

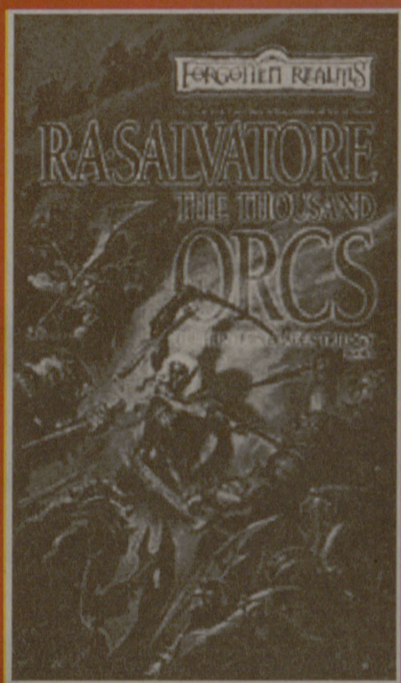
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Rebels threaten to blow up captives in Moscow theater

MOSCOW (AP) — Medics dragged the body of a young woman shot by Chechen rebels from a Moscow theater Thursday as the attackers threatened to kill their hundreds of hostages unless the Russian army pulled out of Chechnya. Two women jumped from a window under Chechen fire and escaped.

Forty rebels, including women who claimed to be widows of ethnic insurgents, stormed the theater just before the second act of a popular musical at 9:05 p.m. Wednesday. The woman, shot in the chest, was the only known fatality of the hostage-taking as it moved into its second day.

Relatives and friends stood in freezing weather outside the theater in a rundown southeast Moscow neighborhood 3 miles from the Kremlin, their dread matching the grimness of the scene and the desperation of the estimated 600 captives inside. Special forces troops moved in formation around the building and armored vehicles stood ready. Snipers were on rooftops.

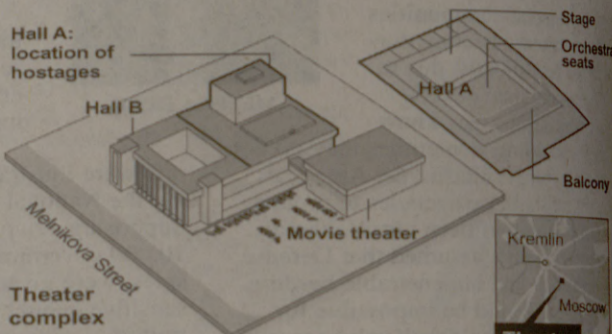
Three Americans were among the 75 foreign hostages in the theater.

In televised remarks, President Vladimir Putin described the hostage-taking as one of the largest terror attacks in history and claimed it had been planned "in one of the foreign terrorist centers" which "made a plan and found the perpetrators." He did not provide evidence the raid was organized abroad.

In a broadcast monitored in Cairo, Egypt, the Qatar-based satellite TV channel Al-Jazeera transmitted statements by some of the hostage-takers who said thousands of their comrades

Chechen gunmen holding hostages

Chechen rebels held approximately 600 hostages at a Moscow theater for a second day Thursday. One woman was killed by the rebels.



SOURCES: Space Imaging; Associated Press; ITAR TASS; Theater Center of Dubrovka

stood ready to die for the Chechen cause.

"I swear by God we are more keen on dying than you are keen on living," a black-clad male said in the videotaped broadcast. "Each one of us is willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of God and the independence of Chechnya."

"Even if we are killed, thousands of brothers and sisters will come after us, ready to sacrifice themselves," said a female among the group, only her eyes peering from a head-to-toe black robe.

An employee said the tape had been delivered to Qatar from Al-Jazeera's Moscow bureau Thursday morning. It apparently was made Wednesday before the theater takeover. The language spoken by those on the tape could not be determined since the audio was broadcast with a voiced-over Arabic translation.

The tape underlined what appeared to have been intense planning that went into the audacious operation, which brought the Chechen war 865 miles north to the Russian cap-

ital. One of the masked men on the tape sat before the camera with a laptop computer in front of him and a Quran, the Muslim holy book, on the floor at his right side.

"We came to the Russian capital to stop the war or gain martyrdom, and our demands are stopping the war and the withdrawal of Russian troops," one speaker said.

Another man on the Al-Jazeera tape said the attack was planned "based on orders from the military ruler of the Republic of Chechnya," possibly referring to Aslan Maskhadov, who was president of the province in the interval between the 1996 end of the first war with Russia and the resumption of fighting in 1999.

These days, some of the Chechens who led efforts to create an independent country and have fought two brutal wars against Russia have adopted the language, methods and sometimes even the dress of extremist Islamic movements and taken to terrorism, draw attention to their cause

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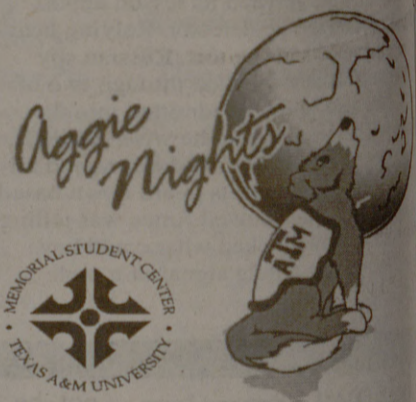
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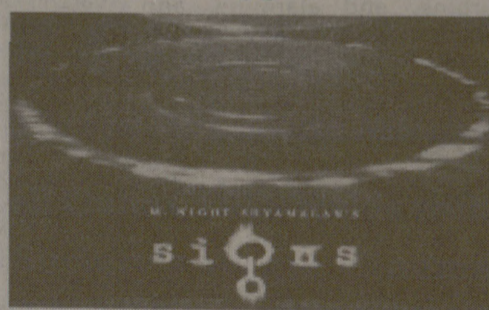
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