

# A Passage to Evil

Revealed: Daniel Pearl was killed because he got access to the dark secrets of Musharraf's Pakistan



**WHO KILLED DANIEL PEARL?**

by BERNARD-HENRI LEVY  
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■ By S. Prasannarajan

**H**is last dateline was his own death. At the end of a journey through the labyrinth of lies and evasions, of deceptions and deviations, all along semaphored by some horrible truth, the reporter became the report. Daniel Pearl, the *Wall Street Journal's* Mumbai-based correspondent on assignment in Pakistan, disappeared from Karachi on January 23 last year, and resurfaced a few days later—first in photographs, alive but chained, a gun pointed at his temple, and then, in amateur videotapes of his decapitation. In 21st century's album of evil, these images have a dark intensity; they take us to the dehumanising realm of faith, where innocence and curiosity shatter the idyll of dictatorship, where even a reporter's notebook threatens the book of secrets.

Who killed Daniel Pearl who was desperately trying for an interview with Mubarak Ali Shah Gilani, leader of the Jamaat al-Fuqrah and guru of shoe bomber Richard Colvin Reid? Who were those shadowy figures who fixed the appointment that never took place but led him to an abandoned house in the suburbs of Karachi and, eight days later, beheaded him and cut him into ten pieces and buried him in the garden? The mastermind, Omar Sheikh—the same Omar who was released along with Masood Azhar, the future leader of Jaish-e-Mohammed, from the Indian jail in exchange for the hostages in the Kandahar hijacking drama—may have been arrested and after a show trial, sentenced to death. But have the questions really been answered: Who killed Daniel Pearl? And why?

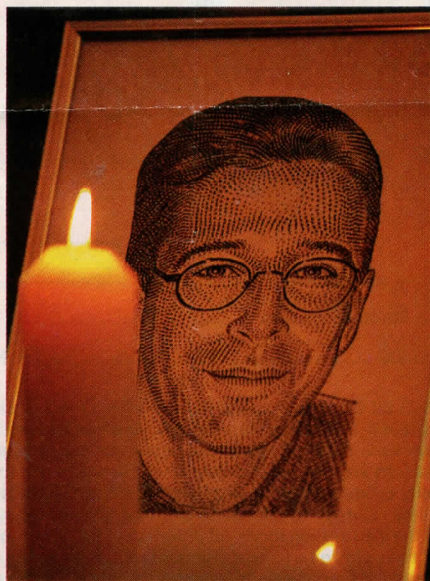
The man who sets out for answers is not just another journalist. Bernard-

Henri Levy is Europe's most flamboyant celebrity philosopher, just BHL in France, worthy of a gushing *Vanity Fair* profile, and in his passion for ideas and action, a modern-day Malraux, whose battlefield stretches from Bosnia to Afghanistan. It is his Assignment Pearl: "Retrace his steps ... find the trail of this man who unwittingly entered a world of darkness. Walk like him. Observe like him. Try to think like him, to feel what he felt, and so to the very end, the instant of death and what he lived in that instant...reconstruct the instant of the death of a man I have never met." Then follow the others, the assassins, chiefly, their brain, Omar, and get into the mind of the Devil to know the "physics of bloody passion, chemistry of a bloody vocation", to know how the demonic works: Omar, the laboratory.

So, philosophy and imagination join first-rate investigative journalism to unravel one of the most sanguineous mysteries of this century. This investigation of an investigation takes Levy to Karachi, Rawalpindi, Islamabad, Los Angeles, London, Sarajevo, Dubai, Delhi, Kandahar ... Along the way he meets those who carry dark secrets and enriched memories, those who lead him

to new twists and those who mislead him; it is an enormous maze where every step is an invitation to new uncertainties, new themes and new plots ... and he—like Pearl, a Jew and a foreigner—does it with great personal risk while in Pakistan (His ruse: I'm an atheist, and I'm writing a novel based on Daniel Pearl...ah, in France we do such things.) Levy's investigation, at one level, is an adventure, a picaresque of the truth-seeker. A worthy successor to Garcia Marquez's *News of a Kidnapping*, in which the novelist returns to journalism to dramatise the kidnapping of 10 men and women, all journalists but one, by the Medellin drug lord Pablo Escobar, and the "magic journalism" of Ryszard Kapuscinski.

Hence we see Levy in the house where the kidnapers kept the hostage—"the Golgotha of Daniel Pearl, the scene of his Calvary"—reconstructing the last moments of Pearl. We see him with the parents of Pearl in Mulholland Drive, Los Angeles, sharing their trauma and courage, looking at little Danny, "the football-playing child, kneeling next to the ball with his big orange socks, hair still blond and long, the face of a little prince, fresh as a



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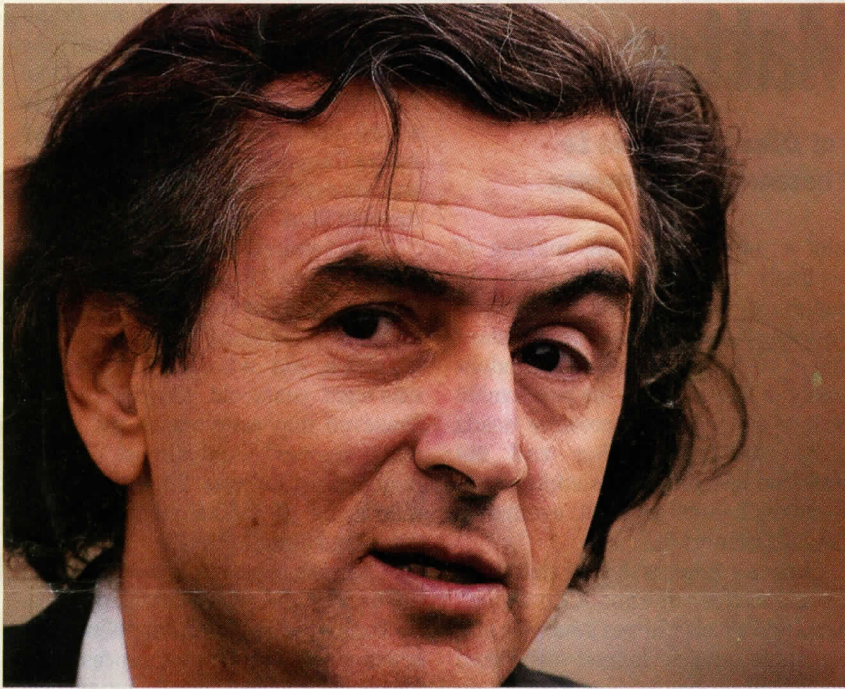
The life of this fine journalist, an American and a Jew, but who was many other things as well: a citizen of the planet, a man curious about other men, at home in the world ... he was a man who had chosen to answer evil with good and, above all, to understand.

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In other words, I bet on a Daniel Pearl busy gathering proof of Pakistan's collusion between the leading rogue states and terrorist networks of the world.

My hypothesis is that he was writing an article on Pakistan's

AFP PHOTO



**PHILOSOPHER DETECTIVE: Levy retraces Pearl's steps to reveal a terrifying truth**

daisy ...” We see him gate-crashing into the madarsa of Binory Town in Karachi, the mosque of the Taliban, the centre of Sunni radicalism, where Omar spent a night before the kidnapping, where Osama bin Laden was reported to have taken refuge for a while, and where, a place that abhors representations of human face, hangs a portrait of bin Laden. We see him at the subway station in London, where, as the family legend goes, the young Omar Sheikh, “the gentle soul”, once jumped on the

tracks to rescue an old woman. Levy’s canvas is a grand sprawl, inhabited by the magnificent and the monstrous.

And the monstrous has the magnetic pull in Levy’s narrative, and in some parts, almost like Milton’s Satan, though, it must be said, he is not on the devil’s side, ever, without knowing it. Still, in the lives of the victim and the killer, he sees parallel destinies, and one of Omar’s photographs from his school days, this boy with a rose in the lapel and a trophy in hands, reminds him of

duplicitous game, whereby it posed on one hand as a good ally of the United States, and on the other lending itself, through its most prestigious scientists, to the most fearsome operations of nuclear proliferation.

To put it simply, was Pearl breaking the taboo?

Entering this sinister world of mad scientists and Islamist fanatics, taking steps into this dark night where secret services and nuclear secrets exchange and share their shadowy realms, working on this highly sensitive and explosive material—was Pearl violating the other major prohibition that weighs

upon this part of the world?

I’m doing it, anyway.

Following Danny, in his wake and, in a way, in homage, I bring this modest contribution to the cause of truth that he loved more than anything else.

I assert that Pakistan is the biggest rogue of all the rogue states of today.

I assert that what is taking form there, between Islamabad and Karachi, is a black hole compared to which Saddam Hussein’s Baghdad was an obsolete weapons dump.

The stench of apocalypse hangs over those cities; I am convinced that Danny smelled that stench.

Danny with his baseball bat. The perfect Englishman who had a Jewish friend, and whose obsessions during his London School of Economics days were chess and arm wrestling (“strategic intelligence and muscle”)—how would such a man, a charmer, grow into a wily kidnapper, a jihadist, Osama bin Laden’s “favorite son” and, later, one of his financial managers linked to the 9/11 operation? Was Bosnia—the stereotype of Islam slaughtered—the turning point for the LSE student who found Samuel Huntington’s *The Clash of Civilizations* particularly enlightening? Did he really go to Sarajevo as part of the “Caravan of Mercy” and fight for the cause? Bosnia in Omar’s life, writes Levy, is an exaggeration, a construction, “a decoy, a false trail”, an invented legend to justify the cause of the demon. The most captivating parts in this whodunit are Levy’s travels in the mind of Evil.

**T**ravels that lead the investigator to the final revelation in which the destinies of the victim and the killer meet, in the backdrop of a frightening irony of the times. Pearl was killed not because he was a Jew and an American. He was killed for what he knew. The nuclear link between the ISI and Al-Qaida. Was the Pakistani secret service helping bin Laden to make the bomb? Was Pearl closing in on the truth? More: why did Abdul Qader Khan, father of Islamic bomb, find it so enjoyable to holiday in Pyongyang? Levy bets on a Pearl busy gathering proof of Pakistan’s shady dealings with terror networks. And this Pakistan is America’s ally in the war against terror! Levy finished this book in the middle of the Iraq war, and couldn’t miss the irony: As “one of the last political dictators was being consigned to ancient bestiaries”, in Pakistan, “tomorrow’s barbarous configurations was being concocted”. He sees Pakistan turning into the “Devil’s own home”.

Daniel Pearl trespassed into its secret chambers—into his own death. Levy’s homage to his posthumous friend is a verdict on the new evil imperium as well: radical Islam, armed and sustained by desperate rogues in uniform. In death, Daniel Pearl, not a symbol but a lone individual who represented none, magnified a terrifying truth. He missed the deadline. ■