

Accomplice to Terror

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FBI agent Harry Hunter is under pressure to catch some bigger fish than the wannabe terrorists he's been rounding up—people who couldn't rob a piggy bank without help from the FBI, as his boss puts it. So when an undercover agent finds another group of terrorists, the Bureau decides to put them on a long leash, hoping to round up a bigger prize. But when you put criminals on a long leash, you could get bitten, as Harry's wife points out, and you yourself might become an accomplice to terror.

Concept

After Harry Hunter and his team of agents round up a group who hoped to topple the Washington Monument, Harry's boss, Joe Hardy, pressures him to find some real criminals and not just wannabe terrorists. After Harry catches some more hopeless amateurs, he feels the heat and tries to find some bigger fish to fry.

When his undercover man, Ahmet, infiltrates a radical Islam group in Brooklyn, the terrorists insist on getting real explosives to test. Harry approves, planning to substitute fake explosives before a real attack can be carried out.

Then a Hudson River ferry is destroyed in an explosion. Was it done by the terrorist group using the explosives provided by the FBI?

Next, Ahmet learns of a plot to bring down the Brooklyn Bridge. It seems unlikely but possible. The FBI team moves to Brooklyn and, when the attack is imminent, goes to the terrorist storage space, removes the boxes there, and substitutes fake explosives.

When the terrorists arrive on the Brooklyn Bridge during evening rush hour, the FBI swoops in and rounds them up. The terrorists, as expected, have backpacks full of fake explosives. Then Harry gets a call from his explosives expert, Smiley Stevenson. The boxes the FBI confiscated also contain fake explosives. The real bombs are missing. And so is Ahmet.

Ahmet manages to get messages to Harry, telling him that the real target is the Washington Monument.

The terrorists load two motorcycles with explosives and chain Ahmet to one of them as a passenger. When gunfire erupts near the Washington Monument, the FBI and other law enforcement people rush to the scene. The motorcycles evade them, and head towards their real target: the Holocaust Museum.

Ahmet throws his weight to one side, causing the motorcycle to crash. Another agent tackles the second motorcycle, bringing it down too—narrowly averting disaster.

Characterization

Harry Hunter is a veteran FBI agent who is under pressure to produce more impressive results that will play well on TV. Although cautioned by his wife, Sharon, he allows a terrorist group to get hold of real explosives from the FBI, placing innocent people at risk. He is overconfident that the FBI will be able to retrieve the explosives before anyone gets hurt.

Sharon Hunter is a nurse who sees plenty of trouble every day and isn't looking for more. She advises Harry to be content with protecting the public and not to take risks just to get good press. Although Harry, along with Jennifer Isely (an FBI media specialist), consider her a hero because of her vocation, Sharon tells them that being a hero doesn't necessarily get you applause. It often means doing something unpopular, and if you do what you know is right, you may not get rewarded for it.

Joe Hardy is an impatient FBI boss who is more concerned with image than actuality. He ridicules Harry's capture of small-time amateur terrorists and repeatedly pressures him to land some bigger fish.

Ahmet is an immigrant Muslim who has made America his home and works undercover for the FBI. He infiltrates the terrorist groups and keeps his ear to the ground, on the alert for trouble. He agrees that the best course is to stop trouble early, but he will cooperate with Harry's plan and risk his life to stop criminals.

Jennifer Isely is an FBI media specialist. Her job is to spread a mixture of truth and propaganda. She wishes she could be a hero like Sharon.

Aneesa is another immigrant Muslim who has made a home in America. Her sincere belief in personal jihad (a struggle against her own faults) is something she explains to Sharon, contrasting it with Khalid's idea of jihad, which is war against his enemies. Aneesa is impressed and challenged by Lincoln's words about reconciliation with enemies.

Khalid (Imam Immanuel) has a lot of grievances about America's treatment of Muslims both domestically and abroad. He preaches vengeance and leads a cunning plot to kill Americans and destroy a symbol of Israel.

Smiley Stevenson is an FBI explosives expert who makes sure that terrorist groups that are infiltrated by the FBI get only harmless fakes. He is against letting the terrorists get hold of real bombs, but he acquiesces in Harry's plan. He takes initiative to stop the terrorists on his own.

Theme

Doing the right thing is not necessarily what will look good on TV. Being a hero often means doing something unpopular. And doing what might look good on TV could actually put innocent people at risk. Harry Hunter and Jennifer Isely both struggle to make decisions that will get other people angry but are the right thing to do.

Tone

The story is an adventure rather than a serious exploration of efforts to combat terrorism. However, it does touch on a few serious concerns:

What makes a hero? Harry thinks his wife, Sharon, is a hero because she's a nurse. Jennifer Isely, an FBI media specialist, thinks the same. Sharon says she's just doing her job. She cautions Jennifer that she might get to be a hero, and if it happens, she might have to do something unpopular.

Reputation vs. reality. Harry's boss is more concerned with press coverage than with actual results. Sharon's Muslim friend Aneesa notes that religious characters who make sensational statements get more press than people who are trying to do good because of their faith. Sharon herself becomes angry when Jennifer's accurate coverage of Harry's failure gets onto the evening news.

Response to injustice. The terrorist leader has bona fide complaints against America, but his reaction—to kill Americans—is a mix of vengeance and selfishness. Ahmet, the undercover agent, is, by contrast, loyal and willing to sacrifice himself if necessary.

Story

Digging Up Small Potatoes in Washington

Aneesa is in the Lincoln Memorial, marveling at the words of Lincoln's second inaugural address: "with malice toward none, with charity toward all." At the same moment, Khalid, also known as Imam Immanuel, is looking at possible targets for a terrorist attack. The Lincoln Memorial? The Washington Monument? Both have problems as targets. Something else?

That evening, the FBI rounds up a group of terrorists who were plotting to destroy the Washington Monument. One of his undercover agents is waiting in the shadows. After everyone else has gone, Harry turns to him and says, "Nice work, Ahmet."

Harry is on the 11 o'clock news that night, which mentions that, according to the FBI, the public was never in danger.

"The public was never in danger," Joe Hardy tells Harry the next day. "You can say that again! Wannabe terrorists with fake explosives and an impossible target!" He tells Harry that it makes the FBI look like idiots and orders Harry to find some real criminals.

That night, Harry tells Sharon about the chewing-out he got and asks, "If the public was never in danger, what great thing did we do?"

"If the public was never in danger," replies Sharon, "isn't that the *best* thing you could do?"

Harry starts saying that Sharon, a nurse, is a hero every day, but she cuts him off and says that she does her job, and does her best, as part of a team, but, still, people sometimes die.

Harry meets with Ahmet, the undercover agent who infiltrated the terrorist group that wanted to destroy the Washington Monument. Ahmet admits that the criminals they just rounded up were embarrassingly inept; Ahmet says he's glad he's undercover so he doesn't get publicly associated with catching amateurs. Harry asks Ahmet to keep his ear to the ground. Harry also meets with Smiley Stevenson, an FBI explosives expert, to discuss his work in supplying fake bombs to terrorist groups infiltrated by the FBI. Smiley has drawn a smiley face on one of the boxes.

"What, do you mark all the fake explosives with smiley faces?" asks Harry.

"I'm just signing my work," says Smiley, adding that the bad guys get plain brown wrappers.

Bioterrorism in Washington?

At the cafeteria in Metropolitan Hospital in Washington, DC, Ahmet overhears two suspicious men sitting at a table but not eating. They say they'll be back the next day.

Under Harry's supervision, the FBI bugs a pepper shaker on the table the men sat at. When the men return to observe the cafeteria, they seem to discuss poisoning the salad bar. They agree to return one more day to observe the cafeteria before proceeding. The next day, FBI agent Dave Warden leaves a note on a napkin, telling them to ask for Jason in the lab. Jason can help them. When the men come to the lab, Warden, posing as lab worker Jason, suggests that they meet for dinner. Once Warden verifies that the men want to poison the salad bar, he says he can supply them with a poison that can't be distinguished from potato whitener. The men enthusiastically agree.

The next day in the cafeteria, the men walk over to the salad bar, carrying a bag of white powder, then start sprinkling the powder onto the lettuce. A real lab worker carrying a tray of food sees this and confronts them. The two men turn and hurry toward the door, but half a dozen FBI agents spring up from tables in the cafeteria and intercept them.

The incident makes the evening news, and again Joe Hardy is frosted. “We caught a couple of chumps, and now we’re famous. Terrorists with potato whitener! It makes me look like Mister Potato Head!... Enough fooling around!”

The next day, Harry tells FBI media specialist Jennifer Iseley he’s glad the incident wasn’t filmed. Jennifer protests that it would have made good film, but notes that having a camera crew there might have spooked the terrorists.

A while later, he encounters Jennifer walking on the National Mall (the park that stretches from the Capitol to the Lincoln Memorial). He tells her that Joe Hardy is pressuring him to catch bigger criminals. He asks whether she is under pressure too. She says no and cautions Harry: “You start responding to pressure and you’ll make mistakes.”

Soon afterward, Jennifer sits on a bench by the Potomac River; Aneesa is already sitting there, and they talk and discover that they both know the Hunters. Then they talk about radical people, and Jennifer points out that Jesus and Lincoln were, in their way, radicals. Jennifer and Aneesa decide to be “good radicals.”

That night, Harry tells Sharon about the continuing pressure from Joe Hardy. “Remember what’s important,” she tells him. “The one making the most noise is not necessarily right. In this case, almost certainly not right. Do what’s right. I believe that you will.”

In his next meeting with Joe Hardy, Harry says, “Even the small timers could lead us to big timers.”

“Now you’re talking like you have a brain,” answers Hardy. “If Ahmet manages to infiltrate another operation, let him lie low for a while and see what they’re up to. Let him see whether the small fish aren’t swimming near some big sharks.”

Preparing for Holy War in New York

Ahmet tells Harry what he’s learned about Imam Immanuel in New York: “He’s talking about America versus Islam, and how U.S. policies are hurting Islamic people, and how they have to fight back. Now, it’s true, his complaints have some foundation ...”

“Yeah, yeah,” replies Harry. “I know we aren’t angels, but that doesn’t mean we’ll let him get away with murder.”

Imam Immanuel is planning a Day of Jihad rally in Washington, but meanwhile Ahmet wants go to New York and check him out. Harry agrees.

On a bus to New York, Ahmet talks with another Islamic man who says they must struggle to obtain freedom for everyone, but cautions Ahmet to be careful about who he gets involved with.

In New York, Ahmet settles in for a long stay. On the street he sees a poster for a talk by Imam Immanuel. A few nights later, inside the Bay Ridge Center for Islamic Struggle, Ahmet hears Imam Immanuel (Khalid) reciting grievances against America and urging people to wage holy war. Afterwards a reporter asks Imam Immanuel what he means when he says, “America will once again feel the sword of jihad.” Imam Immanuel answers the reporter’s questions, but evasively.

After the reporter leaves, Ahmet tells Khalid, “I am willing to struggle for justice.”

“Excellent,” replies Khalid, who says he cannot discuss details there; he tells Ahmet to meet him the next day at 6 pm in the middle of the walkway on the Brooklyn Bridge.

The next evening, Ahmet meets Khalid and plays the part of a man eager for holy war. Khalid tells him to look at the bridge and “imagine it falling into the river, with thousands of people on it, cars sinking, infidels screaming.” With brothers working together, it could be done, says Khalid.

Ahmet reports to Harry, and when Harry tells Joe Hardy, Hardy responds, “Listen, Hunter, why don’t you just *sell* them the Brooklyn Bridge?”

Back in Washington, the newspaper has a story by the reporter who questioned Imam Immanuel. Sharon and Aneesa discuss the story. Aneesa says that Imam Immanuel has a distorted idea of jihad. She says that they must struggle for justice and freedom, but also must struggle against their own faults. Sharon says that Christians have similar concepts. Both of them agree that the people who distort the truth and make sensational statements are the ones who usually get into the news.

Meanwhile, at a meeting of the terrorist group, Khalid explains the plot: two vans with explosives, one coming from New York, the other from Brooklyn, will drive onto the Brooklyn Bridge at rush hour. Two other vans will be following those; the following vans will be turned to block traffic and then set on fire. Then the bombers will deploy bombs to destroy enough suspension cables to make the bridge collapse.

Khalid assigns Ahmet to obtain explosives and says he wants to test the bombs to make sure they’re real. After Ahmet departs on his assignment, Khalid says, “Ahmet is FBI. But he will be useful to us.”

Ahmet tells Harry, who tells Joe Hardy, and Joe Hardy approves letting the terrorists have real explosives. The FBI intends to get them back before an actual attack is carried out.

In a dry run for the attack, Khalid watches from the middle of the bridge and times the vans as they cross the river.

At a self-storage center in Brooklyn, Harry Hunter and Smiley Stevenson deliver a load of bombs to be picked up later by the terrorists. When Khalid and Ahmet go there later, Khalid warns, “We are not going to be duped with fake explosives.”

Two days later, the Hunters are sitting in their living room watching the news. “Two people were killed today when an explosion blew a hole in the bottom of a Hudson River ferry,” says the news anchor. “At least ten were seriously injured.”

“Well, maybe now you have some dangerous terrorists to catch,” says Sharon. “That should make Hardy happy.”

“No, I don’t think Hardy is going to be happy about this,” answers Harry.

The next day, Harry tells Joe Hardy the details of his plans: “We plan to go the self-storage place just before the attack and substitute fake bombs for the real ones we gave them. And we will have a team in place to bust them all on the bridge—plainclothes officers on the spot, snipers on the cable catwalks and in the towers, people on the walkway, plus more people at each end of the bridge.” Joe Hardy tells him to get it all on film.

At the Hunters’ home, Jennifer Isely tells Sharon that Sharon is a hero because she’s a nurse. “Will you stop that?” says Sharon. “Harry was giving me the same story earlier.” Sharon says that sometimes she does “get to be a hero, and it’s not easy or fun. It usually means doing something unpopular, something against the grain, but you know it’s the right thing to do.”

On the TV news, Sharon and Jennifer see that security has been tightened in New York because of the ferry bombing. Minority groups say they are being singled out as suspects, and Imam Immanuel is leading a protest. Immanuel “gives me the creeps,” says Jennifer. “People are losing their civil liberties, and they have a right to demand them back, but Immanuel sounds like he is ready to escalate the conflict into killing.”

Attack on the Brooklyn Bridge

At a meeting of the terrorist group, Khalid (Imam Immanuel) says that the explosives worked and that it’s time to proceed with the attack. One man asks, “Is it necessary that all of us die in this operation?”

“If you are not prepared to make the necessary sacrifice, you may leave now,” says Khalid. He tells his lieutenant to escort the man out. After they leave, loud arguing and pleading are heard outside, followed by gunshots.

Ahmet lets Harry know that the attack is imminent. Harry, Jennifer, Smiley, and the rest of the team travel to New York. That night some of them go to the self-storage place to confiscate the contents and put fake explosives there instead.

The next afternoon, the terrorists prepare for the attack. As they pile into the vans, Khalid turns to Ahmet and says, “You come with me.”

When the terrorists stop their vans on the bridge, setting two vans on fire, FBI agents emerge pour onto the bridge, surrounding the terrorists. The FBI media people are still recording the scene when Harry Hunter learns first that Ahmet is missing and then that the explosives the FBI confiscated were fakes. The terrorists on the bridge also have fake explosives. The real ones are missing.

Holy War in Washington

After Jennifer has returned from New York, she and Sharon are watching TV news in the Hunters’ home. “The explosives we took from the terrorists are fakes,” says Harry on TV.

Sharon is furious with Jennifer for releasing this video to the news people. “This makes Harry look incompetent and just as dangerous as the terrorists! How could you just put this out in front of the public?”

“Somebody at the Bureau got out of control on this one, handing out real explosives to terrorists,” replies Jennifer. “People need to be held accountable for their actions.”

“How could you do this?” demands Sharon. “This is going to hurt people. Do you think it was worth it? And you’re going to be out of a job tomorrow.”

“I know,” replies Jennifer as she gets up to leave, a tear in her eye.

Ahmet, Khalid, and two other men are in a car heading south on the New Jersey Turnpike at night. Ahmet’s phone rings. One of the men says, “Don’t answer that. Give it to me. You won’t be needing it any more.” Khalid says they are going to the Day of Jihad.

At a rest area, Ahmet enters a toilet stall. He unrolls several feet of toilet paper and writes a message on it: “Emergency. Call Hunter, FBI. Ahmet.” Then he rolls up the toilet paper so that the message is not visible. Walking back to the car, Ahmet intentionally scratches his finger on a newspaper rack so that his finger starts bleeding. Getting into the car, Ahmet quickly scrawls, “HELP,” in blood on the outside of the door. The toilet paper message reaches FBI headquarters, and a tollboth attendant notices the message in blood. At another rest area, however, one of the men changes the license plates and puts a few dents in the car to disguise it.

In Washington, the men go to the National Mall, where Khalid talks about destroying the Washington Monument. A sailor nearby notices Ahmet tapping his fingers in Morse code. This message too reaches the FBI.

That night Smiley Stevenson notices someone who looks like Ahmet walking with two other men. Keeping to the shadows, he follows them. He waits while they enter a building and then leave a while later.

The next morning, Khalid opens the Day of Jihad, saying he will take up the sword and lead them against their enemies.

Back at the terrorist hideout, he and the others load two motorcycles with explosives. Then they gag and blindfold Ahmet, chain him to one of the motorcycles, and put a helmet on him with the visor down. Khalid asks Ahmet whether he is ready to be a martyr.

Jennifer Isely, meanwhile, does not report to work. She walks around Washington and once again encounters Aneesa. She describes how she filmed the operation in New York and gave the video to the news people.

“But you think you did the right thing?” asks Aneesa.

“Filming what Harry said? Yes. I think so.” Then they hear the sound of gunfire. Jennifer jumps to her feet and sprints toward the sound.

Between the Washington Monument and the Reflecting Pool, terrorists in ski masks are crouching behind barriers, firing at guards and at people near the monument. The guards return fire. Some of the guards and some of the terrorists are hit by bullets. Police begin arriving from several directions, and the front of the monument is temporarily unguarded.

The two explosive-laden motorcycles race between the bollards and roar up the hill toward the entrance. Several guards turn and look, then fire, but they are too far away, and they miss. Then the motorcycles turn aside, drive out through the bollards, and head south on 14th Street.

Harry Hunter, Joe Hardy, and others arrive just in time to see the motorcycles driving away.

Ahmet, hearing the roaring engines and the gunfire, knows that the operation must be approaching the climax. He leans to one side, then throws all his weight toward the other. The driver loses control, and the motorcycle tips over, then spins sideways, skidding on its side down the street.

The other motorcycle continues south.

Jennifer Isely rounds the corner by the Holocaust Museum. She glances up toward it, sees the second motorcycle coming down the street, and realizes that the museum is the true target. She runs toward the motorcycle and, when she is only a few feet away from it, leaps up and tackles the driver. The motorcycle tips over and crashes. Jennifer falls to the street and lies there injured and bloody.

Harry gets out of a car and runs to the first motorcycle wreck. Police are checking for signs of life, but the driver is dead. Harry Hunter raises the visor on the helmet of the chained passenger, rips off the blindfold, and recognizes the man. It is Ahmet. Ahmet opens his eyes.

“Nice work, Ahmet,” says Harry.

Joe Hardy runs to where Jennifer is lying on the street. He kneels beside her and takes her hand. She is hurt but conscious, and she looks at him.

Smiley Stevenson walks up to Harry, who turns toward him.

“Why didn’t the bombs explode when the motorcycles crashed?” asks Harry.

Smiley Stevenson crouches next to the wrecked motorcycle. He takes a marker from his pocket. On a package lashed to the motorcycle, Smiley Stevenson draws a smiley face.

“I was out on the town last night,” he says. Then he looks up at Harry Hunter and grins.