

**JIHAD JONES AND  
THE KALASHNIKOV  
BABES**

**BY YUSSEF EL GUINDI**



**DRAMATISTS  
PLAY SERVICE  
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*To Torange Yeghiazarian and Golden Thread Productions.*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to John Eisner and the Lark for hosting a workshop of the play; to Torange Yeghiazarian and Golden Thread Productions for rolling the dice and giving it its first production; to Seth Rozin and InterAct Theatre, as well as Tina Parker, Christopher Carlos, and Kitchen Dog Theater for making it part of the National New Play Network's rolling world premiere. Additional thanks to Jeff Zinn and Wellfleet Harbor Actors Theater, David Gassner and Theater Schmeater, Laura Hope and Loyola University, and Sandy Harper and Richard Reichman at Cyrano's Theatre Company for giving it subsequent productions. (And thank you Sandy for encouraging me to write the following author's note for their production of the play.) Also to Robin Wright for devoting some pages to the play in her book *Rock the Casbah*.

## AUTHOR'S NOTES

It's strange to find oneself part of a racial/ethnic/religious group that has been cast as villains on the world stage. Apparently auditions were held for lead villains and I wasn't even consulted. Suddenly — I say suddenly, though this has been happening for most of my politically-conscious life — I find myself having to account for the actions of a group of extremists I would never, ever consider hanging out with. Somehow I'm responsible for these violent idiots. Frequently I find my interactions with others involves this strange dance of both distancing myself from these few violent individuals/groups, who end up tarnishing the vast majority, while at the same time trying to provide a context for what's happening, without appearing to justify these awful deeds.

Of course, the question as to why a particular group gets singled out from a plethora of bad guys operating in the world at any one moment is an interesting question. Which leads to the debate about this notion of “manufactured narratives.” Those stories that the mainstream culture keeps in play for whatever reason. One will hear (more in a subtle manner these days) that such-and-such a people are just somehow prone to violence. Or some other nationality will be labeled as lazy and shiftless. Or still another group will be said to be untrustworthy and sneaky, etc. And because we are all human, sharing similar traits, it's not hard to find news stories that confirm these negative stereotypes of people.

I think Carl Jung's idea of “projecting our shadows” onto others is key here. But that's a subject worthy of a whole essay, not here for these short notes. Plus, there is an additional discussion to be had about how these manufactured narratives serve certain political ends (note how the official narrative on Iran, for example, has shifted over the decades).

For these brief notes, I will say that being in the entertainment business, a business that will naturally take its cues from these mainstream narratives, it is doubly strange to have to navigate one's sense of self/identity through these misperceptions. Being a writer from a group that is currently occupying the role of lead villain, I have three options: I can either address these concerns directly, as I

have in this play; or indirectly, as I have done in other plays; or I can ignore the whole vexing issue altogether, as I sometimes do, if just to take a break. But what if I was an actor of Middle Eastern descent who was being offered roles that bolster these negative stereotypes? What if the only parts being offered were these kinds of roles? What if I had a family to support and needed the money? Perhaps I could justify it by thinking that if I take on this “evil-doer” role it might lead to better, less stereotypical roles in the future. Or perhaps I can persuade myself that by taking on this hideously written “character,” I can flesh him out, humanize him, and perhaps lessen the emotional damage it might do to that Arab kid who might watch the film.

The genesis for this play arose from years of being that Arab kid watching actors of Arab descent taking on these kinds of bad-guy roles. As I would sit there either cringing or enraged at these portrayals, I would think: what on earth persuaded these actors to take these parts?

*Jihad Jones and the Kalashnikov Babes* is my attempted inquiry into that question.

JIHAD JONES AND THE KALASHNIKOV BABES was produced by Golden Thread Productions (Torange Yeghiazarian, Artistic Director) in San Francisco as part of the National New Play Network's rolling world premiere, opening on June 5, 2008. It was directed by Mark Routhier. The set design was by James Faerron; the lighting design was by Jacob Petrie; the sound design was by Sara Huddleson; the costume design was by Sarah Al Kassab; and the production stage manager was Elizabeth W. Curtiss. The cast was as follows:

ASHRAF.....Kamal Marayati  
BARRY .....David Sinaiko  
PEGGY..... Jessica Kitchens  
CASSANDRA..... Cat Thompson  
JULIUS.....Mark Rafael Truitt

As part of the National New Play Network's rolling world premiere, JIHAD JONES AND THE KALASHNIKOV BABES was subsequently produced at InterAct Theatre Company in Philadelphia and at Kitchen Dog Theater in Dallas.

The play was produced at Theater Schmeater (David Gassner, Artistic Director) in Seattle, opening on January 15, 2010. It was directed by Steve Cooper. The set design was by Michael Mowery; the lighting design was by Dave Baldwin; the sound design was by Teri Lazzara; the costume design was by DodiRose Zooropa; and the production stage manager was Sharon Adler. The cast was as follows:

ASHRAF.....Zaki Abdelhamid  
BARRY .....Daniel Christensen  
PEGGY..... Michelle Flowers  
CASSANDRA..... Miriah Caine Ware  
JULIUS.....James Weidman

JIHAD JONES AND THE KALASHNIKOV BABES was produced at Wellfleet Harbor Actors Theater (Jeff Zinn, Artistic Director) in Wellfleet, Massachusetts, opening on May 25, 2011. It was directed by Robert Kropf. The set design and lighting design were by Ji-Youn Chang; the costume design was by Anne Miggins; and the production stage manager was Maureen Lane. The cast was as follows:

ASHRAF..... Paul Melendy  
BARRY ..... David Fraioli  
PEGGY..... Susan Gross  
CASSANDRA..... Stacy Fischer  
JULIUS..... Robert Kropf

JIHAD JONES AND THE KALASHNIKOV BABES was produced at Cyrano's Theatre Company (Sandy Harper, Artistic Director) in Anchorage, Alaska, opening on February 14, 2014. It was directed by Dick Richman; the set design was by Brian Saylor; the lighting and sound design were by Sierra Ileta; and the production stage manager was Marc Hess. The cast was as follows:

ASHRAF..... Matt Iverson  
BARRY ..... Kevin T. Bennett  
PEGGY..... Jacqueline Manhattan  
CASSANDRA..... Kelle June Korpi  
JULIUS..... Robert Pond



## **CHARACTERS**

ASHRAF

BARRY

PEGGY

CASSANDRA

JULIUS

# JIHAD JONES AND THE KALASHNIKOV BABES

*Barry's office. Ashraf is reading a script. Barry is at his desk involved with some task, but also watching Ashraf's reactions. Ashraf opens his mouth. Closes it. He turns the page.*

ASHRAF. *(Beat, reading from the script.)* "You filthy whore-mongering little American, die. I spit on you and your mother. I screw your mother. You pig. You puke-eating pig. Die." *(Ashraf looks at Barry.)*

BARRY. Yup. *(Ashraf turns back to the script.)*

ASHRAF. *(Reading another speech.)* "You think I care if your family die? I care only if they die too soon." Have you, um — read this?

BARRY. Uh-huh.

ASHRAF. All of it?

BARRY. Uh-huh.

ASHRAF. All of it?

BARRY. Have *you*? No, so don't jump to conclusions.

ASHRAF. Conclusions?

BARRY. Yes.

ASHRAF. You mean — conclusions?

BARRY. If I had to choose a word.

ASHRAF. What did I miss? The part where he turns into a hero?

BARRY. Yes, maybe.

ASHRAF. You're saying I missed that in the first ninety pages?

BARRY. I knew it. I knew it would just: *(Makes sound and gesture of something going over his head.)*

ASHRAF. You're kidding.

BARRY. Not with this script.

ASHRAF. This character? Mohammed? Turns into a hero? The guy who says, "Abdul, pass me the pliers," as he holds the grandmother by the throat?

BARRY. This is exactly why I wanted you to read it in my office because I knew you would utterly misread it.

ASHRAF. So there's a lot of nuance I missed?

BARRY. No, you see, sarcasm may be cute, but it's actually a career-killer.

ASHRAF. And playing Mohammed, the bug-eyed, psycho, sadist terrorist will put me in the big leagues?

BARRY. Is the "T" word ever used in the script? (*Ashraf looks at him, flabbergasted.*) Is it?

ASHRAF. Barry.

BARRY. No.

ASHRAF. If it looks like a duck, Barry.

BARRY. This is so not a duck, and it's certainly no turkey.

ASHRAF. How does he turn into a hero after dangling the four-year-old out the window? Rifle-butting the wife a few pages later. And then gathering all the family photos into the living room and pissing on them. Not to mention strapping dynamite to himself and threatening to rape the eighteen-year-old daughter and go off with a bang.

BARRY. Please note the sense of humor. Dark but present.

ASHRAF. And then leering at the seventeen-year-old son and wondering if he should bugger him instead?

BARRY. Clearly he's bisexual. I think that's interesting. Do you have a problem with playing a bisexual? You shouldn't. Sexual ambiguity would do your image good. Brando had it and so did James Dean.

ASHRAF. You're kidding.

BARRY. Wait till I tell you who's attached to the project.

ASHRAF. I'm not playing this.

BARRY. Who do you have wet-dreams about?

ASHRAF. I don't care.

BARRY. You'll wet yourself.

ASHRAF. I'm not doing it.

BARRY. Throw out a name.

ASHRAF. I mean it, Barry.

BARRY. Okay I'll tell you.

ASHRAF. (*Interrupting.*) I don't want to know! That's the problem: There's always a good reason to screw yourself and do the wrong thing. I'm sick to death of this junk. Jesus God, being an actor doesn't mean I have to be a total idiot. I also have to live with myself and not throw up when I think of what I've done. Why did you even show me this script?

BARRY. Because you haven't held one in two years.

ASHRAF. And in all that time, this is what you bring me?

BARRY. Also because you now have a rep as the "no man." The actor who will say no to a script before they've even finished offering it to you.

ASHRAF. Because of that one time when I turned down the part in *Jihad Jones and the Kalashnikov Babes*?

BARRY. Ashraf, my friend: what's the point of having principles if you're not around to show people you have any.

ASHRAF. Barry —

BARRY. (*Interrupting.*) Listen to what I'm saying.

ASHRAF. I have to face myself, *me*.

BARRY. You're an actor. You have to face the public, that's your job, and my job is to get you in front of them.

ASHRAF. I can't face anyone if I hate myself for what I'm doing.

BARRY. Stop, please.

ASHRAF. Where do you think the strengths I draw on to do my work come from? Not from feeling like shit for doing roles that suck and feeling like a total prostitute.

BARRY. I can name you a dozen actors who prostitute themselves repeatedly and do fantastic work. Who feel like shit on a daily basis and do work that blows you away.

ASHRAF. Not with roles that suck!

BARRY. Even with lousy roles because they're good enough to transform whatever they're doing into something magical. And I say you're that good. I say you can take this role, chew it up, and make this shit shine like nobody's else crap.

ASHRAF. Barry —

BARRY. I refute any charge of being over-the-top.

ASHRAF. Don't get on a roll.

BARRY. I'm not backing down with this one.

ASHRAF. I hate it when you do that because then I stop trusting you.

BARRY. I thought you were working on trust issues with your therapist.

ASHRAF. Have you read beyond the first five pages?

BARRY. The whole script, carefully, with more care than I usually do because I knew you would be Little Miss Manners about it.

ASHRAF. What exactly would I be transforming?

BARRY. Please read it as an actor and not as someone with a stick up his ass.

ASHRAF. Barry: This is bad English, wrapped around bad writing, wrapped around a hideous plot filled with God-awful stereotypes and enough cheese to put me off dairy for the rest of my life.

BARRY. Are you done? Because I know your outrage must feel good, but I wouldn't get off on it because a self-jerk with no place to put it does not a career make. I so know that when this film comes out and you're not in it, you will fire me for not having done everything I could to have changed your mind.

ASHRAF. (*Cold, not buying it. He holds out the script.*) Show me this switch when he becomes all likeable and chummy.

BARRY. I didn't say that.

ASHRAF. When he becomes the "hero."

BARRY. "Hero" is an iffy term these days, that's the heart of this film.

ASHRAF. Where is the point where he stops being the most hideous thing on screen. (*Flips through the script.*) At the end? In the next few pages? He's not even here. One moment he's ... (*Freezes on a passage. Slight beat, then, reading in a deadpan manner.*) "With his hands now trapped in Mr. Slinky, and wedged between the doorjamb and the pram, Mohammed is momentarily immobilized. Which gives Roger enough time to revive and reach for the shotgun. From his position on the floor, Roger angles the shotgun and shoves it up between Mohammed's ass cheeks. Roger turns to Heather: 'Sweetie: you may want to look away and cover your ears.' Heather: 'Daddy: I'd like to watch.' Betty enters with her arms around the twins: 'I think we all want to watch this.' Roger: 'Alright, but put on the goggles.' Mohammed: 'Fuck you and the American pussy that shit you. You all bitches.' Roger cocks the gun. Roger: 'Hey, Mo: kiss the virgins for me.' He fires, blowing a hole up through the top of Mohammed's head. Mohammed's body crumples, glancing against the mechanical monkey with the toy cymbals as he hits the ground, switching it on. The twins rush into their father's arms. Tears well up in Roger and Betty's eyes as they reach out to each other. The twins: 'Way to go, Dad.' As the camera pulls away with the family hugging each other, we can now make out that the monkey's cymbals are playing 'The Star-Spangled Banner.'" (*Slight beat.*)

BARRY. Yup. (*Slight beat.*) Knowing you, you're not going to see beyond what's on the page. You'll take it completely for what it seems without giving a thought it might be something else. (*Ashraf drops the script and heads for the door.*) Something that might be even more lucid and daring than you can imagine. (*Ashraf tries to*

*open the door but it won't budge. He tries again.*) That could change everything you want changed. But no, you're going to walk away.

ASHRAF. It's locked.

BARRY. You're so obvious you *are* a stereotype without even having to play one.

ASHRAF. The door is locked.

BARRY. Yes it is.

ASHRAF. Can you unlock it.

BARRY. No.

ASHRAF. Give me the key.

BARRY. Nope.

ASHRAF. Barry.

BARRY. No.

ASHRAF. (*Moving towards him.*) Give it to me.

BARRY. I care enough about you that I'm not going to open that door.

ASHRAF. Care for me?

BARRY. You the actor. You who should have had your name above the title years ago. I care for *that*, that's what I hold dear.

ASHRAF. Give me the key.

BARRY. (*Takes out key from pocket.*) This key? (*Ashraf reaches out to grab it; Barry avoids him.*) This little key is the key to everything you've ever wanted but are too gutless to grab. And I will not have cowards for clients. (*Ashraf moves again to grab the key. But Barry throws the key into an open box — perhaps a cigar box — and locks the box. Then Barry takes the box and puts it in his briefcase. He locks the briefcase. Ashraf, stunned, looks on. For good measure, Barry then opens a desk drawer, slides the briefcase in, and locks that. Ashraf stares at Barry. Then moves to the window.*) I wish to remind you my office is now on the fourteenth floor. And though your plunging career might yet survive your suicidal choices I'm pretty sure your body won't have the same bounce.

ASHRAF. How much are they paying? Will your percentage be a little higher?

BARRY. Nothing to do with that. You can be so smarmy when you get righteous.

ASHRAF. (*Approaching, somewhat threatening.*) What are they offering, Barry?

BARRY. No. Because then you'll think I'm operating solely from financial consideration when there's a lot more at stake than the

# JIHAD JONES AND THE KALASHNIKOV BABES

by Yussef El Guindi

3M, 2W

Ashraf is an actor who has just received rave reviews for his performance of Hamlet at a struggling theatre in Los Angeles. But he's only earning \$200 a week and he's having trouble paying the bills. He needs his big break. And that's just what his smarmy agent is offering: a starring role in a Hollywood blockbuster. Big money, working for his favorite director, and playing opposite his favorite Tinsel Town starlet. All Ashraf has to do is play the most stereotypically evil, fanatical Islamic terrorist ever to grace the silver screen. JIHAD JONES follows Ashraf as he battles the infamous slippery slope, while hilariously balancing his personal ethics and cultural pride against his professional ambition.

*"Laugh-out-loud funny!"*

—The Philadelphia Inquirer

*"Remarkably refreshing and thought-provoking."*

—San Francisco Chronicle

*"Yussef El Guindi's script is an intelligent piece of work which tackles complex problems of art versus bigotry while commanding the viewer's attention with wit and some well-placed insults."*

—The Daily Californian (Berkeley)

*"The humorous language is so good in this farce with a message you'll want to memorize lines and pretend you made them up yourself."*

—CurtainUp.com

## Also by Yussef El Guindi

PILGRIMS MUSA AND SHERI IN  
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