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11 July 77

Dear Anthony,

Here is an expanded and, I hope, improved
outline for THE YELLOWCAKE PIRATES. Please let me
know what you think.

Yours,

Ken Follett.

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Outline

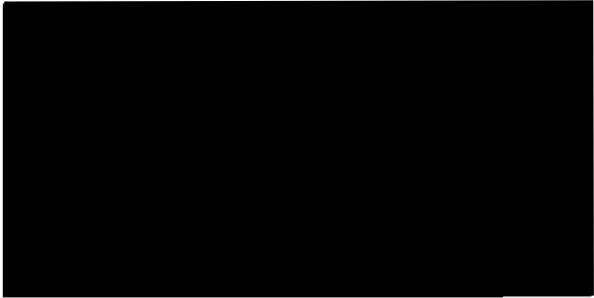
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THE YELLOWCAKE PIRATES

by Ken Follett

125,000 words

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A technical note:-

Uranium has to go through two processes before it can be used to make atom bombs. (i) It must undergo fission in an atomic pile, eg a nuclear power station. (ii) The 'spent' fuel from the reactor must be reprocessed and the explosive by-product plutonium extracted.

Uranium can be bought on the open market, although suppliers are few and sales are strictly monitored by international agencies. Furthermore, many of the 'non-nuclear' nations have atomic power stations, and can therefore carry out process (i). In particular, Israel has one at Dimona in the Negev Desert. The technology of reprocessing is straightforward for anyone who has a reactor; and the construction of an atom bomb is no more difficult than that of any other bomb.

However, none of the non-nuclear nations is allowed to reprocess spent fuel. Uranium is always sold on condition the spent fuel is returned to the major powers for reprocessing.

The international agencies are able to police these agreements quite strictly; for, given the quantity of uranium fed into the reactor, it is possible to calculate precisely how much plutonium will be recovered from the spent fuel.

In this way the major powers have tried to limit the spread of nuclear weapons while at the same time giving other countries the benefits of nuclear power.

It follows that a minor power which wants atom bombs must first of all acquire a stockpile of uranium secretly.

Prologue In 1947 philosophy professor Stephen Ashford gives a sherry party at his house in Oxford. Ashford has a beautiful Lebanese wife, Eila, and a six-year-old daughter, Suza. Guests at the party include: Yasif Hassan, son of a wealthy Palestinian and friend of the Ashford family through Eila; David Rostov, a young Russian on a scholarship to Ruskin College; Nat Dickstein, a young Jew from East London who has recently been demobilised after a very tough war; and Al Cortone, a GI whose life Dickstein saved. All these men are captivated by Eila.

Prof. Ashford takes Dickstein aside. He is speaking on behalf of the Foreign Office, he says. They would be grateful if Dickstein would befriend Rostov, keep an eye on him, and report his doings via Ashford. Dickstein recognises this as an Intelligence gambit, and he agrees.

PART ONE

Chapter One In 1968 a young Israeli agent discovers that the Egyptians are building a nuclear power complex in the Western Desert. Before he can report back he is captured, interrogated and killed; but his interrogator is another Israeli agent in deep cover, and this man passes on the news.

Chapter Two There is a dispute in the Israeli cabinet. The Hawks want atom bombs. The Doves raise two objections: (i) the effect might be to justify the Russians in giving atom bombs

to the Egyptians; (ii) Israel has no supply of uranium. The Doves prevail until Pierre Borg, the oafish Quebecois head of the Mossad, announces that Egypt has already started to build a nuclear strike force. That disposes of objection (i). Borg also has the answer to (ii) ...

Chapter Three In an orchard some miles from Tel Aviv we meet Nat Dickstein, now aged 41, our central character. After his brief flirtation with MI5 at Oxford he went to Israel, fought in the War of Independence, and joined the Mossad. He has been shaped by two traumas: his father's persecution by English fascists in the 1930s, and his own sufferings as a prisoner-of-war in Nazi Germany. He is an uncompromising Zionist; nevertheless he sees the world not in terms of Good Guys and Bad Guys, but of My People and The Rest. He is an intelligent cynic with a Lenny Bruce sense of humour and a deep-seated psychological block about sex. Small, bespectacled and deceptively slender, he is capable of sudden savage violence. (But don't worry, you'll like him, I promise!)

Pierre Borg arrives and briefs Dickstein to steal a quantity of uranium in such a way that at first it will seem to have been lost. The idea is that the radiation authorities and the owners will be so embarrassed that they will cover it up. Later they will be compromised by the cover-up. If and when that gets out, the trail to Tel Aviv will have gone cold.

Chapter Four Dickstein's first move is to penetrate the

Brussels headquarters of Euratom, where track is kept of all radioactive material in the European Common Market. First by posing as a journalist, and later by subverting a permit clerk, Dickstein gains access to the files.

Apparently by accident he bumps into an old college friend, Yasif Hassan. The meeting is uncomfortable: the Hassan family has been impoverished by the 1948 war, and Yasif now works in the European headquarters of a Jordanian bank.

Chapter Five Dickstein visits a nuclear power station and takes the guided tour, noting the security set-up. He could steal uranium from a place like this, but the theft would be discovered immediately. He will consider stealing a consignment in transit.

During this trip he is tailed. The tail reports back to David Rostov, who has been with the KGB since before coming to Oxford. He knows that Dickstein is with Mossad. He also knows that the reactor Dickstein visited is part-owned by a company which supplies armoured ~~km~~ cars to Libya; so he speculates that the Mossad plan a punitive raid on the power station. The surveillance of Dickstein is continued.

Chapter Six Dickstein returns to the files and notes details of several future uranium shipments. He is beginning to hatch a scheme.

He loses his tail and flies to London.

Rostov interrogates Dickstein's Euratom contact. The clerk tells all he knows, but it's not much: Dickstein appears

to be interested in all Euratom permits for transfer of uranium. Rostov makes notes.

Chapter Seven Dickstein visits Prof. Ashford to ask whether Yasif Hassan is 'in the game'. Dickstein is thunderstruck when the door is opened by a woman who appears to be Eila, not a day older than she was in 1941. In fact Eila is dead, and this is her daughter Suza, now 21 and an interpreter.

Ashford says Yes, Hassan has been with Egyptian Intelligence since 1948.

(Isn't it too much of a coincidence that these people, who met by chance in 1947, should all be in the story? No. People go to Oxford to meet the men together with whom they will rule the world twenty years later. Moreover, an MI5 man with a Lebanese wife would be likely to meet a visiting Palestinian, a Russian spy, and a bright young man with ideas of getting into Intelligence.)

Chapter Eight Dickstein goes to Lloyds to make inquiries about a number of ships. One of the permits he has seen in the Euratom files is for a consignment of 200 tons of yellowcake (crude uranium oxide) to be shipped from Antwerp to Genoa aboard the m.v. Coparelli. The owner of the uranium is a small German industrial-chemicals manufacturer which supplies pesticides to the Israeli army. At Lloyds Dickstein learns that the Coparelli has a sister ship, the Stromberg, identical in all but name.

Dickstein's plan blossoms.

Rostov meets with Hassan, and we realise they have been working together all this time. So far, what do they know?

1. Dickstein is with Mossad.
2. He went to a power station.
3. He made inquiries about uranium shipments. It's not difficult to guess that Mossad are after uranium - but what uranium? They don't know, and now they've lost track of Dickstein. The phone rings. Rostov speaks, hangs up, and says: 'Relax. He's contacted us.'

Chapter Nine Suza calls Dickstein and they have dinner.

She is warm, tender, intelligent, happy and promiscuous. But Dickstein has lots of reasons for being ambivalent about her: she's half Lebanese, he suspects himself of being in love with the memory of her mother, her father is with MI5, and Dickstein has not had a lover for more than twenty years. Despite all this, Suza overcomes his sexual block, with devastating results.

Dickstein has not told Ashford what he is up to, but he tells Suza he has been to Lloyds, and she tells her father. Dickstein also tells her he is going to see a man whose life he saved, but she does not mention this.

Dickstein's relationship with Suza is viewed with hostility by Pierre Borg, who homes in unerringly on the fact that, whichever way upside you look at it, the broad is a half a fucking A-rab.

Chapter Ten Dickstein goes to Buffalo to see Alan Cortone, now known as Don Cortone, to call in the debt. He wants the use of a large, isolated house, with a mooring, on the coast of

Sicily, with no questions asked by the authorities.

Cortone: 'Is that all?'

Hassan goes to London to retrace Dickstein's footsteps. He knows that Dickstein went to Lloyds because - we now learn - Ashford is a double agent, and has been since 1943, when, in his view, the British became the Bad Guys in the Middle East.

By comparing the list of Curaton permits with the list of ships Dickstein inquired about at Lloyds, Hassan is able to isolate the name Coparelli. Now they know which uranium Dickstein will steal - but where, when and how?

Chapter Eleven Dickstein sets up two shipping companies registered in Liberia. Company A opens an office in Hamburg, buys a small ship, begins to trade, and buys the m.v. Stromberg. Company B exists only on paper. Dickstein also gets the Israeli army to step up the business it does with the German industrial-chemicals manufacturer.

Suza discovers (suspiciously easily) that her father is a double agent. She realises that she has unwittingly been passing information about Dickstein to his enemies. She must find him and warn him. She is able to ~~discover~~ ^{establish} that the man whose life he saved is Alan Cortone. She gets on a plane.

establish

Her 'discovery' was stage-managed by Hassan, who now follows her to Buffalo.

Chapter Twelve At this point Hassan begins to lie to Rostov about a number of things. One of his lies is to pretend he has recruited Suza.

Dickstein visits the ^{Jewish} owner of a ~~Jewish~~ seamen's employment bureau in Antwerp and tells the man that the Israeli government will shortly be asking a favour - or else.

Borg contacts Dickstein. The Egyptian reactor is operational, which means the Arabs will have plutonium within a matter of weeks. The race is on.

PART TWO

Chapter Thirteen In Buffalo Suza meets Cortone. He knows that she is who she says she is, because of course he remembers her mother; so he tells her the address of the house in Sicily.

Dickstein's team begins to gather in Sicily, and the Stromberg moors offshore.

Chapter Fourteen While the Coparelli is loading uranium at Antwerp her chief engineer vanishes (shanghaied by Dickstein) and is replaced, via the seamen's employment agency, by Dickstein's man Koff.

The Coparelli sails. While she is at sea she is bought by Dickstein's paper company, which undertakes to fulfil her existing commitments.

Suza finds Dickstein in Sicily and warns him.

Hassan, following her, bugs the Stromberg with a radio beacon.

Chapter Fifteen Suza returns home to be met by Rostov, who thinks - remember? - that she is on his team. He tells her she has done well to lead Hassan to Dickstein. She keeps her mouth shut. Hassan has had to go to Cairo for a day or two, he says; so she must stay with Rostov, as she knows Dickstein so well. Suza feels she has betrayed Dickstein again, and she stays with Rostov, partly to hope for a chance to put matters right, and partly because if she tries to escape she will probably become a prisoner.

They board a Polish merchant vessel, heavily armed and crewed by KGB. Rostov believes that Dickstein plans to hijack the Coparelli and transfer the uranium to the Stromberg. Rostov's plan is to have the Polish ship collide with the Stromberg at sea, so that the theft of the uranium will be exposed in the subsequent inquiry, causing the Israelis extreme international embarrassment and fouling up their nuclear schemes.

Chapter Sixteen But Hassan has a plan, and it's different from Rostov's. Hassan too has divided loyalties, for he works for the PLO, and they want the uranium. (They can't make bombs, but just think of the publicity.) Hassan plans to hijack the Coparelli before Dickstein.

Borg contacts Dickstein. Egypt has delivered a secret ultimatum: unless the Israelis clear out of Sinai, the Arabs will use nuclear weapons.

Chapter Seventeen However, both Rostov and Hassan have Dickstein figured wrong. He plans nothing so simple as a

straightforward Hijack.

Aboard the Coparelli, engineer Koff rigs a breakdown. The ship will have to be towed to port for repairs. The captain cables the owner - now Dickstein, of course. A Dickstein ship which 'happens' to be close by heaves-to and takes off the captain and crew, leaving only Koff, and replacing the crew with a handful of agents. (The crew will be taken to the next port of call and paid off.)

The point of all this is to clear the way for Dickstein & Co to take over. Sadly, it also clears the way for the PLO.

Chapter Seventeen Koff gets a message off to the Stromberg before the PLO reach the radio room.

Unfortunately for Hassan, although he has the uranium he can't move it, because the Coparelli is still crippled. This screws up the plan, and the forewarned Dickstein is able to win the ship back after a battle.

Chapter Eighteen Now Dickstein's plan goes ahead. The Stromberg and the Coparelli switch identities - names, papers, everything. The Stromberg is scuttled, and Dickstein sails the Coparelli, with its cargo of uranium, towards Haifa.

The Coparelli has disappeared. But - and here comes the clever bit - nobody cares. The crew have been paid off, the original owners got their money, the new owner is a front for Dickstein, and the insurers have not been presented with a claim.

The owners of the uranium will receive an unexplained cheque for the value of their cargo. When they inquire they will discover that the shipping company (Dickstein's paper company) has been dissolved. If they are inclined to push the matter, one of their biggest customers, the Israeli army, will quietly advise them to let it drop.

So, perfect.

Except for Rostov, the Polish merchant ship, and Suza.

Chapter Nineteen The Polish ship follows the radio beacon to the spot where the Stromberg sank. Then it chases the Coparelli.

At great risk to herself, Suza gets on the ship's radio and warns Dickstein.

Dickstein cannot outrun the Polish ship, so he doubles back. Suza sets fire to the vessel to create a diversion while Dickstein & Co board. There is a lengthy battle, KGB versus Mossad, with Suza in the middle. The Israelis win. They put the surviving KGB in a rowing boat, sink the Polish ship, return to the Coparelli, and steam into Haifa covered with glory.

Chapter Twenty The uranium, disguised as cattle feed, is loaded on to lorries and driven to Dimona. The Egyptian ultimatum is pissed upon.

Dickstein warns Suza that he must mention her father

in his report. The warning gives Ashford time to get on a plane for Moscow. Pierre Borg is apoplectic at this betrayal, rightly taking it as a sign that Dickstein has gone soft.

Dickstein resigns, returns to the real life, and settles down with Suza to grow oranges.

Postscript

ISRAEL SUSPECTED OF HIJACKING SHIP WITH URANIUM

Israel is believed to have been behind the disappearance from the high seas nine years ago of a uranium shipment large enough to build 30 nuclear weapons, it was disclosed yesterday.

Officials say that the incident was 'a real James Bond affair' and that although intelligence agencies in four countries investigated the mystery, it was never determined what had actually happened to the 200 tons of uranium ore that vanished ...

- from the 'Daily Telegraph', 7 May 1977.