

In the mid-1990s, a fiery yet astute Bahraini adolescent was persuaded that he needed to protect his Muslim religion, so he went to battle. He was only 16 years old at the time. After swearing allegiance to Osama bin Laden, he eventually discovered that he no longer believed in the jihadi cause. He'd come to the conclusion that al-Qaeda was utilizing erroneous readings of the Koran to justify its terrorist deeds, which he couldn't accept any more.

As a result, he chose to transfer sides.

These chapters follow Ali al-Durrani, now known as Aimen Dean, from his early days as a jihadist to his years as a spy for the British intelligence organization MI6. Dean's narrative moves from the Gulf to the Philippines to the British town of Dudley, and it's full of drama and mystery. It's a rare look into the dark world of Islamist extremism.

You'll learn a lot in these chapters

- what it's like to have a one-on-one encounter with Osama bin Laden;
- why everyone was taken aback by 9/11; and,
- The Smurfs: Why You Shouldn't Watch It.

Chapter 1 - As a teenager, Ali al-Durrani lost the first of his nine lives in the Bosnian War.

When the phone came, Aimen Dean was in Dubai, packing for his nephew's wedding in Bahrain. The call came from the groom-to-be himself, but he had bad news.

There was a plan against Aimen's life, according to Bahraini security agencies. He wouldn't be able to attend the wedding in a secure manner.

It was 2016, and Aimen had been exposed as a British intelligence spy for eight years. Al-Qaeda, on the other hand, had not forgotten.

Why had Aimen remained a wanted man? His narrative begins when he was a youngster when he was known as Ali rather than Aimen. His connection with the Islamist movement began in Bosnia and Herzegovina, however, his journey carried him all over the world, from Afghanistan to the Philippines, and finally to the United Kingdom.

Ali was the sixth Durrani kid, born in 1978, and was significantly younger than his five siblings. He lost his father in an accident when he was four years old, and his adored mother died of sickness when he was twelve. Devastated, the earnest and studious boy, who had already memorized the Koran, sought refuge in a divisive religious text: In the Shade of the Qur'an, by Sayyid Qutb, the contemporary jihadi movement's father.

Qutb was martyred when he was hanged in 1966. In life, he remarked, one's words are unlit lamps. At the moment of martyrdom, they exploded into light.

In religious study groups, Ali was also taught anti-Western ideas, but he didn't always agree with them. Despite being warned that it was a Western plot, he continued to consume Coca-Cola and watch The Smurfs. In most ways, though, he was a dedicated student.

Nobody could stop Ali, who was just 16 years old at the time, from heading to Bosnia in 1994 to defend his fellow Muslims from terrible Serbian atrocities. He went on to work as a combat doctor, treating injured soldiers and witnessing horrific scenes. He had his legs trapped in four landmines at once at one point. His survival was nothing short of a miracle.

Ali was disturbed by the level of violence he had observed. He felt that executions should be carried out quickly and without regard for people. Instead, he noticed the polar opposite — as well as torture without mercy. He even witnessed one of his friends, Khalid, decapitate a Serb. He, on the other hand, could not bring himself to do the same.

Despite this, he remained a faithful follower of Christ. Ali was still alive in Bosnia a year later, despite the odds. He cried, realizing that he had not been chosen as a martyr by God.

Chapter 2 - Ali labored in Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, and the Philippines for the jihadi cause, but martyrdom eluded him.

The Bosnian battle was coming to a close, and the jihadists began to hunt for other opportunities. The Caucasus appeared to be the next stop, notably the Russian area of Chechnya, where Muslims were being oppressed by the Russian military and radicals rushed to their rescue.

Ali traveled to Baku, the capital of the nearby country of Azerbaijan. However he didn't make it to the front lines this time: he found employment in Baku for a charity that supported the Chechen resistance, and he even picked up some valuable accounting skills.

But still, the work didn't satisfy Ali's desire to fight. Recognizing the need for more instruction, he headed off once more, this time for Darunta, which he was told was Afghanistan's top jihadi camp. He never made it to Chechnya; instead, his next job took him even further away.

Ali traveled to Darunta in 1996, during a pivotal period in the jihadi movement. He happened to arrive at the same time as Osama bin Laden, the founder of al-Qaeda – or "the Sheikh," as he was called. Bin Laden was only beginning to see the need of expanding the jihadi war beyond the Arab world and focusing on other targets, including the United States. However, an attack on that location was still a long way off.

Ali, in particular, found life at the Darunta camp to be difficult. He excelled academically, and he discovered that many of his fellow jihadis were unfamiliar with the Koran. Ali, on the other hand, struggled to keep up when it came to physical activity. He was also infected with malaria and stung by a scorpion.

Ali finally developed the combat abilities required for deployment to the Philippines, where the Moro Islamic Liberation Front was battling the Philippine government. He traveled in late 1996, reunited with his pal Khalid. When an air marshal approached them on the plane, they were startled. But he turned out to be on their side, having fought alongside his cousin in Bosnia. They were elevated to first class.

Ali had not anticipated the turmoil in the Philippines. With its spiders and snakes, the jungle proved to be as dangerous as the enemy. Ali was also struck in the leg by shrapnel during one of his rare combat experiences, inflicting excruciating suffering.

Ali's disillusionment with the Philippines' conflict reached a pinnacle following his recuperation. He made the decision to return to al-headquarters Qaeda's of operations in Afghanistan.

Chapter 3 - Ali swore his allegiance to al-Qaeda, although he had reservations about some of its goals.

Ali was invited to Kandahar for the first time in September 1997. What was the occasion? To take the oath that all aspiring jihadists yearned for.

Ali was brought into a secret meeting with Osama bin Laden in Kandahar. He calmly stated that Ali had been selected by God. He was a wonderfully tall man with a hawk-like appearance. Ali earnestly vowed loyalty to the Sheikh, looking him in the eyes.

Bin Laden later told Ali about all-new Qaeda's combat strategy. He said that the adversary had now morphed into America. It was all part of al-plan Qaeda's to hasten the entrance of history's ultimate phase, as predicted by the Prophet Muhammad. Al-Qaeda will soon inform the rest of the world of its plans to attack the United States.

Ali was ecstatic to return to Darunta. However, he began to have reservations about key aspects of al-combat Qaeda's plans at the same time.

Ali laments the ease with which he approached his profession in the past. He was working on weaponry with the infamous bomb-maker Abu Khabab, and the scientific side of it piqued Ali's interest. On some level, he was aware that he was developing weapons that would be used on civilians, but he put the thought away.

He worked on chemical weapons as well as bombs with Abu Khabab. They utilized a wide range of poisons, including nicotine. They created a sophisticated poison by extracting it from large numbers of cigarettes. Despite the fact that Ali succeeded at his job, his obsession with rabbits would plague him for years to come.

He was sidelined for a while due to serious sickness, including malaria and typhoid. During his recuperation, he was assigned religious education for warriors. In doing so, he frequently

came across young men who had little knowledge of – or interest in – Islam. Many had no notion what their struggle was about, and some were plainly motivated by bloodlust.

Ali's fame was rising inside al-Qaeda, though. He was selected on a mission to the United Kingdom. His naive demeanor made him a perfect candidate for sneaking a satellite phone with £25,000 in calling credit. Ali seems to be having a good time during his quick visit to London.

When he returned to Afghanistan, a new approach was being discussed that made him uncomfortable: suicide attacks. Others disagreed with Ali's belief that such actions were condemned by the Koran. He wasn't sure he wanted to be a part of the jihadi cause if this was the route it was going.

Chapter 4 - Ali chose to become an informant after losing trust in al-Qaeda.

The first suicide attack by al-Qaeda occurred in August 1998, when a twin explosion occurred at the US embassy in Nairobi, Kenya. Only 12 of the 224 persons killed in the bombs were Americans who were meant to be the targets.

Also going well was the progress on Abu Khabab's chemical weapons. Ali has been assisting with the development of a lethal poison gas weapon known as the mubtakkar. However, in the aftermath of the Kenya assault, he came to a harsh realization: if al-Qaeda was moving in the wrong path, he didn't want to be a part of it.

His deteriorating health had forced him to seek treatment in Qatar the previous year. So he took his passport from his al-Qaeda superiors and flew into Doha airport with caution.

Qatari state security came knocking, as luck would have it. Ali was initially both nervous and relieved. He thought this was his chance to turn his life around and leave terrorism behind him, despite the fact that he was still just 20 years old.

Ali was still a firm believer in the Muslim religion and the need to defend Muslims all around the world. However, he'd discovered that much of al-Qaeda's activity was based on faulty or inaccurate readings of the Bible as an excuse for heinous brutality.

The commanders cherry-picked passages to suit their violent inclinations, resulting in phony justifications for suicide bombings and innocent losses. Was al-Qaeda truly operating in the best interests of all Muslims across the world? Ali was certain it was doing the exact opposite now.

That's why, when it came time for Ali's interrogation in Qatar, the interrogators were taken aback to see Ali willingly revealing very sensitive information. He even recalled the bank account number of a prominent al-Qaeda member thanks to his photographic memory and handed it to them. His interrogators couldn't hide their delight.

However, there was only so much he could do for a small country's intelligence agency. It was soon time for the Qataris to transfer him to one of the great nations - France, the United States, or the United Kingdom.

Ali was warned to stay away from the Americans since they didn't have a strong track record of protecting their sources, and he didn't know much about the French language or culture. He'd also loved his brief stay in London. As a result, he picked the United Kingdom.

On a gloomy December afternoon, he arrived at London Heathrow airport and shook hands with two guys who identified themselves as Tom and Harry. They entered an interview room right away.

Chapter 5 - Ali put in a lot of effort for British intelligence, first in the United Kingdom and subsequently in Afghanistan.

Another British intelligence agent, Richard, was so taken with Ali's stories that he gave him the moniker "the cat." Richard joked that he was rattling through his nine lives.

Ali pushed information out to the agents over the course of a few months, surprising them with how little they knew. Islamist terrorism has just recently begun to gain traction in the wake of the recent Kenya attacks.

Ali was the ideal informant, because of his incredible recall and a huge network. Both 10 Downing Street and the White House received his intelligence on a regular basis. However, MI6 would eventually require much more of him.

Ali explained to his al-Qaeda connections that he had traveled to the United Kingdom for medical reasons. They were understanding, and while he was there, they asked him to help with recruitment. He complied, providing his handlers with useful information.

He saw why so many second-generation Muslims in the United Kingdom were drawn to al-Qaeda. Even though they were born there, few of them felt fully British, and they were regularly subjected to bigotry. Radical London preachers like Abu Qatada and Abu Hamza benefited from their disenchantment.

Ali also learned something about his family's history: his father had a British passport — was he a spy as well? Ali wasn't sure, but he could now apply for a passport as well. That notion appealed to both MI6 and al-Qaeda. He was able to go overseas with ease thanks to it.

Ali's supervisors eventually urged him to return to Afghanistan covertly. Ali had intended to leave the world behind him and perhaps become a teacher. However, he was flattered and chose to take the job.

He came up with the concept of creating a food export business from Kashmir. Al-Qaeda favored any concept that may generate revenue and provide him with enough cover to spend time away from the jihadi camps.

Ali hardly had time to register Abu Khabab's frightening progress on bomb-making once he returned to Darunta before being summoned out to the front lines. He was terrified this time since he was no longer yearning for martyrdom. And with good reason.

Ali was exposed to enemy fire while sitting in the back of a pickup vehicle. When he glanced around, he noticed that a bullet had gone clean through the fighter seated next to him.

The cat had reached the end of his fifth life.

Chapter 6 - At the turn of the century, Islamist terrorism was on the rise, and Ali was right in the middle of it.

A series of bomb explosions shook Moscow in September 1999, killing several civilians. Vladimir Putin, the country's newly elected prime minister who is also running for president, has received widespread plaudits for his handling of the situation. However, rumors were circulating among intelligence services.

The bombs were largely assumed to be an inside job, with the Russian government orchestrating them so that separatist insurgents from Muslim Chechnya could be blamed. Putin did, in fact, blame the Chechens and launched a merciless assault on the territory.

Even Ali's MI6 handlers suspected Putin of being behind the Moscow attacks. However, Abu Qatada informed Ali that the incident was in reality a vengeance strike by Islamist terrorists.

Because of the ferocious and murderous retaliation, it triggered against Muslims in Chechnya, Abu Qatada was concerned. This response fueled jihadist demands for vengeance, causing the movement to become even more extremist than before.

Ali was back in Darunta when he came into a particularly ominous new person. He was directed by MI6 to keep a lookout for Jordanian ex-prisoners, and he found one in Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Zarqawi, who was illiterate but brutally driven, was eager to learn everything he could about bomb-making from Abu Khabab.

Ali had developed a reputation for being able to read dreams, and Zarqawi approached him one day and requested him to analyze one of his. Ali deduced that two terrorists at Darunta would perish shortly, and they did so by happenstance a few days later in a failed bomb-making effort. Zarqawi was taken aback, and his conviction grew stronger. He would eventually oversee al-campaign Qaeda's in Iraq, laying the groundwork for what would become ISIS.

Ali wanted to meet with his handlers as soon as possible to update them on Zarqawi and the mubtakkar poison gas weapon that was being prepared for deployment. However, he became stranded in Pakistan when he neglected to remove his spectacles at the border, which made him appear suspect, and he ended up spending three harrowing days in jail before being released on the strength of his British passport.

When he arrived in London, his MI6 handler Richard granted him some time off. Years of physically and mentally grueling effort, both for and against al-Qaeda, were now catching up with Ali.

Chapter 7 - The 9/11 attacks took Ali off guard, emphasizing the importance of his efforts.

Ali was back in Afghanistan by June 2001, but his al-Qaeda commanders knew he was planning another trip to the United Kingdom. Abu Hafs al-Masri, a senior person, phoned him one day for a quick but important conversation.

Ali's mission was to inform four al-Qaeda members in the UK that they would be leaving that summer — before "something huge" that al-Qaeda had planned, as al-Masri phrased it. Meanwhile, Ali was to remain in the United Kingdom. Al-Masri expected the US to rush to Afghanistan as a result of this major event. He wasn't mistaken.

Ali's MI6 contacts were as taken aback as he was. It wasn't until September 11th that they discovered the truth. Ali was strolling down Oxford Street when she came face to face with a mob of people who had gathered to stare in terror at a TV screen in a store window.

Khalid Sheikh Mohammed was the architect behind 9/11, and even al-Qaeda members were only told what they needed to know. It had been masterfully disguised, to Ali's chagrin.

Ali might get more intelligence work done if he was located in the Gulf, it became clear after a few months of frightened responding. As a result, he relocated to Bahrain.

Ali knew of some of all-new Qaeda's plans there, particularly those involving the mubtakkar, which he had assisted in the development of much earlier. He was asked to oversee a project producing the mubtakkar for use on military members by a new partner named Kamal.

Ali went through with it, relaying all of the material to MI6. The Americans, on the other hand, were alarmed when they learned of this new endeavor. Even though there was little possibility of the scheme going wrong because Ali was in command, Bahraini security agents swooped in quickly and made arrests.

Ali was enraged, not least because he hadn't yet found the 55 kilos of cyanide that Kamal had recently obtained. It may still be out there someplace, for all he knows.

Ali's detention was noteworthy for another reason. He grew severely unwell while incarcerated. When he awoke in the hospital, the doctors told him he was diabetic, something he had no knowledge about.

He was glad to be able to relax at Oxford, where MI6 had arranged for him to stay in a tranquil apartment. The truce, however, was short-lived.

Chapter 8 - Despite his cynicism, Ali maintained his intelligence job – until he was forced to stop by an unforeseen occurrence.

In 2004, Ali's job brought him to the small British town of Dudley, where a jihadist known as Abu Muslim was determined to manufacture a fatal poison, much to Ali's chagrin.

Ali went through with it, but she was irritated by the task. He wondered aloud if his controllers were watching the news. The US invasion of Iraq was going horribly wrong, and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was doing havoc there as well — this kind of job didn't appear to be a priority.

Ali, in fact, wished for a way out. His ambitions to become a teacher remained unwavering. "Whoever saves one life — it is as though he saves mankind whole," he remembered from the Koran.

So he hung in there as long as he could.

Ali despised working with Abu Muslim, whose purpose was to create a nicotine poison identical to the one Ali had invented many years ago in Darunta. His crazy plan was to put it on luxury automobiles and have the drivers die, resulting in lower car values and higher insurance premiums.

To keep Ali's cover protected, Abu Muslim was imprisoned for unrelated financial offenses. He was shortly released and departed the country, most likely to Pakistan. Another blunder by the intelligence agencies, Ali reasoned.

The services also failed to prevent a significant attack, the July 7, 2005, London Underground bombing. Al-Qaeda was regaining its footing after a period of disarray. It was bolstered when it formally allied with the insane Zarqawi in Iraq. Zarqawi, thankfully, was killed in an airstrike in June 2006.

Everyone in intelligence was relieved, and Ali was even given permission to take a vacation. He was sitting on a yacht in Paris when he received a text telling him to seek shelter from a Bahraini friend. It had recently been revealed that al-Qaeda had a spy — and the spy's name was Ali.

The story was based on an article published by Time magazine in conjunction with the release of writer Ron Suskind's new book, *The One Percent Doctrine*. It was ascribed to a

certain "Ali, a management-level al-Qaeda operative," and it featured a slew of confidential information.

It was a foregone conclusion that it was him, and it was only a matter of time until al-Qaeda realized it as well. That meant only one thing: his career as an intelligence officer was coming to an end. He returned to London and said an emotional farewell to his colleagues.

He also needed a new moniker. He chose the name Aimen Dean since it sounded neutral. A new life and a new identity awaited.

Chapter 9 - Following Aimen's retirement, the Islamist war took frightening new turns.

Aimen had kept his head down for years by 2013, but the coming of some distressing news prompted him to take a major risk.

Ibrahim, his nephew, had flown to Syria to join the Islamic State and was slain at the age of 19 in the process.

Aimen felt both regret and remorse since his adolescent nephew had requested him to relate stories about his experience in Afghanistan years previously. It was clear that Ibrahim was influenced by his uncle's jihadism, which influenced his subsequent choice to join ISIS.

Aimen was so upset by his nephew's death that he decided to ignore caution and travel to Syria to pay him a visit. His visit there served as a reminder of the horrors of battle, but it also demonstrated how different things were on the front lines there.

Aimen discovered there was a fatwa against him in late 2008, nearly two years after he was revealed. Jihadis were told to murder him if they spotted him, but they weren't told to look for him, which he remarked with a sardonic smile.

On the London Underground, he ran across an old acquaintance who followed him through a crowded station with murder in his eyes. He did, however, manage to flee.

Years down the line, when he learned about his nephew, he had no reservations about risking his life to travel to Syria. He made touch with a people smuggler and planned the trip.

Of course, even for those without a fatwa, traveling across Syria at the time was very perilous due to the existence of ISIS. However, there were other dangers, and it was Bashar al-Syrian Assad's regime that made an unforgettable impression on Aimen on his journey. Syrian bombs inflicted havoc, unlike anything Aimen had ever seen, even his combat scars. He felt passionately for the people of the area and their desire for foreign assistance.

Aimen ultimately arrived at Ibrahim's grave, which had recently been excavated and concreted. He was overcome with the futility of this and so many other deaths.

Mohiuddin, Ibrahim's father, had told Aimen of his son's death with pride - after all, he was a martyr. Aimen, on the other hand, saw only the futility of a squandered life. He went away after saying a prayer.

Nine Lives: My time as the West's top spy inside al-Qaeda by Aimen Dean, Paul Cruickshank, Tim Lister Book Review

At an early age, Aimen Dean, also known as Ali, was attracted by al-Islamist Qaeda's fanaticism. The brilliant adolescent battled on many front lines, signed an oath to Osama bin Laden, and assisted in the development of lethal weaponry. However, he became a British intelligence informant after being outraged by the group's twisted view of Islam and its concentration on civilian assaults. Although regrettably, the war continues, the insider knowledge he offered to the secret service over many years was smart and crucial.

<https://goodbooksummary.com/nine-lives-by-aimen-dean-book-summary-review/>