

# DOHA 12

A NOVEL BY  
LANCE CHARNES

ETA  
**EXCERPT**



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WOMBAT GROUP MEDIA – ORANGE, CALIFORNIA

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# ONE

**12 SEPTEMBER**  
**BROOKLYN, NEW YORK**

Jake heaved the wheeled metal cart into the Religion section, rolled out his shoulders, then started reshelving the books the morning's customers had left strewn all over the café and lounge. He smiled at the great cosmic joke this section told—Christian Inspiration across from Eastern Religions, Buddhism and Hinduism next to Islam. Nothing burning and nobody dying. Try *that* in the real world.

He didn't have to pull shelf duty—he was the manager, he could get one of the kids to do it—but it let him have some contact with the books as something other than entries on a spreadsheet. Even after six years of ten- or twelve-hour days, he still loved the smell of new books, crisp paper, and glue promising new ideas or new worlds.

His phone chirped. He pressed the switch on his headset. “Yeah?”

“Jake, um, could you come down here?” Gwyneth sounded jumpier than usual. “Some kinda scary guys wanna talk to you.”

“Sure.” Jake sighed, wrestled the overloaded cart out of the aisle, and parked it next to the endcap. What set off Gwyneth this time? To her, “scary” meant someone wearing a tie.

He spotted them the moment the escalator brought him within sight of the register counter. Two men, dark suits, safe ties, short hair, watchful eyes. Cops, he figured. *What do they want?* Gwyneth cowered behind her register a few feet to the right of the cops, wrapping herself tight in her black knit cardigan, as if waiting for the men to bite her.

Jake closed with the men and gave each a scan. One fair-haired white, one semi-dark Latino, clean-shaven, thirties, serious. “You looking for me?”

The white one returned the examination. "Jacob Eldar?"

"Yeah."

The cop pulled a flat leather folder from his inside coat pocket, letting it fall open. "Special Agent Johanssen, FBI. This is Special Agent Medina. There someplace we can talk?"

"Uh, sure, come on." Jake led them upstairs to the edge of the mostly-empty café. Why would the FBI want to talk to him? Subversive books? Sure, like those would make the buy list.

They sat at a red laminate two-top next to the windows overlooking the street, Jake on one side, both the agents crowded around the other. Kelli, the new girl on coffee duty, took one look at the three of them and skittered to the café's far end to wipe down tables.

Medina began before Jake could think of anything to say. "Do you still hold dual citizenship, Mr. Eldar? American and Israeli?"

"Yeah."

"Are you in contact with anyone in Israel? Other than your parents."

Something scurried around Jake's gut. The FBI knew about his parents? "Couple friends, an army buddy. Why?"

"Have you been approached by anyone with the Israeli government, or, say, an Israeli company?"

He hadn't had any contact with the Israeli government since he'd dragged Rinnah here to get away from the place. He hoped he never would. "No, nobody. What's this about?"

Johanssen leaned his forearms on the table. "Read the paper, Mr. Eldar?"

"Yeah."

"You see about that terrorist guy got killed in Qatar couple weeks back?"

"I saw it happened. Didn't spend a lot of time on it."

"Well." Johanssen tapped the table with two fingers. "Someone using your passport and your name may have been involved. You lend your passport to anyone, Mr. Eldar?"

Jake glanced between the two agents. When would they break out laughing? Would some guy with a video camera pop out from behind the espresso machine? "Are you serious? Why would I do that?"

Medina pulled a paper from inside his coat, unfolded it, smoothed it on the middle of the table. "Do you know this man?"

A man in his forties stared at him from the grainy, blown-up passport photo. Triangular face, broken nose, straight black hair, moustache, sober glasses. Darkish skin; he could be any kind of Mediterranean, even Latino. "Never saw him before."

"According to Qatari Immigration, that's Jacob Eldar of 475 18<sup>th</sup> Street, Brooklyn."

*Shit.* Jake looked into the fixed dark eyes in the photo. His name, his address. But why him? What else did this guy take? "Who is he really?"

Johanssen shrugged. "Don't know. Smart money's on Mossad right now. You know, the Israeli CIA."

"I know who they are." And wished he didn't, but the Feds didn't need to know about that. "Can't help you. Sorry."

The two agents exchanged *are you done?* glances. Medina flashed Jake a polite smile, then snapped a business card down on the table. "Thank you for your time, Mr. Eldar. If you think of anything, please call." They stood; so did Jake.

He shook hands with them both. "Buy some coffee while you're here. We need the business."

Jake drifted downstairs to the customer service desk while the agents confused Kelli with their orders. He slumped on the stool, staring at the company screen saver bouncing across the computer monitor. *Mossad used my name? Why?* It couldn't be random; Mossad didn't do random.

*Payback?*

He braced his elbows on the green laminate desktop and lowered his face into his hands.

Mossad did payback.

## TWO

**12 SEPTEMBER**  
**TEL AVIV, ISRAEL**

Refael Gur's morning coffee hadn't yet kicked in when he got the call to report to the chief's office. This, he didn't need. He needed to dedicate his first day back at Mossad headquarters to his expense vouchers and the mission report. The accountants probably already flagged him late with his receipts.

He threaded his way through the narrow hallways, returning nods, ignoring the whispers as he passed. *Komemiute* was a small operation; it didn't take an intelligence analyst to figure out who'd done the Doha job. At least he was finally rid of that damn moustache.

Chaim Orgad glanced up from the paper he was signing when Gur knocked on his doorframe. "Raffi." He pointed to the chrome-framed chair in front of his desk. Gur didn't have to be told to close the door behind him.

Orgad tossed the morning's *Yediot Abaronot* in Gur's lap. Gur already knew what the front-page headline said: the same as every other newspaper in Israel that morning. He skimmed the story to see if this bunch knew anything more than *Haaretz*.

DOHA, Qatar - The Qatari National Police revealed today that Masoud Talhami, who was discovered dead of an apparent heroin overdose in his luxury hotel room on August 30, may have been killed by an Israeli assassination squad.

Talhami, 53, a ranking member of Hezbollah's military committee, was one of the instigators of the second Palestinian intifada...

"I've seen it."

"Good. So?"

"So what? We knew they'd figure it out. I told you this would be a repeat of Dubai. I guess the P.M. didn't care?"

"Perhaps. We'd get blamed even if the bastard cooked himself, so perhaps the P.M. decided it was worth being rid of him." Orgad slapped closed a folder and flapped it into his plastic outbox. "What did they find? What do they have on you?"

Gur shrugged. "Lots of video, I'm sure. We took out the camera covering Talhami's door, but it's not even worth trying to get them all. It's not like when you were in the field anymore." It was hard to picture this gray-fringed, paunchy, bald old man as a trained killer, but Gur knew better. Menachem Begin hadn't looked much like an assassin, either. "Nothing physical in the hotel. We didn't stay there except for the couple of hours around the job, and I made sure the team kept their gloves on. The Qataris will eventually find the rooms we stayed in, but the maids will have taken care of anything we left behind there. So, probably nothing."

Orgad nodded and folded his hands over the faded windowpane-plaid shirt stretched across his belly. "At least you didn't look into the cameras, like those idiots in Dubai." He pointed to the newspaper. "Still, there you are, on the front page. I have a meeting with the Director at ten. He'll want to know why we can't manage a simple job without becoming media stars. What do I tell him?"

"Tell him we can't do this shit anymore." Gur twirled the newspaper onto Orgad's desk blotter. "1972 was a long time ago. There's too damn many cameras now. There's biometrics in the passports. There's watch lists. You can't use cash anymore. It's over, Chaim. Let's just build ourselves some more drones and kill these bastards from a thousand miles away, like the Americans."

Orgad frowned as he eyed Gur across the cheap laminate desk. Gur avoided him by roving his gaze around this monk's cell of an office. The only wall decorations were the President's and Prime Minister's official photos. In this line of work, you don't accumulate a lot of pictures of yourself with your co-workers, far less with the high and mighty.

Finally, Orgad stopped nodding. "Those are the words of a

tired man.”

Gur flashed back two weeks: the nighttime view of Doha from the twelfth floor. That miserable prostitute-addict they'd dredged out of the guest-worker slums at the city's southwest fringe, a jumble of skin-wrapped bones dead on the bed from an overdose of pure Afghan heroin. That bastard Talhami, drugged and stuffed full of vodka before he followed the whore to hell. His team watching the scene unfold, surrounded by the beige luxury of yet another high-end hotel in yet another city he'd never wanted to see. *This is how I serve my country.* Would the man whose name he'd used—Jaakov Eldar—be proud of what they'd done?

“Raffi?”

“I can't stop being tired,” he sighed. “We do this”—Gur pointed toward the paper—“over and over, and it doesn't help. We're not winning the war. We can't kill our way to victory.” He knew he shouldn't say these things to his boss, but he didn't care anymore. He'd be happy to sit a desk for the next ten years until he retired. Maybe he could try to build another life if he wasn't always a visitor to his own homeland.

Orgad nodded again, then folded his arms on the desktop. “Well. You need a rest. Things always look dark after a nasty job. Tsach Voydievsky just left for embassy duty in Brazil, so the Director needs an interim day chief in the Watch Center. I'll give him your name. With your face all over the news, you'll have to stay home anyway.”

Whatever *home* was. “Thanks. We should keep an eye on those people whose names we used, just in case. We've put them in harm's way; it's the least we can do.”

“In case Hezbollah decides to go after them? You know that's not how they play the game. Stay out of nightclubs and cafes for a couple of weeks, wait for the bombing, then we move on, yes?”

Gur tried not to grimace. They had an obligation to those people. “Yes, of course.” He stood, turned to the door, then stopped. “When did you know it was time to get out of the field?”

“When I almost shot my wife sneaking into the bedroom with breakfast for me on my birthday. But you?” Orgad squinted at Gur, as if looking into his skull. “I think you're close. We'll talk in a few days. *Shalom*, Raffi.”

## THREE

### **13 SEPTEMBER** **HARET HRAIK, SOUTH BEIRUT, LEBANON**

Fadi Alayan stood on the seventh-floor balcony with his face turned to the buttery afternoon sun. Happy traffic sounds pinged off the apartment-block canyon to bless his ears. Car and truck horns, engines revving, squawks from tires spinning too suddenly or stopping too fast. Arabic rap, Lebanese pop, Nelly Furtado. An ambulance siren, the neighbors' television turned too loud.

Noise was a good thing, a happy thing. After the 2006 war with the Zionists, this area lay destroyed, the streets piled with concrete rubble and torn-apart cars. You could hear from a block away the women crying in the night for the innocent dead. Among those dead were his wife and parents. He could still see their ruined bodies when his mind went to the wrong places.

Now the martyrs were buried, the apartments rebuilt, and the markets open again. Kids played in the alleys and went to school. Alayan watched the people stream by on the sidewalks below his balcony. His pride stood tall inside him; in his own little way, he'd helped bring this area back to life.

Him, and the Party of God. Hezbollah.

"Fadi." Alayan glanced over his shoulder to Kassim, who stood in the open sliding door. He looked himself again: carefully dressed, hair neatly cut, the dark circles gone from around his large eyes. The last job had been hard on them all. "Rafiq finally showed up. They're all here."

Alayan nodded, took one last look at the street parade, then followed his lieutenant into the white-walled apartment. He detoured to the kitchen, grabbed a bottle of Raya water from the humming refrigerator, then straddled the wood-frame chair at the little living room's center. Two overused blue sofas met in the opposite corner. Two of his team sprawled on the sofa to his right;



three, including Kassim, filled the one to his left, under the yellow-and-green martyr poster Ziyad had taped up the day before. Masoud Talhami gazed at him from the poster, clean and sober and serious in a dark business suit and *kaffiyeh*. The stupid son of a whore.

“All right,” Alayan said. “You men are doing okay? You’re rested?” He looked from face to face. Each nodded in his turn. Kassim lit one of his wretched Byblos cigarettes. Rafiq, as usual, looked like he’d just rolled out of bed. “Are you getting any sleep, Rafiq?”

“Trying not to, *sidi*.”

Alayan shook his head, bemused. “Well, stay out of the clubs tonight. Get your lives in order. Shave. We have work, and we’ll be gone a while.”

His team woke up, sat up straighter, watched with sharper eyes. He could hear the speculation whir in their brains.

He nodded toward the poster. “The Qataris are certain the Zionists killed Talhami. The Mossad. So far they’ve released the names of twelve people on the country team, and they’re still digging. Knowing it’s Mossad, eight to sixteen’s the usual number.”

“I knew it,” Ziyad said. “Who else, except maybe the Americans?”

Alayan took a swig of water as he thought about how to say this next part. “*Sayyid* Nasrallah pledged our revenge for this on al-Manar. The Council has decided we’re the ones to deliver it.”

Now they all leaned forward, elbows or forearms on their knees, eyes locked on his face. Gabir smiled like a hungry dog, his dark head bobbing over his tight green, long-sleeved t-shirt. “We finally get to drive a bomb into the Dizengoff mall?”

“No.” Gabir frowned; Alayan knew he’d pout now. “No, we’re not doing anything like that. That’s just what the Jews expect, and that’s not what the Council wants this time.” He folded his arms on top of the chair’s back. “Think about the Mossad for a moment.”

“Bastards,” muttered Ziyad.

“Maybe. But think of their reputation. Why does the world think they’re the best intelligence service?”

“Because fucking Spielberg made that movie about them,”

Sohrab snarled.

“Yes, but why? Because they’ve got balls the size of melons. They tracked down Black September after Munich and wiped them out. They went at it for *twenty years*. They went all over Europe to do it. Even when they failed, like they did in Norway, they got through it with sheer balls.

“How many Hamas men have they killed? How many of our people have they martyred? I can’t keep track. They do it, and everybody knows they do it, and they still almost never get caught. Yes, Ziyad, they’re bastards, but, think about it.” Alayan watched the team’s faces harden. “I’m not praising them, don’t think that. But look at what they did to Talhami. He didn’t just die; he died a drunken heroin addict in bed with a Western whore. The Mossad didn’t just kill him, they destroyed his reputation. They used his own weaknesses against him. That’s what they do best.”

Ziyad and Sohrab looked away, not so willing to be indignant now. *Good*. Alayan needed these men to think, not just be mad. Anger would make them sloppy, and he couldn’t afford that, not this time.

“How would we have done a job like that? We’d get righteous and pledge our lives to Allah and blast the face off a hotel and kill dozens of people. All the Western news programs would show video of bloody women and dead babies and talk about ‘terrorists’ and ‘murderers.’” He watched Kassim nod; they’d talked about this. “We probably wouldn’t even kill the man we’re trying for. That’s what the Jews expect. They expect us to be stupid.”

Ziyad’s eyes crinkled as if he would cry. “How can you say these things about our martyrs, *sidi*?”

“Because it’s true. Yes, we revere them, we pray to Allah to take them into his heart and reward them in Paradise, but we’re *not winning the war*. So we’re going to use Mossad’s rules.” He drained his water bottle and set it on the tiled floor beside the chair leg, waiting for the puzzlement to settle on the men’s faces. “The Mossad country team used American and European passports belonging to real people in those countries. They’ve been doing that for years. They did the same thing in the Dubai job, with Mabhouh. In that one, most of the people lived in Palestine. This time, they all live in other countries.” Alayan paused to let them

think. "We're going to find them and kill them."

Gasps. Wide eyes.

"Wait, wait, wait." Rafiq leaned forward, holding up his hand to signal *stop*. "They're not Mossad. They weren't in the Gulf. Why are we wasting our time?"

"Because it's what the Zionists would do if they were us." He stood, rotated his bad left shoulder, then stepped around the chair. "What do we want to do? Kill Mossad agents? Who would care besides the Zionists? We want to send a message to the rest of the world. Mossad is killing your people too. *They* brought this on you. *They're* the real terrorists."

Alayan did another face check: five pairs of eyes stared back. Kassim and Sohrab seemed to be getting the point. He focused on Gabir. If the dullest one of them understood, they all would. "Remember, the Jews used to ask before they used other people's passports. If these people let Mossad use their identities, they're part of the same gang. If they didn't, then they're innocent victims of Mossad's murderers. Look at the reaction after Dubai. Australia almost recalled their ambassador. The British started saying things *we* usually do. Now imagine if their citizens die because of something those Mossad bastards did." He let them imagine. Even Gabir nodded now. "Rafiq, if it makes you feel any better, they're all Zionists, just living outside Palestine."

He watched them absorb the terms of this new mission. He'd prepared them for this over the past eighteen months, so their surprise didn't last long. It wasn't time yet for them to know the rest of the Council's orders. With any luck, that time may not come.

Sohrab, the slightest and youngest-looking of them, awash in a too-large blue track suit, put on the most evil smile. "When do we start?" His heavy Persian accent made his Arabic sound mumbled even when he spoke up.

"We pick up our documents tomorrow. Once we enter Europe, we'll travel on European passports. Gabir, how's your French these days?"

"*Tres bon.*"

"Good. You'll be French Moroccan again. If you weren't so dark, we could do something else with you." A couple of the others

chuckled. Kassim ruffled Gabir's shaggy black hair. "We'll fly into different airports at different times and meet in Amsterdam in four days. We'll make contact in the usual way. Save your questions until tomorrow. Now go get ready."

EXCERPT

## FOUR

### **15 SEPTEMBER PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA**

Miriam had just returned to her desk when her intercom buzzed. “Ms. Schaffer? Could you come here for a moment, please?”

“Yes, sir.” She took a deep breath, straightened her charcoal suit skirt, gathered her notepad and pen, then stepped into her boss’ office.

The high-backed leather chair put a great halo of black around Clark Dickinson’s blond, white bread-handsome head. He twisted a heavy silver pen in his hands. “Close the door, please.”

*Now what have I done?* Miriam shut the door silently, then turned and stood at attention. The office could double for a squash court. It always made her feel small, no matter how hard she tried to ignore everything but the big, modern tropical-hardwood desk.

“Carla at Reception tells me those were FBI agents who came to see you. Is that true?”

Miriam made a note to strangle Carla the next time they were alone together. “Yes, sir.”

“Is there something I should know about?”

All the firm’s partners thought they needed to know everything about everybody; Dickinson was no different. “It’s all a mistake, sir. The people who killed that terrorist in the Middle East a couple weeks ago used other people’s names. Mine was one of them.”

Dickinson swiveled left and right, over and over. His eyes never stopped examining her. “Why would they use your name?”

“I don’t know, sir. I’m wondering the same thing myself.”

“Is it because you’re from Israel?”

“It could be.” That would explain a lot. But why her? The woman who’d used her name was maybe in her mid-thirties like Miriam, but looked nothing like her. *How do things like this happen?*

*Haven't I paid enough already?*

"I see. And you knew nothing about this."

She recognized the accusation in his voice. Miriam knew Mossad used to ask permission to borrow people's identities; her stepfather had let them do that once. But they'd never given her the opportunity to tell them *no*. "No, sir, I didn't. It's a surprise to me, too."

Dickinson flexed his shoulders. He probably thought it made him look tougher, but to Miriam it just made him look like a squirming little boy. "Is this going to become a problem, Ms. Schaffer?"

*A problem?* "Well... no, sir, I can't think why it would."

"Really." Dickinson tossed his pen onto the open case file in front of him. "This firm has a number of important clients from the Gulf region. You know that, right?"

"Yes, sir, I know that." It also had a few Jewish clients, but she knew he wouldn't go into that.

"So now some of your people killed one of theirs, and used your name to do it. You can't see how that could be a problem?"

She almost blurted, "*My people?*" but swallowed it. Then she nearly led with, "That man was a terrorist!" but cut that off, too. She had no comeback that wouldn't result in "you're fired."

"Sheikh Saleh has already mentioned your attitude to me. This could upset him further."

That weasel Saleh probably funneled his *zakat* straight to Hamas. "Sir, I'm perfectly polite to the Sheikh, just like I am with every other client. Mr. Henshaw never had any issues with my work or my attitude, and I haven't changed a thing."

Dickinson put on his you-poor-dear smile. "Miriam, Saleh's a sheikh. He expects more than 'perfectly polite.' And I have different standards than Henshaw did. I can't allow your feelings about Moslems to harm this firm or its clients. Understand?"

"With Arabs, not Moslems." She wanted to grab the words and stuff them back into her mouth the moment they escaped, but too late. Then the regret turned to contempt. He simply had no idea. What would this Main Line rich boy do if he had to sit through a rocket attack, like she had? Piss his two-thousand-dollar suit?

*Calm down*, she reminded herself. *You need the job*. "Yes, sir."

She just couldn't fawn over that toad Saleh the way her boss did, no matter how many billable hours the man was worth.

"All right, then. As good as you are at your job, you're just a secretary and secretaries *are* replaceable. For now, please take your nameplate down. The Sheikh will be visiting tomorrow, and I don't want to have to explain any of this to him. Is that clear?"

Miriam squared her shoulders and jaw. She knew it made her look taller. "Is there anything else, sir?"

"That's all."

She turned a crisp about-face and marched from the office. She could still do that after all these years, even in heels. She tried very hard not to slam the door on her way out.

EXCERPT

## FIVE

### **23 SEPTEMBER** **ROTTERDAM, THE NETHERLANDS**

Albert Schoonhaven pedaled carefully down the red asphalt bike path along Prins Alexanderlaan. He'd been overheated in the pub, but now the damp evening chill clawed through his trouser legs and down his neck. He took one hand off the handlebars to pull his rough wool coat collar tighter around his throat.

He knew he'd had too much to drink. Everyone was having such a good time, though, with plenty of fun at his expense. Pieter had bought a bright yellow water gun for him and waved it at everyone at the pub. "For your next secret mission!" he crowed.

It had been that way for two weeks, ever since the Qataris announced the names of the people who killed that Arab. Albert awoke one day to find his name in the *Algemeen Dagblad*. He hadn't even thought about the Mossad in the twelve years since he'd left Israel, and now he was linked to some spy adventure. How crazy the world was.

The humming streetlights wore amber mist halos and flashed off the oncoming cars' windshields. Apartment-block windows glowed softly on the other side of the tram line to his right; offices sat dark on his left, with the occasional lit house or flat in between. Even at night, everything was very Dutch—clean and orderly and a little cold.

He rolled past the blocky brick-and-concrete De Nieuwe Unie building—the glass lobby dark and still—and braked at the intersection with Kralingseweg. He obediently waited for the green light, got a wobbly start in the crosswalk. He bumped over the tracks by the Schenkel tram station. Almost home.

Traffic was just a rumor off the main street. Not many people were out at this hour. Albert noticed a man crossing the little bridge over a night-black fragment of the Hollandse IJssel, just past



the bus shelter. The man moved slowly, as if he had no place to go. Albert registered blue jeans and a gray pullover with a hood that shadowed the man's face.

They passed each other at the bridge's end.

Albert Schoonhaven didn't notice the man turn. He never heard the shot that killed him.



Alayan watched the Jew tumble backward off his bicycle, bounce off the bike path, and roll against the curb. The bike glanced off the bridge railing, clattering onto its side. He tucked the still-warm pistol under his sweatshirt. He always took the first kill of every mission to show the men he could do the work, not just plan it.

He glanced toward the tram station's car park. A couple dozen meters away, Sohrab held up their compact black video camera and smiled. All on tape.

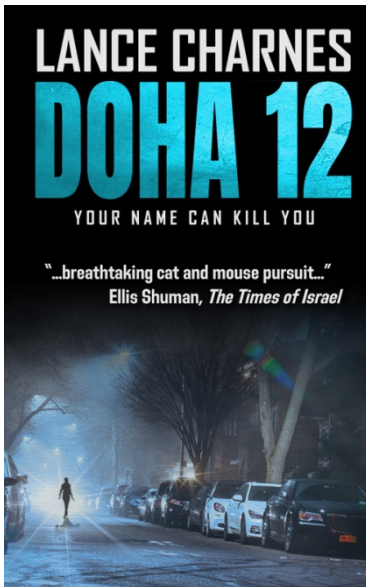
*Just as we'd planned,* Alayan thought. He quickly dragged the body onto the grass next to the bridge, tugged out the man's wallet, then rolled him into the canal. Gabir jogged out of the nearby bus shelter, grabbed the bike, and dropped it over the railing. Two minutes later, they headed north on Prins Alexanderlaan toward the A20 and, eventually, Amsterdam.

*Perfect.* Alayan leaned into his seat and sighed. *Eleven to go.*

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