

The Fine Print

(The One Where Farouk Learns That Martyrdom Ain't All It's Cracked Up To Be)

By Nathan Allen

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The moment of anticipation had arrived.

Farouk's heart thumped like a Newton's cradle. He closed his eyes and focused on his breathing.

For as long as Farouk could remember, his whole life had been leading up to this one day. Before now, everything was theoretical. Today was an idea, an abstract concept. A moment in the distant future that may or may not occur.

Now it was a reality. Today was here. His destiny had arrived

He conducted one final check of his hardware to ensure that everything was in place, then swallowed his anxiety and made his way through the crowded marketplace.

He tried to act as calm and as natural as he could, but acting natural was a lot harder than he had expected. By doing everything he could to blend in – smiling, greeting strangers, tossing compliments to stallholders – Farouk was positive that he was drawing attention to himself. He felt the glare of one hundred sets of eyes burning a hole into the back of his head as he made his way through the crowd. It was as if the words “SUICIDE BOMBER” flashed above his head like a blinking neon sign.

He brushed this off and reminded himself that feelings of paranoia were perfectly normal in situations such as this.

He came to what he decided was the marketplace's most densely-populated area. He nudged his way to a central position that would guarantee a maximum number of casualties.

He took a deep breath and said a silent prayer for strength. He psyched himself up.

It was showtime.

His moment of glory.

His ticket to paradise.

With his thumb hovering precariously above the button, he filled his lungs with air and shouted his final proclamation to the world.

“Allahu akbar!!”

Pandemonium ensued. Onlookers ran for their lives. Infidels screamed and dived for cover.

Farouk opened his eyes.

Nothing had happened. His bomb had failed to detonate.

Worst of all, everyone was staring at him.

He pressed the button on the charger again and again. Still nothing.

This was his worst nightmare – literally. In the lead-up to today, Farouk had been tormented by anxiety dreams where this exact scenario had played out. Now these dreams had invaded his waking life.

“Oh, my Allah,” he said meekly. His throat contracted. His cheeks felt like they were on fire. “I’m so sorry everyone. I’ve never been so embarrassed.”

It took only twenty-three seconds for Farouk to detect his error – he’d mistakenly put the AA batteries in the charger the wrong way around – but it felt like hours.

Farouk was conclusive proof that when you build something idiot-proof, nature just builds a bigger idiot.

“Imbecile!” he muttered under his breath.

Farouk cursed his stupidity, and he cursed the hard-to-read illustrations for the charger’s battery component.

An eternity of humiliation passed, but Farouk finally managed to get the batteries in right way around.

“Now, let’s try this ag–”

Farouk never did finish that sentence. He was tackled from behind by a well-meaning vigilante and brought to the ground. The surprise attack caused him to flinch involuntarily and press down on the button.

In the milliseconds that followed the detonation of the bomb, as his body and the vigilante’s body were both being turned into kebab filler, it occurred to Farouk that he had martyred himself without proclaiming, “Allahu akbar”.

He’d already said it that one time. Was he supposed to say it again? Surely the first one still counted. Besides, it was just a formality, wasn’t it? He’d still be admitted into heaven, and he’d still get his seventy-two virgins.

He’d hate to miss out on eternal paradise because of a technicality.

Farouk had landed himself in some awkward situations before. But he’d never truly experienced awkwardness of the palm-sweating, gut-churning variety until he found himself sitting in limbo, waiting for his number to be called, surrounded by fifty-four infidels that he had just murdered.

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