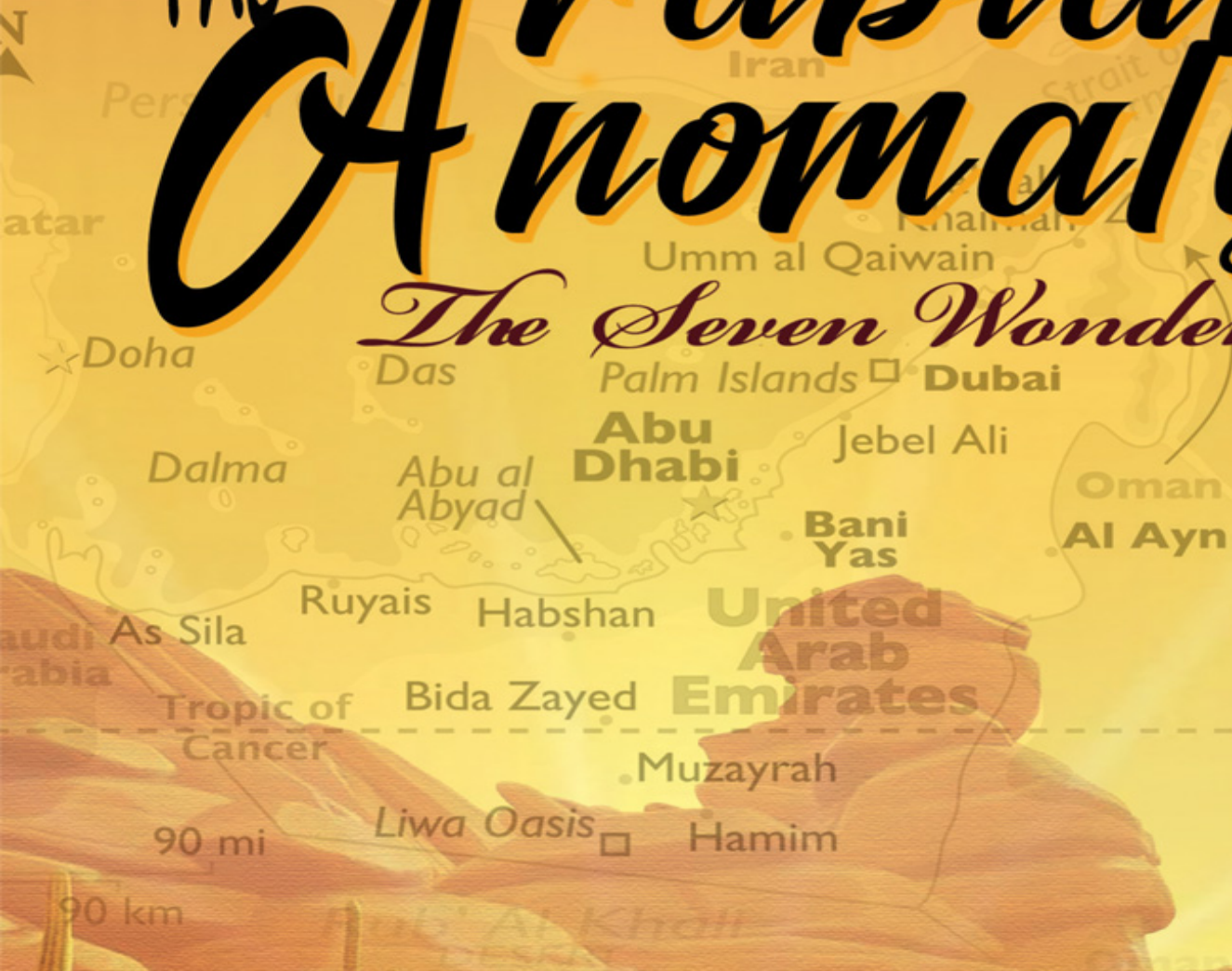


The Arabian Anomaly

The Seven Wonders



Second Book
Prarthana Saji

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Contents

Acknowledgement

The Meeting

Last Day of February

Dubai

The Tallest Building in the World

Suspicious

A Clandestine Encounter

A Surprise Party

Trip to the Zoo

A New Lead

Departure

A Well-Hidden Secret

A Shocker

Warner Bros

The Fight

The Organization of Safeguarding and Creation

A Dream

Chapter I

The Meeting

It was the sixth of September, in the colony of Colonel's Vihar, there was a very intelligent and smart girl named Vrinda who had just reached home after five-month long training. She was a dark, beautiful girl with long wavy hair, a large nose and big beautiful eyes. Her dreams had all come true and her studies were going quite well. Her mother and father, Anju and Sandeep, were happy that she was home, and were sitting with her and talking. Anju was a plump woman with huge eyes and she used to be a professional dancer but had stopped dancing long ago. Sandeep, on the other hand, was a dark and handsome man who had small eyes, a big nose and a moustache.

Just opposite her, a lady of 50, Tara, and her nephew, Kannan, lived. Kannan too had just come back home after a five-month long training and was happy to be home. He was a fair, handsome boy with shabby hair and big eyes and nose, like Vrinda. He was a tension-free person with a good sense of humour and a loving nature. His aunt was happy to have him home and was busy cooking something special for him. She was a plump and shabby lady and used to walk in an odd way.

For outsiders, both the families had a normal life just like any other but they had a secret unknown to all...

Vrinda had two phones one of which she picked up. It was a small phone which looked different from regular phones. She answered it. The voice on the phone said, "Hello Vrinda! Can we have a group meeting tomorrow evening at five, if you are free?" Vrinda said, "Sure Tara, no problem."



In Tara's house, there were three other children who were 18, one year elder to Vrinda and Kannan. They were Neha, Parthik and Arun. Neha had short blunt hair and was as tall as Vrinda. She wasn't too fair or dark and had sharp features. Parthik had neatly cut hair and was dark. He had blunt features. Arun was a fair boy with small eyes and a small nose and a lot of freckles. He was the tallest in the group. They were all Vrinda's friends. There was another lady standing in the corner. She looked like she was in her twenties but was thirty. She had long curly hair and was fair just like Kannan. She was the *real* Tara. As Vrinda entered they all sat down on the dining table kept in the middle of the room, without saying anything to one another. Vrinda noticed that Tara had made a 'Wall of Memories' in that room, where she had put all the pictures they had clicked. Neha asked, "So, Tara why did you call?" Tara said, "I know you all might want to spend time with family but I had to explain few things so I called."

Vrinda said, "Did you work things out?" Tara frowned and said, "Not fully but for the time being, yes." She continued, "Seven months are remaining before you write your entrance exams for colleges. Whenever I call, you all have to reach a place where I'll come and pick you up in my helicopter so we can go to the required area. Now you guys can suggest which place that should be." Then they all sat in thought. Neha lived in Colonel's Vihar itself but Parthik and Arun lived in a colony one kilometre away from Colonel's Vihar so it had to be a place in between the two places but Arun suggested, "We can just meet here. Whenever there's a mission just give us a call before Vrinda and Neha." Parthik agreed.

Tara said, "So be it. This will be our pick up point. Also, there are few things that are left to be taught but they are higher level things thus, those things will be taught eventually. Right now, I want to start teaching you the basics of hacking. Though Kannan does it really well, every person in the group should know everything." Tara paused and there was an awkward silence, so she continued, "Hey, you didn't meet each other for one day and you're all acting like strangers?" The atmosphere loosened up and Vrinda greeted everybody and her mind just went back to the five months they had spent together in the training centre, training to become qualified *spies*, which they were now. They all did a group hug.

Neha asked Vrinda, "What're you planning to do for the remaining seven months?" Vrinda simply answered, "Study and missions." Everybody agreed that they were all going to study for the entrance exams. Vrinda realised that she didn't know what Neha, Parthik and Arun wanted to pursue. When she asked them, Neha and Arun said that they wanted to be engineers and Parthik wanted to be a photographer and he told them that he was working towards it. Vrinda knew what Kannan wanted to become, they both had similar likes. Both of them wanted to join AFMC (Armed Forces Medical College) to become doctors in the Defence. They both had been the best of friends. Kannan had asked Vrinda out and she had agreed just before they had returned from the training centre. Vrinda looked at Kannan and Tara talking about something and she really wanted to talk to him.

Vrinda, Neha, Parthik and Arun were talking, when Kannan popped up and said, "Hey! What are you guys up to? Glad to see you guys. It was really odd that I didn't see you yesterday considering the fact that we were looking at each other's faces every day for the past five months." They all agreed with Kannan. Tara called and said that she had laid few snacks for them to eat. They all sat around the table.

They were called 'The Seven Wonders' and were a small spy group like numerous other groups that existed in India. Tara had formed this group five months back and it had become an official group just three months back. The reason they were called 'The Seven Wonders', though they were only six, was that there used to be another group member, Natasha, who died saving Tara's life just last month. Natasha, Vrinda and Kannan had been the best of friends and Kannan and Natasha liked each other for a very short duration. Natasha's unfortunate death had broken everybody's heart and they all decided not to change their group name as a memory to Natasha. She was the one who had suggested the name.

Around seven o'clock, Parthik, Arun and Neha left Tara's house. Vrinda stayed back. Tara went into her room and only Vrinda and Kannan were left in the room. Vrinda said, "Hey, we didn't get to talk at all when everybody was around." Kannan said, "Yeah. So, started studying already?" Vrinda and Kannan laughed with no reason to do so.

Vrinda said, "So, what's the plan?" Kannan said, "Nothing much...so you want to come out with me on 10th?"

Vrinda replied, "Sure, but where?"

"Anywhere."

“Sure!”

Tara came in and said, “Hey Vrinda, you’re still here?” Vrinda asked, pretending to be hurt, “You want me to go?” Tara quickly said, smiling, “Nah...just asking.” Vrinda, Kannan and Tara spoke for some more time about the missions that they might get and then around eight o’clock Vrinda went back home. The Seven Wonders were like a family now and Vrinda was looking forward to the missions they might get.



On the tenth of September, when Vrinda woke up she had a funny feeling in her gut. She remembered that it was Kannan and her first date. They still hadn’t decided where to go and were just planning to ride around the city and decide which place they should visit as Kannan and Vrinda had got their learner’s license. They decided to meet at one o’clock that afternoon.

After her breakfast, Vrinda was studying when her mother called her and said, “Tara’s on the phone. Come and speak to her!”

Vrinda came and took the phone and said, “Hello!”

Tara seemed annoyed. She said, “Why aren’t you answering your spy phone?! I don’t want this to happen again.” Vrinda apologised and promised Tara that she would not repeat the mistake again. Tara softened and said, “Anyway, come to my house immediately!”

Vrinda cut the phone, told her mother that she was leaving and rushed to Tara’s house. Vrinda had a feeling that they had got a mission and that was the reason Tara had called her. She was sure that Tara would have already called Neha, Parthik and Arun and she was feeling super excited.

When Vrinda entered Tara’s house, only Tara and Kannan were there. All the excitement that had filled her, drained away. She said, “Hey Tara, why did you call? I thought it was for a mission but Neha, Parthik and Arun are not here.” Tara and Kannan smiled in an evil manner. Tara said, “Vrinda, we have been fooling you. Kannan and I are enemy agents who have been ordered to eliminate you if you had the potential to become a spy. I have observed that you do have the potential and so do Neha, Parthik and Arun. So I have tied them up in a room inside and I am going to do the same thing with you!” Kannan laughed, “Mwahahahahaha! Surrender now!”

First, Vrinda didn't believe it but she surveyed both their faces closely. Vrinda started panicking. They seemed to be telling the truth. Vrinda started panicking. She had no weapons and she had no idea what to do. She said, trying to sound braver than she felt, "You have taught me quite well. I will die fighting but not surrender."

Just when Vrinda got mentally and physically ready for a fight, Neha, Parthik and Arun entered through the main door. Vrinda turned and she was filled with relief. Tara was just playing a dumb joke on her!

The relief that had filled her vanished and she felt vexed with Tara and Kannan. She went and started punching Kannan on his shoulders. Tara got in between Vrinda and Kannan and said, "You can stop now!" and then Vrinda, Kannan and Tara started laughing. Neha, Parthik and Arun were totally oblivious to what was going on. Vrinda and Kannan explained to them what happened and they too joined the laughter.



Vrinda was right. They were heading towards a cottage near the coast, in their helicopter, where there was a pen drive that they had to retrieve. It had information about some of the agents who were presently working undercover in other countries. The government had got information that enemy agents had discovered the pen drive's location. According to their Intel, the enemy agents were headed towards the cottage they were headed to.

Tara landed her helicopter in front of the cottage, where the pen drive was hidden. This was a super easy mission and did not need six people but all of them pleaded Tara if everybody could go. Eventually, she agreed and said that three people will wait in the helicopter and will be called if backup was needed.

Neha, Tara and Parthik went in to get the pen drive. Vrinda felt really bored and by the looks of it, Kannan and Arun were dying of ennui too. A few minutes after Tara, Neha and Parthik went into the cottage, Kannan asked, "So....what's up?" Vrinda replied, "What do you think? Take a guess!!" Silence again. Vrinda had no idea what to talk about. Kannan asked, "What book are you reading?" Vrinda answered, "Harry Potter, for the thousandth time." Kannan said, "I know that one." Vrinda asked, knowing what the answer was, "You've read it?" He replied, "No...I just

watched the movie. I liked it.” Vrinda threatened, “If you want to be close to me, you better not like Harry Potter.” Kannan looked at her, confused. Vrinda continued, “...You have to LOVE it!” Kannan said, “Only for you, I’ll try and read the book and watch the movies again. Then I’ll love it.” Vrinda laughed and said, “I’m just kidding. So sweet of you, there’s no need for that. The only request is, don’t get annoyed when I keep bugging you about how much I love Harry Potter.” Kannan looked as if he was trying to remember something. Then he said indignantly, “How come you never mentioned your love for another man in the past few months.” Vrinda said, “I am yet to be fully discovered by anybody.” Kannan looked at her sceptically. Vrinda admitted, “Okay, just kidding. I am a woman of few secrets and I have told you most because you’re so sweet...I also love Ruskin Bond and Sudha Murthy and most of the good books. I like you quite a lot.” Kannan said, “And me you.” From behind them, Arun said, “Ew guys, I am right here.” Vrinda defended, “Hey! That was just the best friends speaking.” Arun said sceptically, “Is it? Is it really?” Kannan said, “Whatever you want to think.”

A second after, Kannan suddenly started laughing and said, “We fooled you so well. It was awesome.” Vrinda made an annoyed face and said, “So what? I have to tell you, both of you act really well. I knew Tara could act well as she pulled off a 50-year-old lady trick very well but when you too said that both of you were evil, I totally fell for it!” Kannan teased, “Whatever said and done, you fell for it!” He continued laughing for a few minutes. Vrinda asked, “I was thinking that all of us should go to the coming dance party in the army club. My parents go every month but I stopped attending it ages ago as I didn’t like dancing and didn’t have friends. Neha, Parthik and Arun can also bring their parents along with them.” Kannan said, “That’s a great idea! I’ll ask Tara if she wants to come.”

Vrinda turned to face Arun and was going to ask whether he liked her idea when he raised his finger to his lips and gestured them to be quiet. Vrinda turned to look where Arun was looking. There were about ten to twenty people tip-toeing towards the cottage. Luckily they hadn’t spotted their helicopter yet, as it was hidden behind some wilderness. As they had expected, the enemy agents had reached the cottage.

All three of them ran into the helicopter and gathered their weapons. Vrinda felt exuberant as it was their first mission as a fully qualified spy.

She felt slightly scared too.

Vrinda, Kannan and Arun crept behind them. Vrinda gave a missed call on Tara's spy phone as a signal to inform Tara about the approaching danger. The enemy agents were almost inside the cottage when Vrinda, Kannan and Arun attacked. Vrinda just wished that Tara, Parthik and Neha came out soon, as they really needed help. To her utter relief, Tara, Parthik and Neha ran into the battleground!



They were sitting in the helicopter, going back home. There was a blanket of silence in the air. Yes, they did retrieve the pen drive! The blanket of silence was because of the exhaustion that all of them felt. They had finally imprisoned most of them. Tara, Arun and Neha had safeguarded the pen drive. RAW spies had come and taken the pen drive and the imprisoned people back to the RAW headquarters as they identified some of them to be on their 'Wanted' list. It was already five in the evening.

Vrinda and Kannan were sitting next to Tara who was flying the helicopter. Suddenly Vrinda remembered that it was supposed to be their first date earlier that day. She said, "Kannan, today we were supposed to ride around the city. Remember?!" First, Kannan had a blank expression and then he exclaimed, "Yes! It was supposed to be our first date." Both of them laughed. Kannan said, "Well, I guess this was better than randomly roaming around the city. We got to go to a completely different location!" Vrinda agreed, "Yeah, what could be a better place to have our first date than a mission!" Both of them continued their laughter.

The exhaustion left the air after this and everybody started talking again.

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