



An Unexpected Patriot

Homing in, but who is the hunter, who is the game?

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Taking a break from cyberintelligence, Shannen Rossmiller switches on *Karachi Cops*.

It's a Pakistani version of a popular U.S. reality show, broadcast on WorldLink TV, that follows police on patrol.

Rossmiller loves watching dogged officers destroy mud-brick drug houses, and seeing bad guys' rights violated.

Brutal is as brutal does, she thinks.

She's been communicating with Michael Curtis Reynolds on the Web. He's like a great novel that Rossmiller can't put down.

Mastermind, narcissistic sociopath, Rossmiller pegs Reynolds, a Wilkes-Barre man who is writing in English on the all-Arabic Osama bin Laden Crew Web site. *Guys like him creep me out*.

"The plan is [to] recall . . . [U.S.] troops home [from Iraq] as well as firing their boss," Reynolds writes. "Interested?"

It's November 2005, and Reynolds seems to want to crash the U.S. government and end the Iraq war. He's asking al-Qaeda for money and personnel.

Oh, dear God, please just let him be a blowhole with no life, spouting off, Rossmiller thinks to herself.

She takes a breath. "I suggest that you make details in a document and attach to e-mail so it is not intercepted," Rossmiller writes back. "You may call me Hani."

Today, she's not herself, a Montana judge, wife and mother. She's Hani of al-Qaeda, a terrorist recruiter, a killer, and a hater of Americans.

"There's little time, due to how busy we all get during the holidays," Reynolds writes. "There's much shopping to do, travel to plan ... not to mention all the presents to wrap. What I need is to have my Christmas bonus. . . ."

He's writing in code, Rossmiller thinks. This gives her chills.

Ryan Anderson, the National Guard tank crewman she helped jail for treason, would lapse into code sometimes to hide his intention: betraying America.

Reynolds is starting to worry Rossmiller. *The plan*, she says to herself, trying to compel him. *Tell me the plan.*

Then Reynolds spills it. He wants trucks filled with propane (Reynolds' "presents") driven into the Alaska pipeline, as well as into refineries and gas lines that crisscross states.

Reynolds tells Hani that in the ensuing chaos of economic collapse, Americans will "trample Washington to recall troops" from Iraq, thus ending America's involvement there.

"The government, the environmentalists and the gas users will be at each others' throats," says Reynolds.

And I suppose anyone who dies in the bombings will just be collateral damage, Rossmiller thinks.

Sending Hani information about the pipeline, as well as a diagram of an Opal, Wyo., refinery in frightening detail, Reynolds convinces her that he is a man of action, not just words.

Rossmiller decides to reward his diligence. "Our leader the sheikh is very much in liking this operation idea," Rossmiller/Hani writes back in halting English.

They negotiate a price, Reynolds' "Christmas bonus": \$40,000, to be left in a duffel bag at a deserted Idaho rest stop.

Originally, Reynolds, who has lived in various parts of the world, wants the money wired to a bank account in Austria. No way, Rossmiller/Hani says.

All terrorism is done in cash, Rossmiller says to herself as she writes to Reynolds. *Don't you know that?*

After the job is done, Reynolds says, he plans to "leave this accursed country forever. . . . It isn't the land of the free but the home of the new dictators."

Coward, Rossmiller says to herself. *Sadistic traitor.*

People like Reynolds keep Rossmiller up at night. People like Reynolds, Rossmiller believes, show that she can't let her guard down for a second.

Korans on the highway

On July 20, 2006, a rented Budget truck crosses into Montana and turns off the highway and onto a series of back roads.

Descending from the Rockies, the truck speeds through a desolate, hilly area of Caragana brush and green ash trees. Houses here are three, maybe four miles apart.

A rental truck grinding along these little-used roads is odd. That the occupants of the truck are four Muslim men is rarer still, especially in this part of Montana, where outsiders seldom visit.

Suddenly, the driver takes a turn too sharply and loses control. The truck rolls over, pinning one of the occupants in the wreckage. Copies of the Koran spill onto the road.

Rescue workers free the pinned man and rush all four to Pondera Medical Center, where police officer Travis L. Alexander says the injured man refuses treatment.

Meanwhile, the three others seem dazed and hold their backpacks tight.

Alexander begins to question them.

They're all college buddies, they say, but they're aged 22, 25, 43 and 18.

They were coming from the north, they say, but they were driving from the west.

They're selling T-shirts for the Warped Rock Tour, they say. But would Muslims hang out with wild rockers?

Alexander thinks the men seem nervous, and he regards them with deep suspicion.

Who are these guys?

Alexander examines their backpacks and finds, according to the police report, "1 lap top computer (Compaq brand), several cell phones and what appeared to be a high quality GPS unit (Microsoft brand)" plus "several digital and video recording cameras."

Wait a minute! thinks Alexander. *Where's the judge? Where's the judge?*

Since the Anderson case, the cops around here have been on edge. Not long before the wreck, Alexander says, an anonymous caller phoned town officials and threatened jihad.

And now these guys with mapping equipment show up and wreck 20 miles from Judge Shannen Rossmiller's house.

I love Shannen to death, Alexander tells people, but she's made a lot of us cops nervous.

Alexander calls the FBI. Bureau agents come to the scene and evaluate, and Rossmiller's husband, Randy, and the kids move to a safe location. Rossmiller is working out of town.

Later, Randy returns to the house, thinking, *No way anyone chases me from my home*. He knows how to use a gun; that's how they're bred in Montana. That night, he tells people, he sleeps with one eye open.

Blow-drying her hair about 7 a.m., Rossmiller notices the message light blinking on the phone.

The recorded voices of cops breathlessly explain what happened.

FBI agents suggest Rossmiller not go home for a few days, until they're sure there's no threat.

"The timing of all this is too strange," Alexander says. "I 100 percent believe they were mapping Shannen's place, GPS-ing the house. They were professionals.

"If it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck . . .," he says.

The FBI says they evaluated the situation carefully with local police and found no threat. The men were allowed to go. Rossmiller downplays the event. But her friends worry.

Now, her house is monitored and law-enforcement officials regularly patrol. In theory, nothing should happen.

Still, Rossmiller knows there's theory and there's life. And the difference can kill you.

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