



A Case of Exploding Mangoes

By Mohammed Hanif

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A Washington Post, Rocky Mountain News, Boston Globe Best Book of the Year

Intrigue and subterfuge combine with bad luck and good in this darkly comic debut about love, betrayal, tyranny, family, and a conspiracy trying its damndest to happen.

Ali Shigri, Pakistan Air Force pilot and Silent Drill Commander of the Fury Squadron, is on a mission to avenge his father's suspicious death, which the government calls a suicide. Ali's target is none other than General Zia ul-Haq, dictator of Pakistani. Enlisting a rag-tag group of conspirators, including his cologne-bathed roommate, a hash-smoking American lieutenant, and a mango-besotted crew, Ali sets his elaborate plan in motion. There's only one problem: the line of would-be Zia assassins is longer than he could have possibly known.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

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A Case of Exploding Mangoes By Mohammed Hanif Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Amazon Best of the Month, May 2008: On August 17, 1988, Pak One, the airplane carrying Pakistani dictator General Zia and several top generals, crashed, killing all on board --and despite continued investigation, a smoking gun--mechanical or conspiratorial--has yet to be found. Mohammed Hanif's outrageous debut novel, *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*, tracks at least two (and as many as a half-dozen) assassination vectors to their convergence in the plane crash, incorporating elements as diverse as venom-tipped sabers, poison gas, the curses of a scorned First Lady, and a crow impaired by an overindulgence of ripe mangoes. The book has been aptly compared to *Catch-22* for its hilarious (though not quite as madcap) skewering of the Pakistani military and intelligence infrastructure, but it also can trace its lineage to Don DeLillo, doing for Pakistan what *Libra* did for JFK conspiracy theory, and Kafka's *The Trial*, with its paranoid-but-true take on pathological bureaucracy. Recent events pushing Pakistan into the worst kind of headlines make *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* a timely and entertaining read, and when a mysterious bearded man called "OBL" makes an appearance at a Fourth of July party for U.S. military brass, we're coolly reminded of the fickleness of opportunistic policy in unpredictable lands. --Jon Foro

Mohammed Hanif on his experience in the Pakistan Air Force Academy Once upon a time, when I was eighteen, I found myself locked up in Pakistan Air Force Academy's cell along with my friend and partner-in-crime, Khalid Saifullah. We had thought we were doing charity work but the Academy officers obviously didn't share our ideals. We had been caught trying to help another classmate pass his chemistry exam, something he had failed to do twice already and this was his last chance to save himself from being expelled. The logistics of our rescue effort involved a wireless set improvised in the Sunday Hobbies Club, a microphone concealed in a crap bandage around the left elbow of our academically challenged friend, and a Sanyo FM radio receiver. We were running our operation from the roof top of a building next to the examination hall. We were caught red-handed whispering reversible chemical equation into the transistor. We were in breach of every single standard operating procedure in the Academy rule book, and faced certain expulsion. We had just started our glorious careers and now we faced the prospect of being sent home and having to explain to our parents how, instead of training to become gentlemen-officers, we were running an exam-cheating-mafia from the rooftop of the most well-disciplined training institute in the country. For two days, while we waited in that cell to find out about our fate, we planned our future. Khalid, always the world-wise in this outfit, immediately decided that he was going to join the merchant navy and travel the world. I tried hard to think what I would do. I came from a farming family where even the most adventurous members of our clan had only managed to branch out into planting sugarcane instead of potatoes. Education, jobs, careers were absolutely alien concepts. The Academy was supposed to be my escape from a lifetime that revolved around wildly fluctuating potato crop cycles. And here I was, already a prisoner of sorts, facing a journey back to a life I thought I had left behind. "Maybe I'll become a teacher," I said vaguely. The farmers in my village used to show some vague respect to teachers in the primary school I attended. "Or a mechanic." I was a member of the car-maintenance club in the hobbies club after all. It was considered an elite club since there was no car to maintain. It was basically a hobbies club for people who hated hobbies. "You can't even change a bloody tire," Khalid reminded me. We managed to stave off the impending expulsion through a combination of confession and denial: we lied (we were listening to cricket commentary on the transistor radio), we grovelled (we were ashamed, ashamed, ashamed of our unofficial like behaviour) and we pleaded our undying passion for defending the borders of our motherland. They looked at our relatively clean record, our sterling academic achievements and let us off the hook and awarded us a punishment considered just short of expulsion. We were barred from entering the Academy's TV room--and from walking. For forty-one days. During the punishment period, we had to stay in uniform from dawn till

dusk and when ever we were required to go from point a to b we had to run. Khalid went on to become a fairly good marathon runner (before, years later, dying in an air crash, while trying to pull a spectacular but impossible manoeuvre in Mirage fighter plane). I discovered Academy's library. I had barely noticed that the college had a very well-stocked library. We knew it was there, we occasionally used it as a quiet corner to hatch conspiracies but I had never noticed that the long rambling hall was lined with cupboards full of books. All the cupboards were locked, but you could see pristine untouchable books behind their glass doors. The librarian, an eagle-nosed old civilian, walked around with a large bunch of jangling keys although his wares were not in any danger of being stolen. I was to find out later that he was quite a professional. The library was immaculately catalogued. You could of course go to him, fill out a form and request a book. But I never actually saw anybody fill out a form. I spent some afternoons staring at the books from behind the glass doors as my classmates watched videos in the TV room (including the fellow who had scraped through his chemistry exam and survived but would die years later in our current president's General Pervez Musharraf's moronic military adventure in Kargil on India-Pakistan border). How do you ask for a book when you are eighteen and have been brought up in a household where the only book was the Quran and the only reading material an occasional old newspaper left behind by a visitor from the city? "I want that book," I asked the librarian pointing tentatively towards a cupboard which contained a thick volume of something called *The Great Escapes*. The librarian, relieved at having found a customer, took out his bunch of keys, removed a key and asked me to go get it myself. I took my time and browsed for a long time before filling out the form and borrowing the book. So grateful was I for getting that book that I brought him a samosa and cup of tea next day. That turned out to be a very good investment as the librarian handed me the bunch of his keys as soon as I entered. I browsed randomly, recklessly, reading first paragraphs and author bios, and made naïve judgments. *The Cross of Iron* wasn't a religious thriller but a war novel. *Crime and Punishment* had very little crime in it. Was Rushdie related to the famous pop singer Ahmed Rushdie? Mario Puzo and Mario Vargas Llosa. The strange covers of Borges. Abdullah Hussain, I had heard of. A whole shelf devoted to Gabriel Garcia Marquez. *Chronicle*. Was that little book about the wrecked ship really a true story? I didn't know which one was a thriller and which one was literary. *As I Lay Dying*--sounds like a nice title so let's read it. So does *Valley of the Dolls*. It is probably not the right way to read. Discovering books was like a discovering a second adolescence. I discovered new sensations in my body. It was even better. It was guilt-free and I could show off. Not that anyone except my librarian friend was impressed. Outside the library, the world revolved around parade square, hockey fields and series of punishments and rewards that didn't seem very different from each other. The vocabulary used to run the Academy life comprised of about fifty words, half of which were variations on the word 'balls.' Every order began or ended with balls, it was used as verb, adjective, qualifier or just simply a howl. Balls to you. Balls to mother, my balls, I'll cut your balls.... Every order, every threat, every compliment was a variation on the same testicular theme. Now that I look back at, it is quite obvious that this place was drowning in its own testosterone. From outside, life could seem orderly. Uniforms were starched, rifles were oiled and sessions on the parade square hard and long. I yearned for that jangling of the keys in the library corridors. Once I was caught in my Navigation class reading *Notes from the Underground* hidden under a map that I was supposed to be studying. After our second year in the Academy, there were sudden attempts to turn us into good Muslims. Compulsory prayers. Quran lectures. Islamic Studies classes. In the third year we were caught stealing oranges from a neighbourhood orchard and as a punishment we were sent out to a mosque outside the Academy where Muslim cousins of Jehovah's Witnesses taught us how to knock on random doors and preach Islam. "But they are all Muslims," I had protested. "So are you," came the reply. "And look at yourself." At that time I didn't realise that we were an experiment in Islamisation of the whole society. General Zia was a distant presence. He was our commander-in-chief and the permanent president of Pakistan. He thought he was never going to die. So did we. Years later, sitting in the officers' mess of a Karachi air base, we heard about the plane crash that killed him and several other generals. We were sad about the pilots and the crew of the plane. To drown our sorrows we pooled our meagre savings, ordered a bottle of Black Label whiskey, and instead of hiding in our bachelor quarters as we normally did, we opened the bottle in the officers' mess TV room and discussed our

future. I left the air force a month later. --*Mohammed Hanif*

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Pakistan's ongoing political turmoil adds a piquant edge to this fact-based farce spun from the mysterious 1988 plane crash that killed General Zia, the dictator who toppled Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, father of recently assassinated Benazir Bhutto. Two parallel assassination plots converge in Hanif's darkly comic debut: Air Force Junior Under Officer Ali Shigri, sure that his renowned military father's alleged suicide was actually a murder, hopes to kill Zia, who he holds responsible. Meanwhile, disgruntled Zia underlings scheme to release poison gas into the ventilation system of the general's plane. Supporting characters include Bannon, a hash-smoking CIA officer posing as an American drill instructor; Obaid, Shigri's Rilke-reading, perfume-wearing barracks pal, whose friendship sometimes segues into sex; and, in a foreboding cameo, a lanky man with a flowing beard, identified as OBL, who is among the guests at a Felliniesque party at the American ambassador's residence. The Pakistan-born author served in his nation's air force for several years, which adds daffy verisimilitude to his depiction of military foibles that recalls the satirical wallop of *Catch 22*, as well as some heft to the sagely absurd depiction of his homeland's history of political conspiracies and corruption. (May)

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

Compared to the works of Joseph Heller and Salman Rushdie, Mohammed Hanif's debut novel is a darkly comic send-up of power and corruption. Hanif's prose is rich with detail and insight, and he skillfully juxtaposes humor with chilling images of torture and, surprisingly enough, touching scenes between Shigri and Obaid. Critics attributed Hanif's missteps "a lack of depth and persuasiveness" to his inexperience. This *is* a debut novel, and an ambitious one at that. Even the *San Francisco Chronicle* calls the novel "clever," and the *Sunday Times* admits that Hanif "show[s] undoubted promise as a writer." *Mangoes* may not be a perfect creation, but its satire and political commentary make it a worthwhile read.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Phillip Patten:

The feeling that you get from A Case of Exploding Mangoes will be the more deep you digging the information that hide inside the words the more you get interested in reading it. It does not mean that this book is hard to recognise but A Case of Exploding Mangoes giving you excitement feeling of reading. The writer conveys their point in a number of way that can be understood through anyone who read this because the author of this publication is well-known enough. This specific book also makes your current vocabulary increase well. Making it easy to understand then can go along with you, both in printed or e-book style are available. We propose you for having this specific A Case of Exploding Mangoes instantly.

Edda Allen:

Precisely why? Because this A Case of Exploding Mangoes is an unordinary book that the inside of the e-book waiting for you to snap this but latter it will surprise you with the secret this inside. Reading this book alongside it was fantastic author who write the book in such amazing way makes the content inside of easier to understand, entertaining approach but still convey the meaning thoroughly. So , it is good for you for not

hesitating having this nowadays or you going to regret it. This amazing book will give you a lot of positive aspects than the other book include such as help improving your talent and your critical thinking means. So , still want to hesitate having that book? If I have been you I will go to the guide store hurriedly.

Carlos Mendoza:

A Case of Exploding Mangoes can be one of your beginner books that are good idea. All of us recommend that straight away because this book has good vocabulary that may increase your knowledge in vocabulary, easy to understand, bit entertaining but nevertheless delivering the information. The article author giving his/her effort to put every word into enjoyment arrangement in writing A Case of Exploding Mangoes however doesn't forget the main point, giving the reader the hottest in addition to based confirm resource details that maybe you can be one of it. This great information can easily drawn you into brand-new stage of crucial pondering.

Scott Reisinger:

Reading a book to get new life style in this calendar year; every people loves to examine a book. When you go through a book you can get a large amount of benefit. When you read textbooks, you can improve your knowledge, simply because book has a lot of information into it. The information that you will get depend on what types of book that you have read. If you need to get information about your research, you can read education books, but if you act like you want to entertain yourself you are able to a fiction books, such us novel, comics, as well as soon. The A Case of Exploding Mangoes provide you with new experience in reading a book.

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