole again. We were once a land of poetry, music, astronomy, and mathematics; much of the world’s culture came from us. Even an enemy was safe if he had been invited into our home.”

Farid's incredulous look showed what he was thinking. "How do we do this?"

"To begin with we will take advantage of the fact that the Iranians and Americans do not like or trust each other." He motioned toward Salman. "Some years ago, Salman outlined a complicated plan, and we began preparing. We discovered one flaw, a hole. You are the one who must fill in the missing piece of the puzzle."

"I don't hate the Americans or the French or the English," offered Farid. "The Americans should pay for the death of my father, but even the Russians could not confront them."

"Nor do we," answered Reza. "We just want them to leave our lands so that the culture has time to really take root with the people. The teachings of our faith need to be stripped of the false interpretations. We need time to resurrect the civilization that once made the Middle East the center of culture and learning. In the future, the Western world is a logical partner."

"But your father's vision of bringing the Iranian dictatorship into the plan was always a pipedream," added Ahmed. "As long as they hate everybody who is different, the world remains divided and very dangerous. They now embrace the bloody Russians. No rational nation embraces them. The Iranian regime are hypocrites and defile the teachings of the prophet. There will be blood spilled to destroy them and to push the Westerners out of the Middle East. You will be part of a small army that will dip swords into the blood of thousands. But it will all come quickly, and that blood will nourish a reawakened people."

"We have spent years preparing you for one tiny part,

Farid. We will avenge your father together. We know we can count on you,” added Karim.

Farid leaned back in his chair, again dabbing sweat from his brow in the cool room.