

STRIKE THE EMPIRE BACK



**EPISODE IV:
THE LORD,
THE HOMELAND,
THE LEADER**

BY MICHAEL RAKOWITZ

IN OUR PREVIOUS EPISODES...



CANADIAN AERODYNAMICIST GERALD BULL TAKES HIS CHILDHOOD DREAM OF BUILDING THE WORLD'S BIGGEST GUN TO BARBADOS, WHERE THE US AND CANADIAN GOVERNMENTS COMMISSION A SUPERGUN CAPABLE OF FIRING PAYLOADS INTO SPACE...



WHILE IN IRAQ, A CIA-SPONSORED BA'ATHIST COUP CULMINATES IN THE EXECUTION OF GENERAL ABDUL KARIM QASIM. AFTER HIS DEATH, RUMORS CIRCULATE IN BAGHDAD THAT HIS FACE CAN BE SEEN ON THE MOON. ONLY FIVE YEARS EARLIER, IN THE AGENCY'S FIRST ATTEMPT TO DEPOSE THE IRAQI PRESIDENT, THE HIRED GUNMAN—SADDAM HUSSEIN—LOST HIS NERVE AND MISFIRED.



DR. BULL'S EXPERIMENTS IN THE CARIBBEAN ARE MOTHBALLED IN 1972, BUT HIS FINDINGS RESURFACE A DECADE LATER WHEN PRESIDENT REAGAN DEVELOPS THE *STRATEGIC DEFENSE INITIATIVE* AGAINST SOVIET MISSILE ATTACK, AKA STAR WARS.

**THE
SAGA
CONTINUES...**



ON JULY 22, 2003, THE US ARMY DESCENDED ON A HOUSE IN MOSUL WHERE SADDAM HUSSEIN'S SONS UDAY AND QUSAY WERE BELIEVED TO BE HIDING. AT LARGE SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE AMERICAN-LED INVASION THAT MARCH, THE BROTHERS WOULD BE DEAD BY THE END OF THE ENSUING FOUR-HOUR GUNFIGHT.



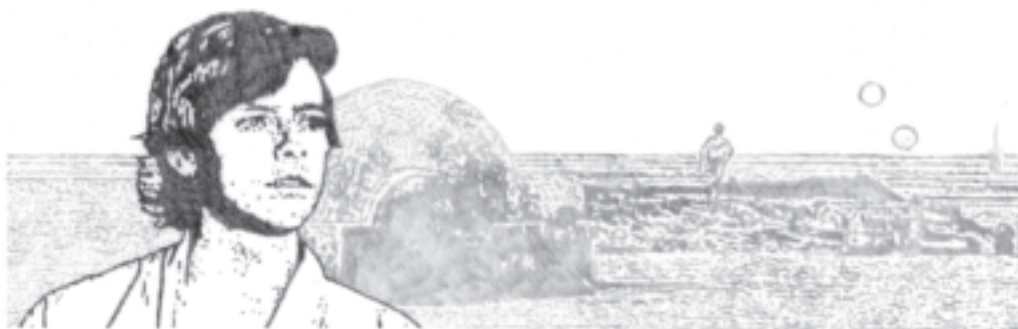
IN HIS LAST MOMENTS, DID UDAY THINK TO COMPARE HIS SITUATION WITH THE OPENING SCENE OF ONE OF HIS FAVORITE FILMS? DID HE BELIEVE HE WAS FIGHTING WITH THE GOOD GUYS, OR AGAINST THEM? UDAY HAD HAD A STORIED PAST IN HIS FATHER'S IRAQ. HE'D GRADUATED TOP OF HIS CLASS AT BAGHDAD UNIVERSITY IN 1984, ONLY TO BE BANISHED TO SWITZERLAND FOUR YEARS LATER. HE'D KILLED HIS FATHER'S PERSONAL VALET AND FOOD TASTER—KAMAL GECEO HAD INTRODUCED SADDAM TO A YOUNGER WOMAN, AN INSULT TO UDAY'S MOTHER. UDAY ALSO FEARED GECEO WOULD TRUMP HIM AS HIS FATHER'S SUCCESSOR.



AS THE AMERICAN TROOPS POURED INTO THE SAFE HOUSE AND HE TOOK HIS LAST BREATH, DID UDAY EXPECT A TOWERING BLACK-CLAD FIGURE TO ENTER THE ROOM AND SURVEY THE SITUATION, LIKE IN THAT FAMOUS IMAGE HE'D SEEN ON A MOVIE SCREEN TWENTY-THREE YEARS EARLIER?



THE FIRST IRAQI SCREENING OF *STAR WARS* MOST LIKELY TOOK PLACE IN MARCH OF 1980, NEARLY THREE YEARS AFTER ITS ORIGINAL US RELEASE, AT A PRIVATE EVENT ATTENDED BY SADDAM HUSSEIN AND HIS FIFTEEN-YEAR-OLD SON UDAY IN THE AUDITORIUM OF BA'ATH PARTY HEADQUARTERS IN BAGHDAD, SIX MONTHS BEFORE THE BEGINNING OF THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR.



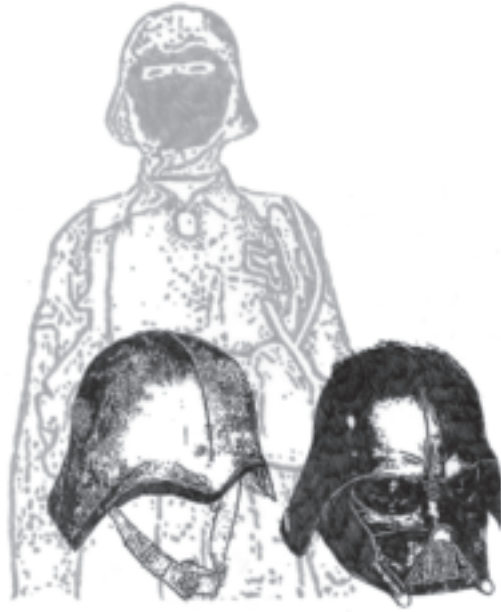
EARLY IN THE MOVIE, THE YOUNG HERO LUKE SKYWALKER WATCHES TWO SUNS SET ON THE PLANET OF TATOOINE, WISTFULLY CONTEMPLATING HIS DESTINY AFTER HIS UNCLE HAS REBUFFED HIS DREAM OF BEING A PILOT.



DID UDAY, LIKE EVERY OTHER BOY OF HIS GENERATION, EVER RECREATE THAT SCENE IN HIS MIND—STANDING OUTSIDE HIS PARENTS' HOUSE, THE SUN SETTING IN THE BACKGROUND, WAITING FOR THE FUTURE?



IN 1995 UDAY FORMED THE FEDAYEEN SADDAM, AN IRAQI PARAMILITARY ORGANIZATION. NUMBERING SOME 40,000 AT ITS HEIGHT, THE GROUP WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR ASSASSINATIONS AND INTIMIDATION. IT ALSO PARTICIPATED IN SMUGGLING AND OTHER ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES ALONG IRAQ'S BORDERS, WHICH EVENTUALLY LED SADDAM TO TRANSFER COMMAND OF THE MILITIA TO HIS YOUNGEST SON, QUSAY—BUT NOT BEFORE UDAY PRESENTED HIS FATHER WITH A PROTOTYPE FOR THE DEFINING ELEMENT OF THE FEDAYEEN UNIFORM, A HELMET THAT WAS AN EXACT REPLICA OF DARTH VADER'S.



THE HELMET WAS TO BE ACCOMPANIED BY A BLACK SHIRT, TROUSERS AND SKI-MASK, TO CONCEAL SOLDIERS' FACES. ON ITS SIDE A RUBBER INSIGNIA FEATURED SADDAM'S FACE IN PROFILE, SURROUNDED BY THE WORDS: THE LORD, THE HOMELAND, THE LEADER. DURING THE 2003 INVASION, THE FEDAYEEN RESISTED COALITION FORCES EVEN AFTER THE LAST RANKS OF THE IRAQI ARMY HAD FALLEN. AMERICAN SOLDIERS SPOKE OF THE STUNNING AND SURREAL EXPERIENCE OF FIGHTING THE UNIFORMED BAND.



ON AUGUST 8, 1989, SADDAM HUSSEIN INAUGURATED THE VICTORY ARCH, A MONUMENT HE CONCEIVED TO COMMEMORATE IRAQ'S VICTORY OVER IRAN. GIANT BRONZE CASTS OF HIS HANDS WIELD THE SWORDS OF QADISIYYA, WHICH BELONGED TO SA'AD IBN ABI WAQAS, COMMANDER OF THE ARMY THAT DEFEATED THE PERSIANS IN 636 AD. THE SWORDS, CAST IN STEEL MELTED DOWN FROM THE WEAPONS OF SLAIN IRAQIS, RISE ABOVE THE HELMETS OF VANQUISHED IRANIANS, WHICH CASCADE AROUND THE BASE OF EACH HAND. DURING THE OPENING CEREMONY, SADDAM RODE THROUGH THE ARCH ON A WHITE HORSE, IN ALLUSION TO THE MARTYR WHOSE DEATH ON A WHITE HORSE AT THE HANDS OF THE SON OF SA'AD IBN ABI WAQQAS BEGAN THE RIFT BETWEEN SHIA AND SUNNI MUSLIMS. ON THE INVITATION CARD FOR THE INAUGURATION, SADDAM PROCLAIMED: "THE WORST CONDITION IS FOR A PERSON TO PASS UNDER A SWORD WHICH IS NOT HIS OWN OR TO BE FORCED DOWN A ROAD WHICH IS NOT WILLED BY HIM."



AFTER BAGHDAD FELL IN APRIL 2003, US SOLDIERS FOUND PAINTINGS IN ONE OF SADDAM'S PALACES, INCLUDING THE ICONIC KING DRAGON BY AMERICAN FANTASY ARTIST ROWENA MORRILL. HER FRIEND AND FELLOW SCI-FI ILLUSTRATOR BORIS VALLEJO, CO-AUTHOR OF *THE ART OF ROWENA*, CREATED THIS POSTER FOR THE 1980 *STAR WARS* SEQUEL. IN ITS CLIMACTIC SCENE, *THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK* REVEALS THE FATHER-SON CONNECTION BETWEEN VILLAIN DARTH VADER AND HERO LUKE SKYWALKER, AND IN 1991, ON THE EVE OF THE FIRST GULF WAR, THE FILM'S THEME MUSIC TRUMPETED A MASS OF IRAQI SOLDIERS AS THEY MARCHED UNDERNEATH THE VICTORY ARCH FOR IRAQI TV CAMERAS.



THE *COMMITTEE FOR REMOVING SYMBOLS OF THE SADDAM ERA* BEGAN TO DISMANTLE THE ARCH IN EARLY 2007. DEMOLITION WAS HALTED, HOWEVER, AFTER US-LED COALITION TROOPS WERE SEEN TAKING IRANIAN HELMETS AND FRAGMENTS AS SOUVENIRS. IT WAS FURTHER DETERMINED THAT THE DESTRUCTION OF THIS SYMBOL MIGHT EXACERBATE THE RIFT BETWEEN SHIA AND SUNNI. THE MONUMENT, STILL STANDING, REMAINS A POPULAR BACKDROP FOR SNAPSHOTS OF US SOLDIERS, AS IN THIS PHOTO OF MASTER SERGEANT JOSEPH SLAUGHTER.



SGT. SLAUGHTER WAS A POPULAR WORLD WRESTLING FEDERATION CHARACTER IN THE 1980S. PORTRAYED BY ROBERT REMUS, HE REPRESENTED A PATRIOTIC US MARINE DRILL SERGEANT. IN 1985 HIS PERSONA WAS MADE INTO A 3½-INCH G.I. JOE ACTION FIGURE, A CLASSIC LINE OF TOYS REVAMPED TO CAPITALIZE ON THE WILDLY SUCCESSFUL STAR WARS FIGURINES PRODUCED AT THE SAME SCALE.



IN 1990, AMID THE BUILDUP OF COALITION FORCES AGAINST SADDAM HUSSEIN, SGT. SLAUGHTER TURNED HEEL AGAINST THE US TO BECOME AN IRAQI SYMPATHIZER. HE TEAMED UP WITH AN IRAQI MANAGER, GENERAL ADNAN, AND A NEW TAG-TEAM PARTNER, COLONEL MUSTAFA. DECKED OUT IN IRAQI MILITARY GARB, THE THREE WRESTLED AS THE TRIANGLE OF TERROR AND TOOK ON HULK HOGAN AND THE ULTIMATE WARRIOR. BUT THE HULK PREVAILED—IN FRONT OF FLAG-WAVING FANS, IN A STADIUM DECKED OUT IN PATRIOTIC BANNERS. WITH THE END OF FIRST GULF WAR, SLAUGHTER ABANDONED THE GENERAL AND THE COLONEL, AND RETURNED TO HIS PRO-AMERICAN PERSONA.



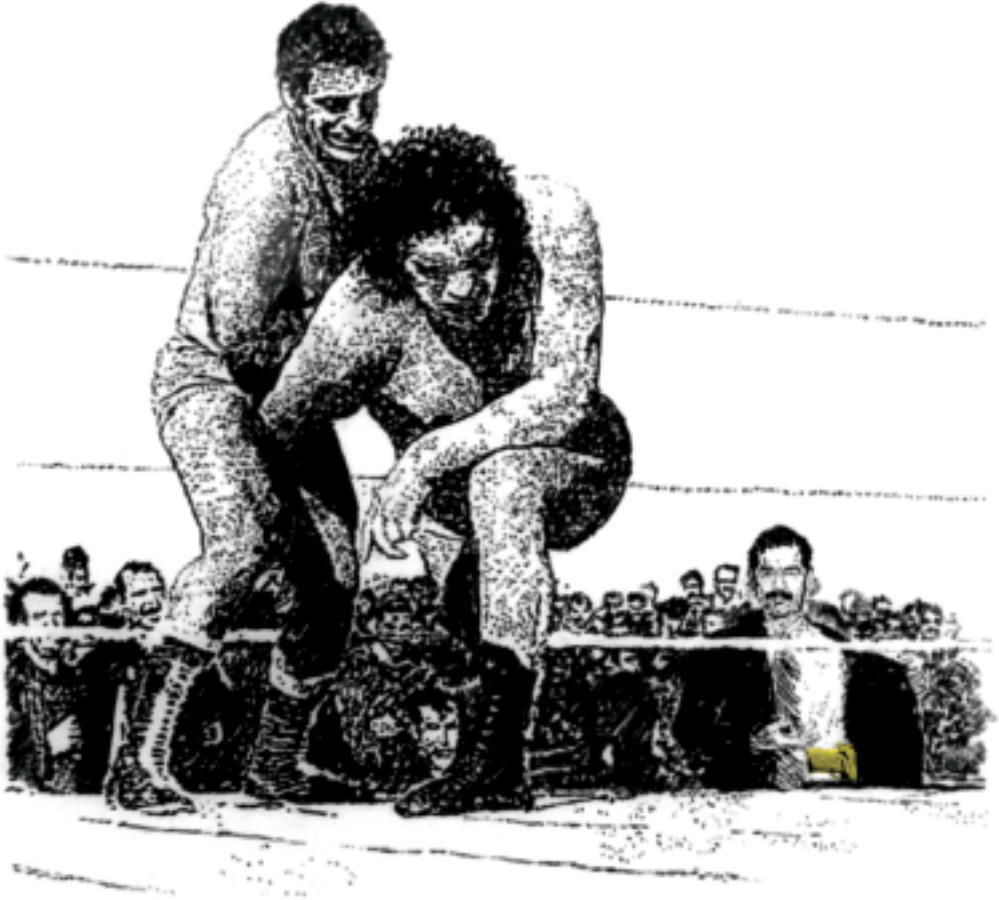
COLONEL MUSTAFA WAS PLAYED BY HOSSEIN KHOSROW ALI VAZIRI, AN IRANIAN WHO WRESTLED FROM 1983-87 AS THE IRON SHEIK. CAPITALIZING ON REAL-LIFE POLITICAL SITUATIONS LIKE THE IRAN HOSTAGE CRISIS AND THE RESULTANT AMERICAN ANIMOSITY, HE'D OFTEN ARRIVE IN THE RING WAVING AN IRANIAN FLAG CUSTOMIZED WITH AYATOLLAH KHOMEINI'S PORTRAIT. THROUGHOUT THE 1980S THE IRON SHEIK WAS ENGAGED IN A LONG-STANDING FEUD WITH HIS FUTURE PARTNER, SGT. SLAUGHTER. AS AMERICAN FORCES READIED FOR WAR IN THE PERSIAN GULF, THE PATRIOTIC HERO TURNED INTO A VILLAIN AND THE IRANIAN WAS RECYCLED AS AN IRAQI.



GENERAL ADNAN TOO ADOPTED MANY PERSONAS OVER THE YEARS. IN THE LATE 1950S AN AMERICAN ORGANIZATION RECRUITED ADNAN ALKAISSY, A SUCCESSFUL BAGHDADI WRESTLER, FOR A FOOTBALL SCHOLARSHIP AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON. IN TEXAS ADNAN WRESTLED WITHOUT A STAGE NAME, ONLY TO LEARN THAT MATCHES WERE FIXED AND BETTER STORYLINES MEANT BETTER ATTENDANCE. AT PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY, TOLD HE LOOKED NATIVE AMERICAN, HE BECAME CHIEF BILLY WHITE WOLF. IN THE LATE 1960S IN LONDON HE WAS REINVENTED AS THE SHEIKH, AN ECCENTRIC, SWORD-WIELDING ARABIAN OIL TYCOON, COMPLETE WITH AN ENTOURAGE OF BELLY DANCERS.



IN 1969, ON A VISIT HOME, ADNAN WAS SUMMONED TO MEET SADDAM HUSSEIN. THE VICE PRESIDENT TOLD ADNAN OF HIS DESIRE TO SEE HIM BRING WRESTLING TO IRAQ. ADNAN DECLINED. "WE ARE NOT ASKING YOU TO DO THIS," REPLIED SADDAM. "WE ARE EXPECTING YOU TO DO THIS AS YOUR DUTY." ADNAN PROMPTLY BEGAN PROMOTING THE SPORT ACROSS THE COUNTRY. HE ARRANGED FOR WORLD-FAMOUS WRESTLERS TO VISIT BAGHDAD AND FIGHT HIM IN FRONT OF STADIUM CROWDS. IN 1971 ANDRE THE GIANT ARRIVED, A 7'4", 500-POUND FRENCH WRESTLER—A MAN SO BIG AND POWERFUL ONE DID NOT ASK HIM TO LOSE.



AT THE MATCH, SADDAM APPROACHED THE ROPES. "BE VICTORIOUS," HE WHISPERED TO ADNAN, REVEALING A SOLID GOLD PISTOL. "IF HE HURTS YOU IN ANY WAY, I WILL PUT EVERY BULLET IN HIS FAT HEAD AND SEND HIM BACK TO FRANCE IN A PINE BOX." AS THEY WRESTLED, ADNAN TOLD ANDRE THAT WINNING WOULD COST HIM HIS LIFE. ANDRE LOST. THROUGH SUCH EXPLOITS, ADNAN GREW INCREASINGLY POPULAR ACROSS IRAQ—AND SADDAM GREW JEALOUS. KNOWING HOW THE VICE PRESIDENT TREATED RIVALS, ADNAN CROSSED INTO KUWAIT AND LEFT IRAQ FOR GOOD. HE ARRIVED BACK IN THE US IN THE MID-70S, AND CHIEF BILLY WHITE WOLF WAS REBORN.

IN OUR NEXT EPISODE...



A MYSTERIOUS NEW CLIENT OFFERS GERALD BULL THE CHANCE TO REALIZE HIS DREAM OF BUILDING THE BIGGEST GUN IN THE WORLD. BUT AS HE WORKS, THREATS ARE MADE ON HIS LIFE. HIS NEW EMPLOYER GIVES HIM A GOLD-PLATED GUN TO DEFEND HIMSELF. WILL DR. BULL SUCCEED?



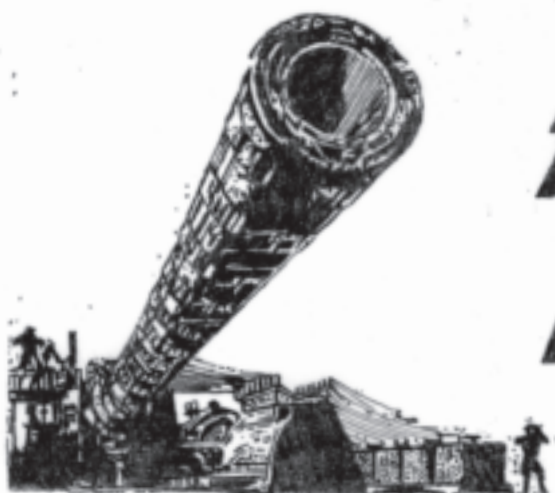
AND WITH THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR OVER, WILL SADDAM
HUSSEIN ACHIEVE HIS NEW GOAL—TO LEAD THE ARAB
WORLD INTO SPACE?

TO BE CONTINUED...

STRIKE
THE EMPIRE
BACK



COMING SOON
**EPISODE V:
THE MOON,
THE STARS,
THE SUN**





SPECIAL THANKS:

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