

# Bad Looks: a novel

By Thomas Schwartz

I:

In 2015 London, Abu, Rabi and Tola are radicalized and ready to follow their curiosity to a new Islamic State when an act of vengeance impels them immediately. Rabi drives, and picks up a terrorist's widow from Paris, and half-orphan of Bosnian named Bahtiyar from a training camp in the Balkans where an old and powerful warlord has been hiding for decades. Chapter seven introduces Abu's father in a new time line. By chapter eleven, partnerships are formed, historical and geographical settings are mapped, and purposes are set. The bawdy tale of Simbat adapting to a sea change launches into action high above inland Tanzania in a chopper as mercenaries searching for outlaw justice.

The characters often challenge our empathy but each has redeeming characteristics. Said's "The Other" cradles them. We piece together their motivations. Abu is genuinely looking for a moral life. Tola is searching for truth. By the time that they're launched into the epic struggles of humanity, sometimes haplessly, world shaking events overshadow them. It becomes clear that they're not the heroes we need. Enter Simbat at the climax. Despite anachronisms this novel is firmly saddled in time. Its plots are split by a generation. Its use marks tense to cast a broad arc across 90,000 words. Characters are connected by fortune, flight and redemption. They pass time with religion, fantasy, dreams, sex, nightmares, mystic journeys and forced migrations. They contrast each other around themes of sins of the father, damsel in distress, ain't what it used to, with a harsh peppering of extremist realism.

II:

## 1: I Presume (1182)

On a mountain, in the past, a shepherd named Ignatio saw bandits driving to his village and ran ahead to warn them. They defended their village until Ignatio saw his girlfriend get kidnapped and struck by a speeding vehicle.

## 2: Summo's (824)

Now, Abu and Tola through the lens with sharp dialogue and physical description at the gym. Abu is an amateur boxer and Tola is his manager. This evening promises to follow them from mosque to a drag race under the rose.

## 3: Zig Zag (2556 )

Abu is framed through pieces of his childhood, persisting into the present. A story within the Mosque introduces al-Khidr, the Green Saint. Rabi's connection to the Islamic State appeal to Abu and Tola.

## 4: The Unification of Tangankiya with Zanzibar (586)

Old General Mbiti, a bureaucrat at Zanzibar was a boy when he witnessed his national revolution. This chapter describes, then funnels through his childhood too within the reformation that followed it. Although he often disagreed with the national directives, he grew up to operate the nation's busiest port with patriotism.

## 5: Duygu (2333)

A young Turkish woman studying medicine in London goes out with Abu. In the car there is exposition, ice breaking dialogue and sexual tension. Despite her performative spontaneity, she adheres to her family values. At the race, Rabi entices his friends with a lucrative offer.

6: The Sailor Man (1948)

Simbat fell asleep while taking inventory and dreamed about his life journey from scrub deckhand to captain of his own ship. Afterwards he briefed the crew as they approach Zanzibar.

7: White Cobra (2150)

The car race is close but Abu wins. They celebrate by going to a night club. Late at night, the loser of the race drives by and throws beer cans on Abu, Tola and Rabi. Our trio is provoked into incidental vengeance. A bullet, intended to pop a tire causes a fatal accident that kills innocents.

8: OG Mbito (1222)

Mbito got a phone call at his port office. It was the governor of the distant province of Iringa. Bandits were raiding mountain villages. He asked about hiring a mercenary force and it becomes his purpose to enlist Simbat's crew.

9: Friends' Enemies (1304)

Simbat visited Mbito's office, where he was offered a dangerous job to end a band of murderous robbers. He goes towards the market around the old gate in Stone Town to visit a fortune teller and ask for guidance.

10: C'est la vie (1669)

Hayat Bournamecca, a thinly veiled analogue of Hayat Boumédiène, awaits her convoy to the Islamic State. At the moment, her husband is committing terror on Paris' streets. Before long Abu, Rabi and Tola arrive to bring her away.

11: La Fistinière (1905)

This chapter seems crude and gratuitous. 3<sup>rd</sup> person through Hayat's eyes as they travel. Rabi brings the group to a libertine ranch for gay men and exposes them to “the vices of Europe” under the pretense of getting a steak dinner. In Milan the group starts to splinter with confusion, stress and distrust. Rabi and Hayat flirt. The chapter ends with Rabi announcing that there will be a fifth passenger from Sarajevo.

12: Fortune Angel (2166)

As Simbat approached her booth, the narrator introduced herself as a fortune teller in Stone Town. She told of her life journey from Pagan to Muslim, a tableaux of the themes including religious extremism, judgment by God and men, fight or flight for life, immobility, and parentage. She revealed that she was the estranged grandmother of Abu and watched over him with clairvoyance.

13: Bahtiyar (2809 )

Bahtiyar gets in. His father was killed in the Srebrenica massacre in Bosnia. He trained at Gornja Maorica camp with Abdullah Zaik al Murqin, a mysterious mujaheddin. He's been active in the Balkans since the early nineties. Before that he was trained by American soldiers in Afghanistan.

14: Kapikule (1312 )

En route from Sarajevo to Turkey, Rabi recalls a conversation when he sold Abu and Tola to the Islamic State. Approaching Turkey, Rabi compels them to recite verbose oaths again. There is contraband in the car but Rabi tells them they will cross easily.

Part 2:

15: Fatih (5114)

Ahmet teaches a story before getting a text from Rabi. We then follow our travelers into Istanbul through the perspective of Rabi's Land Rover as the group drive through Istanbul and drop Hayat off at her dormitory. They meet Ahmet at Fatih mosque. He tours them through historic Istanbul while lecturing them on the caliphates.

16: Jandarma (2175)

Duygu goes to the bakery to get bread for her family pension when she encounters a group of refugees. She gives them some bread and learns a bit about their journey. She returns to her family pension and speaks to her father and the cook. She's happy and has a bright future.

17: Boo (981)

Abu's wakes up, goes to pray but encounters demons. He's tormented in the place where his religious beliefs used to comfort him. He's losing his stone-faced confidence and his position as the mediator between the hotheaded Tola and the cool, manipulative Rabi. It seems the group will split up.

18: The Storyteller (830)

Simbat visited Kahina the fortune teller in Stone Town in her ancient booth to seek guidance. She told him he would have a child.

19: Bandari (1346)

To dig up dirt, Simbat bribed a pimp for the name of the boss gangster, Tippu. The name didn't sit easy with Simbat but his mind was still on shore leave. Gangsters, sleazy clubs, whores, tankers of grog and gratuitous sex greeted him in Stone Town.

20: Affinities for Effigies (1046)

Hanging around their Istanbul Hotel, Rabi's examining his friends. He tells them to await orders but plans to ditch them. Abu meets travelers in the prayer room. He still thinks he's got a ride. He doesn't want to hurt the innocent but feels like he's in a chain of command directly to Allah. Abu finds out that Duygu is in Turkey.

21: Sail for Dar (712)

Simbat formed a militia to fly inland. He spoke to them on the deck with pomp and fatherly love as he announced that they would be paid by the Tanzanian government while the ship was anchored in Dar es Salaam.

22: The Blue Mosque (1349)

Abu's sitting on a bench considering if he should send a message to Duygu. He's aware of his penchant to flirt, drink, fight and that some day, he'll have to answer to Allah. Part of his reason to travel to the Islamic State is to secure a place in heaven but even at Istanbul's legendary Blue Mosque, he's unable to avoid getting a girl's phone number. His inner conflict between virtue and vice, attraction and faith is dragging him to a breaking point.

23: Walled Peninsula (1192)

Hayat reminisces about her recent days. Her husband was no holy warrior but an embarrassment to the Muslim community whose jihad was actually a manipulation by Hayat and others who didn't want to deal with him.

24: Bust (1705)

Abu, Tola and Bahtiyar party in Istanbul. Rabi, knows this will be a drunken, lewd night and stays home to focus on the Caliphate. The others drink in Galata Square, which amplifies their personalities. They meet travelers from Africa and America. Tola draws trouble and Abu ends conflict. Bahtiyar is a young, horny teenager who ends up severely intoxicated, foreshadowing the ending with an explicit sex scene.

25: Rise to Kneel (985)

Simbat, Sayeed and the monkey Maymun rowed from their ship to the harbor in Dar es Salaam. They find Ignatio and, learning that his village suffered an attack by bandits, offer him a place in their militia.

26: In Scope (1009)

As a lieutenant in ISIS' army at large, Rabi has a mind control drug and ponders it. His narration portrays him as an ambitious sociopath, ruthlessly considering how to play his hand. He decides to give a glass of spiked water to Bahtiyar.

27: Greenbird Main Man (1437)

In the night as the mind control drug comes on, Bahtiyar dreams of his childhood. He is swimming in a creek, learning from his father and nursing from his mother. These regressive dreams are interrupted by al-Khidr, the Green Saint who tells him to endure this poison. He wakes up under the influence as green parrots nuzzle on the windowsill. The physiology of his consciousness is described.

Rabi starts to use him as a pawn. The first thing that Rabi does is extract information about the training camp in Bosnia.

28: Kimbillo Coffee (2396)

Continuing to search for Tippu, Simbat, Sayeed and Ignatio took a bus to a cafe in a northern suburb. They knew the name from the infamous slaver, Tippu Tip. At the cafe, Ignatio's distress caused a scene with the waitress. She pitied him and gave them an unlikely next stop, a meeting at a charity to help trafficked women was holding a fundraiser. A rustle at the curtains let them know that someone had been spying on them. At the fundraiser, they learned where to find Tippu but on the way they were picked up by some of his thugs. Maymun was thrown out the window of the vehicle. He saves himself and swims to the banks to pass out and dream.

29: Maymun's Dream (809)

Maymun dreams of his capture by poachers and being stuffed in a sack with animals for meat, pets and parts.

30: The Slip (2557)

Rabi gives plane tickets to Abu and Tola to reach IS and drives off with Hayat and Bahtiyar. Then he kidnaps Duygu. Abu tells Tola a secret about his life, and they visit an acquaintance of his father. They're honest about their plans to travel to Syria and the friend recommends a plane to Cyprus and then a boat to Syria.

Part 3: Simbat sets his purpose. Abu finds a new path. They contrast each other around the theme, sins of the father. Duygu is captive, Hayat's in a dreamy flux and Bahtiyar's under the influence.

31: Dog Domain (2591)

Simbat and his scouts were jailed by Tippu but the guards were amateurish. The crew escape but were waylaid again, eventually finding themselves face to face with Tippu, the boss. Simbat told him they came to buy a girl. Tippu invited them to his nightclub later. A short distance away on the banks of a small creek, Maymun was woken up by a dog. They followed the ship's horn together, passing through the dog domain. They found Vo and lead him back to Simbat. As the helicopter flew in, another goon showed up on a motorcycle. He offered to help them and claimed that he knew the location of the bandits.

32: Red Ochre (814)

As he regains conscious agency from the dose of Scopalumine, Bahtiyar finds himself in a backseat. He asks who the others are, where they are, and what they're doing. A surprise bullet flies through the car and rips off his ear.

33: Flee (1462)

A Kurdish family prepares to leave home before Daesh. Sal Hazir describes his responsibilities in the family and community. His younger brother Seyfettin walks towards the border with their donkey. He sees a black Rover and shoots it through the back window.

34: Versa Visa (2575)

Abu and Tola take an inflatable raft from Cypress to Lebanon. The Green Man visits them, riding a fish but they both believe he's a dream. On shore, hundreds of refugees are waiting. The smugglers enlist Abu and Tola to search the refugees for weapons and sharp objects. There's a fight and painful consequences for Tola. They're moving towards Rakka.

35: The First Euphrates Dam (2584)

Rabi reaches Rakka. First, he convinces Duygu to reattach Bahtiyar's ear. He tells her she can earn her freedom by working in the hospital. Hayat slips her a note with a phone number, and a promise to help. Khalisa, her guardian from al-Khansaa Brigade, brings her to a prison dormitory with other captives. Rabi's narration explores his plans for a pharmaceutical lab. He walks the streets meeting people and listening to poets. In his entry interview, he's a suspected drug dealer.

36: Outpost (804)

In the back seat of the smuggler's car, Abu and Tola listen to them argue about where the borders are. After a while they stop and force Abu and Tola to walk. They approach a barren outpost, they talk about their purpose and their goals. At the outpost at Uqayribat there are crucified corpses.

Part 4: Two citizens of the Islamic State, an escaped slave child and a brutal warlord are juxtaposed. Our protagonists meet and join them as they become citizens too. This first chapter goes into graphic detail to explore the range of good and evil. By this point, the story has grown beyond any single character so new characters are introduced in accordance with the themes of the story. We flirt with tropes from action movies and kids movies.

#### 37: Usama & Moaman (4246)

Usama bin Yaktin is a child who escaped from slavery in a salt mine and joined a group of Uyugar pilgrims to travel to the Islamic State. Moaman al Badia is an Iraqi businessman who seized the opportunity to lead armies, rape, conquer and pillage. In Uqayribat, Moaman sees Abu and Tola enter his shopping center and befriends them over coffee. The boy Usama recites poetry. After a brief discussion, he invites them to enlist. They agree and leave to find evening festivities where the newcomers share stories of their journeys. They swear their allegiance to the Caliphate. We then follow Moaman to rape Yazidi women. Then we hear an interview with Hayat over the radio. She talks about life in Paris and her journey to Rakka. The narration moves steadily through Abu and Tola's rapid military training.

#### 38: Theophylline (3118)

Duygu fits in to the maternity ward where she's enslaved. Rabi has settled into a position as a lieutenant in training but continues to supervise Duygu from opening his pharmaceutical lab in the same hospital. He plans to produce a large amount of Captigon.

#### 39: More Bad Guys (1410)

To introduce a new character to blow him away, Titus Memon Zekomo was an soldier in Malawi when his base was attacked by rebels, killing his family. He and the other survivors banded together and violence beget more violence. We follow his story steadily towards his death in rocket fired by Simbat's helicopter. The small, but well armed militia flew into the complex.

#### 40: The Overwhelming (4168)

Kobane is a crucial city in the Syrian war. Abu and Tola pass a tunnel to siege it. Rabi is serving as a command lieutenant, Abu is a lookout, Tola is a combat technician and Rabi straps Bahtiyar with explosive and sends him towards a wall on a motorcycle. The air defense at Kobane is severely over-saturated. Bahtiyar experiences a moment of magical salvation at the green hands of al Khidr and Abu is knocked out in a bomb blast.

#### 41: Rift Valley (1605)

Simbat's mercenaries deepened their assault on the bandit's complex and managed to gain control of it with guns and ammunition. From the helicopter, Simbat saw a boat speed away but couldn't follow it. They returned to assist the assault and, with a little pressure, managed to get probable destination of those who escaped. They flew to an airfield in Karonga.

#### 42: Halnj (1907)

An unfinished mosque in a nearby village hosts a field hospital for ISIS' injured. A local man tells the story of those who remained there and how they've been subjugated. He cleans up blood and carries a stretcher to the makeshift surgery room in the washroom. A commander named Emre Ismail's arm is amputated.

#### 43: Militant Idol (2164)

This chapter brings Simbat into the present timeline and looks towards the end. Once again, Simbat enlists soldiers for a militia. This time he's brought together a showcase of strange and beautiful Shiite mercenaries for a kind of talent show. Simbat's entrance into the present timeline, from fable to current events, is a touch absurd. He plans to use these militias to infiltrate IS and look for his son. We

follow them to their desert camp for another story inside a story as they camp out in preparation for the mission, which Simbat announces is to rescue Abu.

44: Karonga (2651)

Simbat's mercenaries flew to Karonga in their damaged helicopter. They managed to land it on one wheel. They split into three taxis then reconvene on their target, a large colonial house where they unleash another fusillade. They sieged it from all directions, leading to a standoff in the basement where the women are held captive including Fariha.

45: Thrown Rope (3451)

Simbat, the prodigal father and his new crew of Shiite all stars saves his son from a hospital that will probably let him die. While Simbat finds his son in the hospital, his crew destroy a few targets in a nearby airfield. Abu haplessly stumbles out of his coma with his father watching him end Rabi's life.

46:

Bahtiyar creeps through the desert under satellite surveillance and is apprehended by Turkish border guards where he ends up in prison. Duygu and Tola cross together but once they're across, in a field in South east they split completely, only to be apprehended separately. Zaik is found and captured too.

Epilogue (1772)

the narrator takes her liberty to tie up the loose ends in prosaic fable. She begins it with her take on *once upon a time* but ends it in a loop.

### III: Statistics

-87,836 words

-23,743 words and sixteen chapters in the past story line

-61,416 words and twenty-nine chapters in the present story line

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