



Source: Karin Brulliard, 'Bingo and high tea offer rich Iraqis an oasis', *Washington Post* in *The Age* online, 19/05/07.

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Little Fadya has found this thing on the internet. It's a game, she supposes—some nonsense the Infidels have invented. On the screen, there are pictures with numbers, and you click and drag them into patterns. Well, not patterns exactly, not like in the palaces, where there are patterns in the tiles. No, with this game, it's more like a sequence in a line. Make a line of four pictures. Then click a button to see what the combination means. You might get a carnival of noise and lights blaring 'Jackpot'. Other times, you drag over a BAD lot of pictures, and you lose whatever favours you've been gathering up until then. That's when the numbers have added up wrong somehow and the screen just flashes and goes blank.

How do you know which pictures make a good or bad kind of result? Now, that's a question to answer!

Each separate picture, it shows a king, or a queen, or a high ranking politician. Each picture is all flattened, in bright colours, like a child would draw it. That is, if you were allowed to draw pictures. Put all these characters together. Gather a party of these people. Or a committee. Or a gang of one-eyed conspirators lined up, all of them blinking and breathing together. In the game, they add up sometimes to prizes, sometimes to penalties.

There IS some amount of skill in the game, the way you put together the sequences. Fadya can see how you get rewards when you're cunning. But mostly it's luck. Or maybe you should call it support given over by God. Because, actually, it's more than just luck. Yes, it's a blessing from the one almighty and merciful God. A blessing—like the fact that the internet is still working here, in this blown-to-bits street. Yes, more than a lucky fact, it's the blessed support of a merciful God. Imagine God has taken this thing from the Infidels, and taught Fadya how to trick it.

Fadya spent a couple of days wondering what to do with all the luck that's been given to her. What should she do every day, in this house with no roof? Living with all the old people who have come huddling in here, who've limped in from every other flattened house in the street. Fadya—she's the only YOUNG one in the house. She's the one with a full life to look forward to. Fadya—she's been given by God. It's what the old people call her: 'A gift come from God.'

Fadya can run and climb. She can go and get water. She can wriggle down into rubble. She can dig into basements and fossick for food. She can bring it all back in a bucket, to help feed the old people. And the Americans don't worry much about her. Because of how small she is. And how she smiles. Her charm and her cunning—they're gifts granted by God. Plus her sparkling eyes. And how ready she is to jump.

Call it a miracle, how the internet is still working here. The

electricity, the phone line, the computer sitting there ticking in its room full of dust. Nothing else works in the entire, flattened neighbourhood. And Fadya—she's the only resident in the house who knows how to work it—this roofless house blessed with luck granted by God to all the old people.

Fadya has decided to trust the luck-game she's found on the internet. She's started trusting that it brings her instructions from God.

'Ask yourself a question', she mutters, 'Ask the computer'.

'Okay. Should I run fossicking west or east tonight along The Boulevard of the Heroes?'

She asks the computer. And she starts to line up more questions, as a list, in a sequence:

'Should I smile or scowl today when I see the Americans?...

'Should I smile and accept the Americans' chocolates and gum?'

'Do I want to sleep right now, or haul the buckets out to the spigot—stand in a queue for three or four hours?'

Fadya has discovered that she doesn't need to answer these questions. Because the game on the internet is a gift granted by God. If there's a question that needs answering, Fadya drags the kings and queens into a line. The game sends her directions in the form of its answers. The game is a blessing granted by God. She doesn't have to answer her own questions.

'What's today's map for going out and coming home?'

Fadya just goes to the computer and lines up the pictures. It's how she figures out her daily pathway through the streets. She's proven it by now—the game is the best way to find food.

'Go to this house? Or that one?'

Ask the game any question, and it will light up or blank down. The game will tell you God's wishes.

'Take this parcel in a bucket and walk up to the Americans?'

It's a simple enough question—yes or no—a simple question that Fadya doesn't have to answer. Because the kings and queens will tell her.

The kings and queens have taken care of Fadya, every day now, for three weeks.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Ross Gibson.*