

# the paradise state



by wai hayndz

*“Somewhere amidst the tombola and the raffle at the village fete the first limb was severed...”*

It had sounded dark, comical and timeless, yet with contemporary political allusions- Orwellian in nature, but with scope for Monty Python-ism... the Parish Council decreeing death sentences for dog-fouling, the vicar casting the first stone shortly before cream tea with Mrs Whoever, severed hands for sticky-fingered teenagers, stoning for pregnant teenage girls and drug-addicted hooligans and more stoning for bored and adulterous housewives- all set amongst the lush backdrop of England's green and pleasant fields.

Yes, Graham McDonald's attempts to write a satirical article for the village Newspaper were causing him deep unease. The idea had seemed clever enough when he proposed it to the Kibworth South Village Times editor at The White Hart three weeks earlier. The concept was simple: a fictional Middle-England village in a world where the West had adopted Sharia, or a metaphorical legal system of some kind.

But what the hell did Graham McDonald actually know about Sharia? He didn't even know that much about Christianity and he had technically been C of E all his life. He and his wife sometimes attended church, the occasions generally limited to Christmas and Easter these days, and mostly just to be seen. His knowledge of British Law was even less so. He was a retired farmer, who despite having always harboured ambitions of investigative journalism, or being a war correspondent in some battle-scarred stretch of the world, had reluctantly only ever farmed... the family business.

This had been thrust upon him as it had his father before. Now in the youth of old age, liberated by adult children with no desire to follow the ancestral calling, he had broken free from his hereditary shackles: livestock, crops, tractors and a slavery to the weather; and had rented out the bulk of his land. Traditional concerns of conditions being too wet or too dry, the constant rising agricultural costs and the never-ending battle with supermarkets driving prices down, were now replaced with the luxurious problems of being a gentleman of leisure with a little too much time on his hands. He had made several attempts since this time to pursue his long-harboured dreams. So far, every attempt had been thwarted, laughed off or shouted down by Colin Sumner- President of The Rotary Club and Editor of the monthly village news pamphlet.

‘But you're the richest man in Kibworth’, Sumner smirked, ‘why on earth don't you just stick to what you know and leave the journalism to us professionals?’

Graham doubted, firstly, that he was the richest man in Kibworth, and secondly, if he was, that this bore any relevance to whether or not he contributed an article to The Kibworth South Times. Nonetheless, it was Sumner's stockpile response each and every time.

His first proposition was a balanced piece on organic farming. The second was wind-farm subsidies. The third was sustainability of... it didn't matter, as Sumner countered each with some tenuous logic and then published the same old sycophantic claptrap about Mrs Darby's prize-winning Dexters or Doctor Sealey's charity Santa run or his borderline-obsessional inquisitions as to whose dog had fouled the village green. Finally, inspiration had struck and Graham had stumbled upon an idea, in the haze of inebriation, which had captured Sumner's attention.

Three weeks later he was struggling not only with meeting the deadline, but also, and most importantly, the subject matter. Where he initially felt he had compelling grounds for a bold piece of journalism or creative writing or whatever it was, he now realised he knew next to nothing on the subject, bar what he had read in the *Times*, *Telegraph* or *The Mail* and then, for balance, *The Guardian* and *The Mirror*. It seemed there was more to Sharia than he'd imagined and that it wasn't as black and white as the headlines. Sumner was simply handing him enough rope to hang himself with. Graham was damned if he was going to give him the satisfaction.

*A little knowledge is a dangerous thing*, thought Graham, as he struggled through the fifth attempt of his laboured fable. It was, he concluded, a stupid piece. Only the thought of that self-satisfied bastard Sumner's smirking face when he failed to deliver kept him ploughing on through the tawdry online texts, sifting through arguments for and against the case, Sharia for Dummies, The Huffington Post, The Mail Online- to produce his crop. Otherwise he could quite easily imagine Sumner publishing an empty space in the village newspaper, probably accompanied by a goading headline like: "**McDonald fails to deliver**" or "**Old McDonald fires blanks**" or something along those lines. That was exactly the kind of thing that the Bastard would do.

While Graham was far from ever being pro-Sharia (he couldn't be, by the simple accident of birth he was fully committed to The Church of England in the traditional manner: half-arsed Churchgoing as foreplay for drinking) he understood that the bastard Sumner had set him up to tread a very dangerous line through a minefield of two equally unappealing sets of consequences. Three if you included failing to deliver the piece, which Sumner was almost certainly banking on. The first was that the article would be seized by the far right. He didn't want to inadvertently become a poster-boy for the BNP. And neither did he want a Fatwa on his head if he pissed off the other lot. The second, if he leaned too far in the other direction, went too far in adding necessary counter-point, was that the article could be seized by the extreme left, or become a compelling argument in the case for actually introducing Sharia. He didn't want to be Middle England's advocate of that either. The problem with people, Graham supposed, was that they tended to polarise things so readily. But then again, he was giving a little too much credence to The Kibworth South Village Times' circulation and how much anybody that mattered would take seriously the political machinations of a retired farmer.

He set to work, doing his best to write the article, retaining the dark humour, true to his original idea, while demonstrating as much of a balanced illustration through his newly applied knowledge as he could. After three days of intense, reclusive, caffeine-fuelled work, sealed away in his wife's office, emerging only sporadically to top up the coffee plunger, he delivered the finished draft of, not exactly a *labour of love*, but a five thousand word essay of *something at least*, to the bastard Sumner.

Nobody, least of all Graham, expected it to go viral.

'Dad, what the fuck have you done?' an echo-like imitation of his son's voice barked out of the telephone receiver, 'I mean... I'm up a mountain in Karnataka and even I know about this... it's fucking everywhere?'

Graham resisted the temptation to pull up his son for the use of a statement as an interrogative on this occasion. The younger generation all did it. The Americanisation of the world, he supposed... Before the phone rang he had been

successfully running off a printout of the original piece from his wife's new printer, to see what all the fuss was about, when halfway through the damn thing had stopped or jammed or run out of ink:

## The Parish Doctrine

By

Graham McDonald

After the tombola and the raffle on the green the first limb was severed. The vicar had read the charges in front of the gathered villagers, as Colonel Summers looked on approvingly and nodded. The culprits were a pair of teenage boys who had been accused, and found guilty, by the Parish Council, of theft from the village shop. Admittedly, it was the first punishment of its kind for quite some time in the Parish State.

Once the second limb was severed the villagers dispersed. It was unlikely there would be another crime of this ilk in South Bikworth for a while and the vicar, after a few moments of quiet conversation with Colonel Summers, made his way to the crescent for afternoon tea with Mrs Hut.

Graeme Dawkins had been amongst the spectators, as had all of the village's residents. This was mandatory for the punishment of 'crimes against the public interest'. It deterred others from carrying out the same offences. It was effective.

As Dawkins strolled home through the village he thought back to the last time a corporal punishment had been enacted. Rare though they were now, there was a time when they occurred several times a week. Mostly hands, but sometimes feet too. Floggings happened several times daily. This was shortly after The Parish State had been founded with Colonel Summers the newly appointed Chairman of the Council. At that time Capital punishments were commonplace, perhaps once a month, and though Dawkins sympathised greatly with the two boys now missing their limbs, he felt a small sense of relief that it at least had not been a stoning.

As the balanced, impartial piece that Graham had aimed for, it was an epic failure. As a promotional marketing tool for launching an unknown, amateur writer into the spotlight, however, it was quite successful.

After opportunistically commissioning his son's expertise in printer operations, he ended the call to the mountain in rural India, leaving his son to continue smoking LSD and "finding himself", or whatever it was the young did out there, and turned his attention to the impossible task of replacing the ink cartridge of his wife's new machine, just as she entered the room.

'I told you that retiring from farming was a mistake,' Susan complained, riffling through the pages of *The Times* with concern, 'there's a three page spread about you in the *Times*2.'

'Just don't look at it,' said Graham as he wrestled with the printer.

'And if I put on the TV it's even worse'

‘Well... don’t look at that either. It’s simple,’ he said, as the printer made a loud cracking noise. Graham emitted a small groan of defeat.

‘Have you asked the police if they’d like some tea?’

Graham glanced from the broken plastic in his ink-stained hands out the study window: the front door of the old farmhouse now heavily guarded by several armed officers.

‘I suppose they’re ok’, he replied, ‘it’s only an hour since I made them some coffee- real stuff, not Gold Blend. Should be fine until tomorrow.’

Susan rolled her eyes as Graham abandoned his efforts to print the rest of the document, instead scanning back over what little the machine had allowed.

South Bikworth was an idyllic village, part of several neighbouring settlements that comprised the Parish State. Crime was almost non-existent, at least those “against the public interest”- theft, banditry, unlawful sexual intercourse, unfounded accusations of unlawful sexual intercourse, drinking of alcohol, and of course, apostasy. Disagreements occurred, which were resolved peacefully by the Council, their guidance and rulings mostly the settling of fines.

Dawkins cut through a footpath that arched around the church and ended between the village hall and the butchers. As the rusty gate creaked when he stepped from the path onto the road he heard from behind the sound of a loud rumbling engine slowing down and as he turned he saw the smiling face of Colonel Summers, leaning from the window of his Range Rover, his eyes fixed like superglue to Dawkins.

‘Afternoon Graeme,’ said Summers.

‘Good afternoon Colin’.

‘It’s a fine day,’ Summers declared.

A frown formed on Dawkins forehead, as the freshly seared image of the screaming Guppy boy, Mark or Martin, his right hand separated from his wrist, was now permanently branded in his mind’s eye.

‘Yes.’

Summers registered the hesitation like a shark senses blood.

‘Got a problem with the Parish’s punishment, Graeme? Don’t approve?’

Dawkins shrugged, he hoped, non-committedly.

‘It’s the law. Fact. Simply the standard set by the Good Book, and who are we to question such things, Graeme? But that brings me to another matter I wanted to raise with you...’

Dawkins stiffened.

‘How is your wife?’

He felt a shiver run down his spine.

‘She’s fine, thank you for asking.’ Dawkins replied, turning to leave as Summers’ already fat grin spread further across his face.

‘It’s just about what she was wearing when I saw her yesterday...’

'When you saw her yesterday?'

'The material.'

'The material?'

'Yes. The material. Inappropriate.'

Dawkins said nothing.

'Ensure that she wears only traditional dress from here on. None of this shi-, I mean, stuff, from Paris. Even if you can afford it, it goes against the Parish Doctrine.'

Dawkins nodded for an easy life. Let it go.

Summers had expected a rebuke of some kind. In its absence he carried on like a terrier in a rabbit hole.

'And the length...'

'The length?'

'Too short. Ankles on display...' Summers' smile remained stretched across his face, but the steel in his eyes burned red hot.

Dawkins expression dropped momentarily, revealing a look of utter contempt, before leaping back to the previous forced smile.

'She's a beautiful woman,' Summers leered, 'you shouldn't share her with the world. Do you want every Tom, Dick and Harry looking at your property?'

If Summers were looking down he would have seen Dawkins' tightened fists clench into an iron grip, but he was too busy staring at his smile of gritted teeth.

'A beautiful woman,' Summers repeated slowly, his eyes beginning to glaze, before snapping back:

'See it doesn't happen again.'

Breaking the law with its utterance, Dawkins muttered 'Fuck off, you red nosed cunt', as Colonel Summers' Range Rover tore down the road through the village and past the school.

When they had first met at The Young Farmers Ball in the early Eighties, Susan had said to Graham that he looked like a young Charlton Heston. He had liked this. She had reminded him of Lauren Bacall in her prime. He liked this even more. The couple were an unlikely pair to find at the Young Farmers', and so naturally they found each other quickly. Sumner had never forgiven him. Now, after thirty years of marriage, as he stared at himself in the mirror- a smooth round plate where hair once shot, heavy-set lines that he felt he'd earned burrowed deep in the landscape of his face, and a peppering of auburn buried amongst his mostly remaining salt-coloured hairs that lined the sides- he wondered how he was going to fare in front of a televised audience on Question Time.

Perhaps if Sumner had just gone and published the piece in The Kibworth South Village Times, as Graham had intended, then none of this would have transpired. Maybe a couple of the neighbours might have skimmed over it between the advertisements for local stud farms and witch hunts for dog poo, and then it would have simply withered and died. But Sumner had refused to publish the piece, citing it "incendiary", though this had not deterred him from forwarding it, along with Graham's contact information, on to all of the local political parties- left, right, moderate and extreme, religious groups and anywhere else he felt it

may cause the correct level of offence.

It had caused quite a stir.

Graham was no I.T. whiz kid, but when he logged in to the dusty coffer of his Hotmail account and found several thousand messages clogging up his inbox he realised that something was afoot. Death threats were a new experience, for a start. It didn't take Sherlock Holmes, the village idiot, or even Graham's Labrador, to smell that it had something to do with that fucking red-nosed bastard Sumner.

An accidental "leak", apparently...

Graham perched at the end of the panel, struggling to make out the audience, as the studio lights half-blinded him. The players: the show's white-haired presenter, a chubby blond politician with unkempt hair in a pin-striped suit; a spectacled and smartly turned-out Asian man of around fifty with a greying beard, dressed in a Kamini outfit and kufi; a fat white bruiser spilling out of a cheap polyester suit, with a lazy eye and greasy hair scraped across his crown... and at the far end sat a lean, wild-eyed, manicured maniac in skin-tight leather trousers, frilly black shirt, jet-black scarecrow hair who resembled, once sculpted from porcelain and passed ten-thousand volts from an electric chair, a sort of gothic Jesus for the chemical generation.

And Graham.

The Parish Doctrine had polarised opinions deeply. Everyone and every group, aside from the mainstream political parties, had been quick to leap upon it - either seizing it as their own, or relishing their condemnation of it. There didn't appear to be much middle ground in the matter. Pro or against, that was it. There had been some interesting interpretations though. Oddly enough, both the *British Defence League* and *IslamicState4UK*, two extremely opposing organisations, had favoured it equally in the pro-camp. In Graham's mind they had both missed the point. (In truth, there hadn't actually been one other than delivering something rather than nothing to Sumner.) Other Islamic groups had been dead-set against it, labelling it little more than provocative, Islamophobic propaganda; with some left and right of centre groups stating it "incitement of religious hatred" while others declared it "freedom of expression".

Nobody could make up their minds but everyone had an opinion.

'First question,' said the presenter.

A seemingly disgruntled, red-haired man in a white kaftan - perhaps in his twenties - sporting a straggly ginger beard stood up in the audience.

*Hello*, thought Graham, *here we go...*

Dawkins stood accused before the Parish Council as Colonel Summers led the grave charges against him.

'Have wind farms been little more than a very expensive failed experiment?' asked the kaftan-clad young man.

Perplexed, though feeling that he could contribute to this subject at least, Graham cleared his throat, when the presenter assigned the question to the wild-haired actor and comedian.

Electro-Jesus piped up.

'See, yeah, right, what I'd do...' shouted the comedian-slash-actor, '... is I'd lock up all the people with the money!!!'

Graham was even more perplexed by this as Electro-Jesus launched authoritatively into a rehearsed populist diatribe, lacking any substance, about

bankers and voting, which had absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with the question...

‘Revolution!!!’ yelled the chemical Messiah.

Some whoops and cheers came from a few of the younger or simpler members of the audience. Grinning idiotically, Electro-Jesus basked in the trivial glory. Chubby-Blond-Politician waded in, huffed and puffed a bit, accused Electro-Jesus of hypocrisy- a textbook example of an individual who had benefitted from a system while having the gall to denounce it- and the pair began to bicker.

Graham exhaled with relief.

‘Next question.’

A skinhead in a bomber jacket and combat trousers with tattooed knuckles stood up with determination. Graham braced himself for trouble.

‘Is organic produce causing an unfair hierarchy within our food distribution system?’ the man asked.

Once more relieved, Graham readied himself in anticipation to offer his expertise on the matter, but the presenter designated the question to another member of the panel. The leader of the radical religious group offered his thoughts on organic farming. Skinhead in the audience nodded along approvingly.

‘Next question, from a Mrs Evangeline Fisher from Winchester.’

A gentle slip of a woman, about sixty, stood out from the crowd.

‘Go ahead,’ said the presenter.

She coughed softly. Graham relaxed.

‘Do you feel that we are on the brink of a Holy War with the tidal wave of immigrants we are currently drowning in?’ she asked. ‘And if not, then shouldn’t we be?’

The fat bruiser on the panel, the leader of the British National Party, to be precise, smiled broadly in agreement and locked his podgy, sausage-like fingers together. Graham winced, clinging to the hope that the woman was not one of his fans, and more importantly, that the question wouldn’t be assigned to him.

‘Graham McDonald,’ said the presenter.

Graham cursed inwardly.

‘Erm... no,’ he said, and left it at that.

‘Would you care to expand on that?’ asked the presenter.

‘No,’ replied Graham.

‘But,’ said the little woman, now with piercing eyes, and clutching a few sheets of paper, ‘if I quote your own words from “The Parish Doctrine”’, before reading out:

Dawkins watched aghast with horror as the first stone flew from the vicar’s hand and struck his neighbour, Mrs Hut, with a dampened thud to her temple: the noise similar to that of a rolling pin hitting a wet fish. The milkman who she had been carrying on with had received his eighty lashes earlier and was banished from the Parish State. Dawkins’ wife Sue clutched his hand as, after emitting a dreadful wail, Mrs Hut’s body went limp.

Colonel Summers cast the next stone, followed by several more rocks from other members of The Parish Council and key members of The

Rotary Club, before the Bowls Club joined in on the fracas.  
The purge of sin in South Bikworth had begun.

‘... This is clearly nothing more than a chilling but deadly accurate prophecy of things to come... and obviously the author intends that we must raise arms against this stealth attack from the enemy within’, Mrs Fisher waxed zealously, before breaking into song: ‘*ONWARDS CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS, MARCHING ON TO WAR...*’

Chubby-Blond-Politician glanced sheepishly at Graham across the table, a look that said: *you’re on your own here, pal, but best of luck!*

‘Well, that wasn’t quite what I was getting at...’ said Graham before the BNP leader added his voice to the debate, or put words in Graham’s mouth.

‘This is exactly what will happen unless we, The British People, act fast and take a stand. The author obviously believes that this is a wicked, vicious faith and has the full backing and support of...’

The leader of the extremist Islamic group then jumped in on the action, to speak his version of Graham’s mind, as Graham’s voice was drowned out. Gasps and groans, boos and claps, cheers and condemnations rang from the audience to set the backdrop for the controversial sound bites from the eclectic panel.

After about twenty minutes of hysterical ranting and rising of volcanic tempers, the studio was in disarray. Attempts by the presenter to mediate the pantomime proved relatively fruitless.

It was marvellous television though...

Finally, the waters settled enough for a few more questions from the audience.

An Asian woman with a broad Yorkshire accent questioned why a platform had been given to an Islamic extremist rather than a representative from The Muslim Council of Great Britain, a similar question from a middle-aged black man with a cut-glass accent as to why any airtime was being given to the BNP, an elderly white man garbed in Harris Tweed questioned where representatives from the mainstream parties were, aside from the Mayor of London, and a young woman with dreadlocks raised the relevance of the panel’s actor and comedian, other than the fact that he may have a new book or film or stand-up tour to promote. Chubby-Blond-Politician said he felt it was good that people were talking about the issue though skilfully avoided adding any concrete opinion of his own. Electro-Jesus launched into supplementary rehearsed monologue that had absolutely nothing to do with the subject, the same as before, only louder.

Seizing back control of the stage, the presenter stated, ‘room for one last question...’

Graham searched through the haze of the studio’s heated atmosphere and made out a few of the day’s faces: the young Muslim convert interested in renewable energy, the inquisitive organic farming skinhead, the toxic Winchester woman, until his eyes landed upon a familiar face: a ruddy-faced man with liver spots, bulbous red nose and that irritating, unmistakable smirk.

‘... from a Mr Colin Sumner of Kibworth South’.

The bastard Sumner.

*Let he who is without sin cast the first stone.*

‘My question is for Graham McDonald,’ said Sumner, as the audience fell silent. ‘Mr McDonald, in your work, *The Parish Doctrine*, you depict a familiar world in unfamiliar circumstances... The story’s protagonist is ultimately brought

by its antagonist, Colonel Summers, to the subjugation of being lashed before the village for questioning the word of the Parish Council and then is sentenced to execution for apostasy.'

Graham nodded.

'Many people have interpreted, perhaps violently, the subtext and metaphorical value of this article, and yet you haven't given any clear indication to the audience tonight of what you had actually intended in writing this piece...'

Sumner continued.

'I would like to know what your intentions were. Is this simply a case of scaremongering, is it a direct criticism of a religious faith, is it an endorsement of a set of beliefs, or is it simply a shameless publicity stunt in a bid to further your own limited abilities as a writer?'

Graham, who was noted in certain circles of the village dinner party circuit as a master of ready wit and repartee, considered this for a moment. As time froze, his potential answer played steadily through his mind. He tried to formulate a way to say the following in as concise a manner as possible as extracts of his explosive work of "fiction" burst through his subconscious like shrapnel from an IED:

*'I hadn't intended any of the above and didn't know much about the subject when I conceived the idea. Once I started trying to write it I realised how out of my depth I was and so put myself to the task of study and research... but quickly discovered that it was highly complex. There are five schools of Islamic thought, each with similar but differing ethics... To illustrate the differences of these in a short work of prose is a task beyond my abilities, so I amalgamated the punishment system into a generalised practice of religious metaphor aimed as much at highlighting some of the pros and cons of how any religious institution, not just Sharia, can merge with a legal system in the contemporary world. Naturally, perhaps because of my own set of beliefs, 'Apostasy...' decreed Colonel Summers this was biased and fell more heavily on the negatives... '... for which there can be only one appropriate sentence... Death!' However, my intention was neither to condemn nor condone this particular idea, simply to deliver a piece of writing for a deadline, and not be outdone, by an individual with personal motives against me. 'Do you have any last words?'*

*'In the process I've inadvertently learned more about my own set of beliefs, or perhaps prejudices, if you like. While I feel it is good to keep traditions and respect beliefs of others, if human beings interpret an ancient text too literally, then things will often end in tears. Thud. Thud. This applies to all religions and faiths as no doubt within each there is often good as much as potential misguidance, but if taken as gospel, there is bound to be conflict with contemporary values. Thud. Thud. Thud. Man will too often interpret, or misinterpret, any word of God to suit his personal desires and motives. Thud.'*

*'However, in the time since this has reached the public stage it has given me a greater scope of philosophical thought about society and the world and freedom and extremism. 'Do you repent?'*

*'It appears to me that when it comes to controversial differences most people will only ever rigidly pick a side, and from that point will refuse reason or logic, and then what are often complex grey areas simply become black and white dogma and rhetoric. As long as people are only ever looking at things in this way, compromise and peace and resolution are unlikely to be achieved, while conflict will simply perpetuate...'*

*'DO YOU REPENT?' 'On the flipside it has also made me think about*

*freedom of speech in relationship to extremism or tolerance and perhaps this ideology is mutually exclusive to these opposing principles. Put another way, we have the right to say what we wish, but sometimes fail to grasp that all actions have reactions, Thud. Thud. Thud. and fail to exercise considered judgement in the pursuit of this right. Was it Churchill who said, "We are masters of the unsaid words but slaves of those we let slip out?"*

*'To the gentlemen on this panel, of opposing extremes, you are both one and the same- but it is your right, in a free democracy, to be so. Enjoy it. To the members of this audience and those watching at home I say, in the words of Samuel Johnson, "Be not too hasty to trust or admire the teachers of morality; they discourse like angels but they live like men.'* Graeme screamed at the Parish Council as Colonel Summers hurled the final, silencing rock.

... but before the words had travelled as far as his lips, and could take articulate shape, an audience member was raising another issue: a Beretta M9 Semiautomatic handgun. Graham's chest ruptured as two deafening explosions shattered the studio's fleeting silence.

Ears ringing, shrieks erupted from the audience and panel as the young Islamic convert leaped from his seat to wrestle the gun from the perpetrator. Another loud crack rang out, striking the leader of the British National Party firmly between the eyes. The tattooed skinhead launched himself, pulling violently at the weapon, as another bullet burst through the larynx of the radical Islamist, its intended beneficiary, from the hands of the unlikely extremist, a Mrs Evangeline Fisher of Winchester.

Sadly, Graham was never able to clarify his position or share his recently learned philosophies with the world, but in his final gasps he had just enough time to articulate a few poignant words, to the bastard Sumner, that he'd always wanted to say:

'Fuck off, you red-nosed cunt.'

He had few regrets.