

# BookLook

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The moon was shining over the harbor at Makassar, the storied old spice port nine hundred miles east of Jakarta, when Norman and I stood in the steamy night, staring up at the huge steel flanks of the interisland passenger liner the M.V. Bukit Siguntang. With its upper decks wrapped around a large single funnel, and bathed in a garish yellow light from intertwining floodlights, the vessel resembled a giant wedding cake from hell. Dozens of embarking passengers, shoving and yelling, and using their luggage as battering rams, fought for a foothold on the rickety gangway. Every now and then, pairs of gimlet-eyed cops in maroon berets and camouflage would yank some poor devil out of the mob, probe his deteriorating cardboard box with the snout of a machine gun, and haul him off into the shadows.

...

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Alarmed by the chaos, I grabbed Norman by the arm, and said, "Remember, pal, we're here for a look—but that is all. If anything, and I mean anything, seems dangerously out of whack, we're off the ship immediately. Comprendo?"

Norman nodded in agreement, but from the way his eyes dilated with excitement I could tell he wasn't really listening. In the next instant he raced ahead to the base of the gangway, waved for me to join him, and then suddenly disappeared into the levitating mob like a man being sucked up into the bowels of an alien spacecraft.

I froze. Without Norman I was absolutely and forever sunk—just a confused, ignorant bule, or "white face," stranded on a dock in the middle of nowhere. And so I took a deep breath, walked

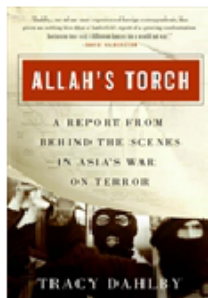
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## Allah's Torch

By Tracy Dahlby

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