

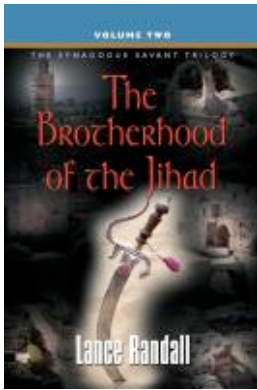
VOLUME TWO

THE SYNAGOGUE SAVANT TRILOGY

# The Brotherhood of the Jihad



Lance Randall



*Caught in the crossfire of three extremist groups vying for control of Palestine, three couples struggle to protect family, friends, and faith. The Zionist movement in 1921 is resisted by Arabs, driven by Jewish hardliners, and supported by Christian groups under the influence of the British. An aging, world-traveled shipping line owner, a Georgia entrepreneur, and a professional spy face old foes and new challenges in an emotional struggle of cruelty, deception, and triumphant love.*

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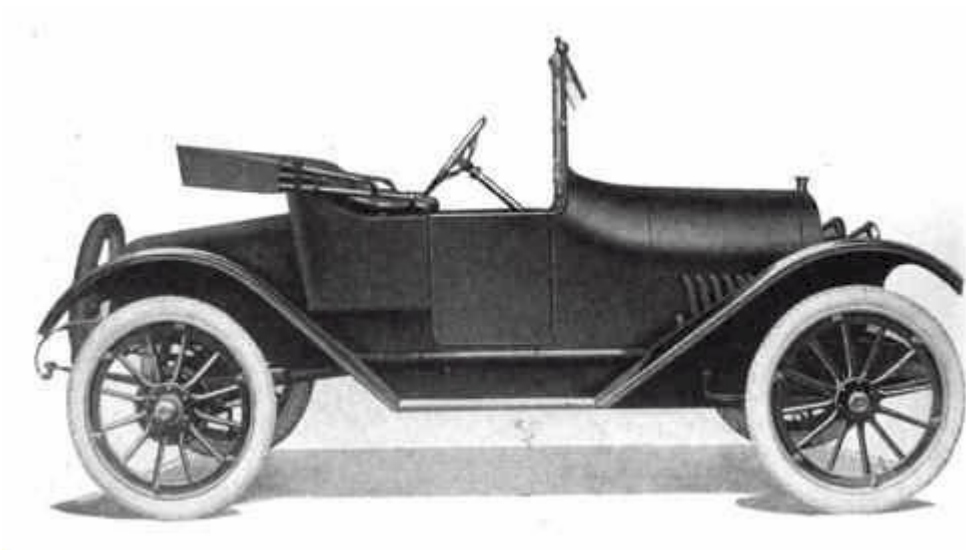
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# The Brotherhood Of the Jihad



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## Prologue

**Moreau, Georgia, USA – April 3, 1921**

Samuel Coxwell waited impatiently, and his mother, Sarah, stood fidgeting with him. The two were used to waiting on father and husband, Wilbur; but today was the boy's tenth birthday and the dad had promised that the family would go to the river fishing and picnicking after his one early morning meeting. The sawmill and box plant he had built in Moreau, Georgia was now the major employer in Barrett County and a thriving venture demanding most of his time. With a nearly inexhaustible supply of Southern Yellow Pine locally, the facility supplied all the lumber and crates for the Bernard Brothers Shipping Line.

"I won't be long," he told his wife when he kissed her goodbye before six o'clock. "I'll only be gone an hour," he had promised; but now it was nearly nine, and the youngster was afraid his father had gotten distracted.

Lately it seemed the businesses he and Sarah had started after returning from Israel demanded more and more of Wilbur's attention. Though the rewards had been great, a large house and forty acres of their own, for instance, Sarah longed for the days when she occupied all of her husband's thoughts.

"The fish won't be biting by the time we get there," the boy grumbled.

"If you want to ride your new bike to the river . . ." Sarah began.

"Oh, boy!" Samuel exclaimed, and started to dash out the door.

"Wait a minute . . ." she grabbed his arm to stop him. "What I was going to say is: If you want to ride your bike to the river, I'll walk with you, but I need to leave a note for your father to join us there.

"Awww . . . I thought you were going to let me go by myself," the boy said with a hangdog look.

"Well, just pretend I'm not there." Sarah tried not to laugh. "Go get your bike and I'll meet you by the front gate."

The bicycle delivered a few days before his birthday looked just like the picture in the Sears and Roebuck catalog. Since hiding it was out of the question, they gave him the gift early. He mastered the balance and propulsion of the device almost immediately and a worn path now surrounded the house.

Sarah left the picnic basket and a note for Wilbur, and started for the front gate and the beginning of the mile and a half walk to the river. The boy, filled with the energy of youth, pedaled small circles around her for a while; and then sped ahead. Just as Sarah was about to call after him, Samuel returned. With the pattern established, he repeatedly rode the large ovals around Sarah, then surged

ahead with boundless energy and returned to slingshot around her; his short legs covered twice the distance she walked.

“Watch this, Mother,” he shouted gleefully as he went racing by.

The road turned sharply ahead just before the river landing. Standing up on the pedals, he propelled the bike as fast as his forty-five pound body would allow and disappeared around the bend. She laughed, amazed that his small body could generate so much animation. Then Sarah heard the car engine.

“Samuel,” she called. “Sam!” she shouted and picked up her pace. She could hear the engine revving, but he was out of her sight. “Samuel!” her volume was now nearly a scream.

A 1920 Oldsmobile Model 43 slid around the bend and came toward her, its tires spinning. At first, she thought the car was deliberately aiming at her; and she stepped off the road. As the vehicle swept by, her eyes followed it. She did not recognize the driver, a dark-complected and black-haired young man with a stubble beard; but she did recognize the man in the window of the back seat and her heart sickened. It was Asad.

The Oldsmobile surged past her, the red dust of South Georgia clay swirling around her. In the rear window was a small, frightened face. It was Samuel.

\* \* \* \*

It was after four p.m. before Sheriff Newhouse and his deputy left the Coxwell home. His investigation of Samuel’s kidnapping was well meant, but without the context or understanding of Sarah and Wilbur’s past, the young lawman was at a loss to make any sense of it. His tenure as the chief law enforcement for Barrett County had only begun two years earlier. He was the second man elected after Sheriff Norton’s conviction in nineteen-ten for graft and conspiracy, a trial in which Wilbur had been a primary witness.

During his interrogation, Sarah, in a state of denial, had caught herself fretting that she would not have dinner ready for Samuel and Wilbur at their normal time. The realization that Samuel would not be at the table tonight caused her emotions to crater; her sobs loudly expressed the emptiness inside her. Wilbur tried to comfort her, his arms the only solace available to her; but even her husband was not enough to fill the hole in her heart.

The Sheriff’s last words as he left were, “The kidnapers will probably try to contact you with a ransom demand. When they do, call me immediately.” Sarah and Wilbur knew what the demand would be, and they were perfectly willing to give them the information they wanted in exchange for their son.

*The Brotherhood of the Jihad*

“Do you think they will contact us tonight?” Sarah asked Wilbur when they were alone.

“No,” he said morosely, sitting with his head in his hands. He was unable to express the pain he was feeling; the loss of his son so unexpectedly was breaking his heart.

“Well, do something! Don’t just sit there! Find my son!” Sarah’s unrealistic demands ended in a sob.

He stood up and pulled her into his arms, and they cried together. As the sun began to set, the couple sat side-by-side in the darkening house, waiting for the telephone bell in the wooden box on the wall to ring or for a knock on the door. It was unlikely that they would contact them by phone, since only a few wealthy individuals and large businesses in the county had telephone connections to the outside world. Wilbur drew his arm from around Sarah and stood. Striding to the phone, he rang the operator.

“Dora Mae, I want to place a call to either Isaac Bernard or Joseph Bernard in New York, City,” Wilbur instructed the operator. “You will find them at either Joseph’s home or the Bernard Brothers Shipping Company. . . Yes, thank you. . . Yes, I’ll let Sarah know. Call me back when you have my party,” he said and hung up.

“Dora Mae, said to tell you they were praying for us and for Samuel,” he advised his wife. “I think that’s a good idea for us right now,” he whispered as she looked up at him with tear-stained cheeks.

The couple knelt together on the floor as Wilbur spoke aloud. “Heavenly Father, we come to you in our hour of need. We know that our son, Samuel, is in your hands. We know that no matter what happens he will be with us in heaven serving you someday. Even in his childhood innocence, he acknowledged to you that he was a sinner; and we are so proud of him for confessing those sins to you and asking for your forgiveness. We know you pardoned him, Lord. We know when he accepted you as his Savior that you poured out your grace on him and committed him to an eternal life with you; and we are so grateful for that knowledge.

“But, Lord, we come to you tonight with heavy hearts. Our Samuel has been taken from us. At his birth, we committed ourselves to the task of raising him to honor you. We dedicated his life to you in a church ceremony. We watched him follow your example in baptism; and now, Lord, someone willing to take a boy’s life to settle a score with his mother and father has taken our little boy. Please protect him in the lion’s den, as you did Daniel. Protect him from harm and bring him home to grow up as your servant. Lord, give us the strength and courage to follow your will in the days ahead. In Jesus name, we pray. Amen.

Sarah said softly, “Amen,” through her tears.

*Lance Randall*

The jangling of the bell wrested the couple back to reality. Wilbur answered; but even before his “Hello” was able to echo through the poor connection, the voice on the other end of the line began to speak. As the crackling tinny voice conveyed the message, Wilbur’s face turned white with fear and then red with anger.



# Chapter One

~

## Asad's Declaration

**Nablus, Palestine, Ottoman Empire – July 14, 1910**

The destruction in Palestine from the earthquake was severe.<sup>1</sup> The tremors of aftershocks shook the ground and people's nerves for days, frightening every resident into living in the street. Because congestion and debris brought transportation to a standstill, it took Asad two days to reach his family.

Leaving Faruq in pursuit of the Americans had not been a difficult decision. *If someone took my son, I would have the same blood lust in my eyes*, he thought; *but my family needs me!* Asad knew the aftermath of the earthquake would be more terrible than the actual tremors. The basic requirements of life would become difficult. Food, shelter, and water would be in short supply or non-existent. Disease would follow. He chose to try to save his village and his family. It was not a decision he regretted, especially when he heard the outcome. The Americans had survived, and Faruq had not.

Asad's wife and children, whom he had only seen briefly since returning from America, were in Nablus, one of the towns most heavily damaged by the earthquake. With most of the population of central Palestine living outside or on the move to loved ones and safer confines, it had taken Asad twice as long to reach his home.

The fallen walls, collapsed roofs, and toppled second-story-floors covered the shallow valleys and gentle hillsides of the village. Even the city's most famous structure, an-Nasr Mosque, was a crumpled pile of stones. It would require complete reconstruction. A life of survival at its most basic level followed in the days after the earthquake. Living, sleeping, and cooking were only possible in the streets. Families and friends dug out the remains of their loved ones and whatever possessions they could find; their emotions ravaged by deprivation, death, and despair.

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<sup>1</sup> As noted in the Forward to *The Synagogue Savant*, the July 11 earthquake actually occurred in 1927. The author has used artistic license to move the event to 1910.

Asad found his family, but their home was a pile of debris. As he approached her, Lamya, his wife, was nearly unrecognizable. Her name meant “soft to the touch;” but coated in dust and debris from helping a neighbor dig her mother’s body from the rubble of their destroyed home, she was gritty rather than soft; nevertheless, Asad hugged his wife, an uncustomary display of public affection in Arabia.

His son, Usama, stood beside his mother nearly unrecognizable through the thick dust coating him. The boy’s name, which was the description of a lion’s characteristics, was a word play on the father’s name, which meant *lion*.

Brave and fierce, the young man had saved at least two villagers by rescuing them from collapsing buildings. Crisis had brought out the qualities in him that would portend the next generation of jihadists. His mother was very proud of her son, and told the stories of him risking his life repeatedly to whoever would listen. Now, here in the middle of the street, the words of his deeds spilled out of her as she reported zealously to her husband all that Usama had done during the last two days. The father swelled with pride and kissed the boy’s dirty cheeks.

“You are Usama, son of Asad,” he shouted for all to hear. “From today forward you will be a warrior in The Brotherhood. You shall do great deeds for The Prophet. Allahu Akbar!”

Surrounded by the dire putrescence of the earthquake’s aftermath, Asad’s declaration before the witnesses standing in the street was an emotional and heartfelt covenant. It meant the boy was no longer his; pledged to The Brotherhood, Usama would experience a jihadist’s fate. The boy would grow to become a man filled with violence and hate. Usama was eight days short of his twelfth birthday.

As the days and months passed, father and son worked side-by-side to clear the rubble and rebuild their home. Together they helped their neighbors reconstruct their lives, as well. The tiring labor and long summer hours toughened Usama’s body and his spirit. Each night the boy dreamt of the great deeds of valor he would achieve in jihad and of his reward in Paradise.

Each day the boy asked his father, “*Baba*, when may I start the training of The Brotherhood?”

Each day the father replied, “We must restore what the earthquake has taken from us first.”

The mosque had been destroyed, but the community worked together to construct a place of worship; and father and son contributed their time and talents. Worshipping and laboring side-by-side, the two grew closer day by day.

Both their home and the temporary mosque had a tightly sealed roof in time for the rainy season, a period that runs from October to May in Palestine. Asad’s

contributions to the restoration of the local *madrasas* had also assured Usama a seat when the school resumed with the first winter storms.

In class, the boy dutifully drilled the recitations of the Qur'an; but he had not forgotten his father's promise to dedicate him to the service of The Brotherhood of the Jihad. Neither did the father. The following summer Usama kissed his mother goodbye and left for Haifa to train under the tutelage of Imam Abu Yusuf. For the next two and half years, the boy's physical body, emotional state, and innate abilities received every stress and training his teachers could devise. He became a triple threat; his physical prowess trained to use every weapon available for one result—death to the enemies of Islam; his mindset shaped to make him willing to sacrifice everything—the reward martyrdom; and his intellect expanded to give him the skills to operate in the modern world for one reason—the holy war of jihad.

Almost sixteen now, his family was The Brotherhood; his response to every stimuli measured by the organization's need and command. Even with all the indoctrination, a distraction came—the thirteen-year-old daughter of his weapons instructor.

Her name was Leena and a white *hijab* covered her from head-to-toe. He was certain she was beautiful, however. Her dark, sparkling eyes entranced him.

The white clothing modestly covering her was a sign that she had entered womanhood. Every young man knew the custom. When a girl experienced her first cycle, her mother took her to purchase her first white *hijab*. The familiar proverb said: *The girl enters the hijab shop and a woman exits.*

With womanhood established, Usama knew it would not be long before she would be married. At thirteen, Leena was late; he knew families with married women as young as nine. The thought of her possible betrothal to an older man brought bile to the back of his throat. Leena's name meant 'tenderness,' and having her tender charms in the arms of a grizzled old warrior was not something he could accept.

Only heroic deeds and victories in battle would establish him as a man worthy of a prize like the young Leena; but he knew he would achieve such greatness. He was ready; he was willing. When the opportunity arrived, he would seize it. Since he was ten, he had dreamed of valor. Since he was twelve, he had been training. On his sixteenth birthday, the imams gave him his first assignment.

"Meet me two hours before sunrise," his captain had told him; but he gave no other details.

Usama barely slept.

\* \* \* \*

**Tel Aviv, Palestine, Ottoman Empire – March 23, 1917**

The mission the boy was assigned was a common one. Since the start of the Great War, Palestinian raids on Jewish settlements and kibbutzim were nearly nightly. Over the previous thirty years, Jewish families and groups seeking to escape persecution in Russia, Lithuania, and other destinations of the *Diaspora* fled to the Promised Land, only to find hardship, disease, and most often, failure.

The forced displacement of the Jews from their homeland had occurred several times during history, most recently in 70 CE, when the Romans destroyed the Second Temple and wiped out a Jewish rebellion. Rome's victors imposed harsh punishments, including banning Jews from living in the land of Israel and dispersing them throughout the known world. Because of the *Diaspora*, the Jews had spent centuries hoping to return to the Promised Land. The Jewish ritual at the conclusion of the celebration of the Passover Seder recorded that dream—*Le-shanah ha-ba-a b'Yerushalayim—Next year in Jerusalem*.

Usama was born into a historical and cultural quarrel beyond his comprehension; but he understood that the usurpers were threatening to take away his family's land. The Hebrew men, women, and children, whose lives he and his comrades were about to change, had struggled to drain the malarial swamps, plow the infertile fields, and grow the crops to sustain their families. Most had purchased the land they wrested a living from; but by the time of the boy's dedication to The Brotherhood in nineteen-ten, Zionism had begun to strain the boundaries and blur the lines separating the conflicting communities. Periodically, during his years of training, the jihadists from various groups had attacked Jewish settlements, killing inhabitants, stealing their meager assets, and destroying any sense of security.

In defense of their communities, a Jewish militia, *Ha-Shomer*, formed. The original forty members blended into the cultural environment, and tried to protect their Jewish friends. They spoke Arabic, wore Arab robes and Circassian dress, carried modern firearms, and rode their horses like the wind; and they trained their peers in self-defense. The immigrants knew the bloody history and they anticipated an even bloodier future. Their motto was *by blood and fire, Judea fell; by blood and fire, it will arise*.

In nineteen-fourteen, when the Central powers of Austria-Hungary, Germany, and the Ottoman Empire and the Allied powers of Britain, France, and Russia began to shape the events leading to the Great War, the ancient land of Israel was once more caught in the crosshairs of competing powers. Age-old religious and cultural conflicts bubbled up, fueling the violence that preceded the

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organized armies' arrival three years later. Usama was about to be a part of one more of these explosions of violence against an immigrant community. On the morning of the Arab attack, however, two diplomats thousands of miles away would make an agreement for their respective governments that would affect the Arab boy in ways he could not imagine.

\* \* \* \*

The moon was nearly full, but the dark shadows of young citrus trees hid them as they huddled outside the perimeter of the kibbutz. The boy checked his weapon for the tenth time, his training so complete that he could dismantle his Russian Beutegewehr Moisin-Nagants rifle and reassemble it perfectly in the dark. The rifles had been captured from the Russians by the Turks, who in turn sent them south in preparation for the British advance in North Africa.

"You stay with Ali. Do what he does," the captain whispered to the young man. "You'll do fine."

Ali grinned at him in the dark, his teeth almost phosphorescent from the reflected moonlight; and then motioned his young charge to follow him. Running low, they reached the rock wall encircling the compound. Crouching behind the stones, they listened for the guard's footsteps crunching on the stony path. They did not wait long. Earlier, spies had timed the guard's circular routine, and he had not broken the pattern during his last circuit around the complex.

Usama and his friend had practiced taking down a sentry many times in training camp; but this was a real target, and Usama was nervous. Ali started to get into position to jump the man; but Usama put his hand on the man's shoulder, handed him his rifle, and took the eighteen-inch length of pipe.

The *take down* was efficient. The guard never saw Usama and never uttered a sound. Despite the large lump on his head, he would recover. The attack's goals were not the slaughter of the residents, but rather the destruction of their harvest. The Valencia orange ripened between March and June. The members of the kibbutz carefully picked each orange, washed them, wrapped each individually in a thin tissue paper, and packed them in wooden crates for markets in Europe. It was a valuable crop and the lifeblood of the community. Days short of celebrating the completion of the harvest, the ready-for-shipment crates sat stacked in long, tall rows under the tin roof of the warehouse waiting transport to the wharf. The success or failure of the commune depended on the fruit reaching its destination.

The dozen jihad warriors chosen for the citrus packing plant attack climbed over the wall carrying cans of coal oil with them. Moving quickly, they converged

on the packing plant and spread the flammable liquid throughout the crates stacked over their heads. In less than ninety seconds, the odor of the oil began to drift across the plaza of the compound. Ten of the men escaped, retracing their steps to retreat to safety beyond the wall, leaving Usama and Ali to complete the raid.

Usama had the honor of igniting the flames. As Ali held his rifle, the boy struck a match to fire the end of a torch. Racing back through the warehouse, he touched the flaming stick to puddles of oil, one after the other, until the entire building was an inferno of thick smoke and heat.

In moments, the community's occupants sounded the alarm and began to run toward the conflagration with their weapons. Shots rang out and the raiders hiding behind the wall returned the defender's fire.

Grabbing his rifle from Ali, the two young men dashed across the courtyard with Usama in the lead. The young sixteen-year-old boy was fast; and as Usama ran, he heard the shot that killed the slower Ali. He heard the man's grunt when the bullet slammed into his lower back. He heard his comrade's body skid across the rocky ground. Even running with the wind, he could hear those things, but he never looked back. He never saw the damage to the warehouse and the oranges. He never saw the children's hunger, because of the destruction of their livelihood. He never saw Ali's lifeless eyes, as he lay twisted grotesquely in the rocky dust. Usama never saw those things because he was fast, and lucky, and because he chose not to look.

He jumped the wall, and ran to join the others escaping into the night. The sweet stench of oranges blanketed the area. As he ran, the increasing distance from the kibbutz muffled the screaming and crying from the immigrants as they watched their income burn.

The Brotherhood of the Jihad's leaders declared the raid a success. They praised the young arsonist; his advancement insured, with new and more dangerous assignments a certainty.

\* \* \* \*

In London, thousands of miles away, two diplomats watched as eighteen months of work came to fruition with the official exchange of the correspondence they had worked on.

On paper, it was easy. The British Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey's correspondence to Paul Cambon, the French Ambassador to Great Britain, and Cambon's reply sealed the deal. The real work during the previous two years of negotiations, however, came from Sir Mark Sykes, a Member of Parliament and

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the assistant secretary to the British War Cabinet, and by Francois-Georges Picot, a French diplomat who served as consul general in Beirut.

The Sykes-Picot agreement anticipated the end of the war and the demise of the Ottoman Empire. With this agreement, the diplomats divided the spoils, giving each of the victors, Britain, France, and Russia, control of different zones within the Middle East. The agreement left Palestine to vague multi-national control, setting the table for future disputes and geo-political struggles.

Using color codes, the map formalized the areas of responsibility between the Allies and one additional area of Arab States under British or French *influence*; but not everyone was happy, including the Arab and Muslim groups. Promises made by others to the Arab chiefs, including those made by T. E. Lawrence, partitioned control differently and with less European influence. The agreement had the effect of rallying support for the Central forces of Germany and Turkey as war came to Palestine in 1917. Though the British would take control of Egypt and Bagdad by March 1917, the summer and fall would see war at its most vicious in Palestine, from Jaffa to Jerusalem to the Megiddo Valley. On December 9, 1917, Jerusalem would fall to the British General Allenby. By October 30, 1918, over six-hundred years of Ottoman rule would end with Turkey signing an armistice with the Allies, leaving the British in control of Palestine.

Arab confidence in the British lasted three days.

\* \* \* \*

Asad was very proud of Usama. On that March 1917 night, when he had torched the fruit harvest, the boy had lived up to his name by exhibiting the characteristics of the lion, fierce and unafraid. In the years prior to the Great War reaching the Holy Land, Asad and his son remained active in persecuting Jewish settlers.

The Ottoman Empire, though an Islamic authoritarian government, had over the last seven hundred years tolerated limited Jewish return to Palestine. While refusing to sell government property to Jews, they had allowed others to sell to groups organized for Jewish Zionism, including Baron Rothschild. Though antagonistic toward Jewish development, they carefully protected both the life and property of the Jewish community, even shutting down anti-Semitic newspapers.

In the first decade of the nineteen hundreds, seventy-five-thousand Russian, Romanian, Lithuanian, and German Jews had immigrated to Palestine. The Turks had tolerated this migration much to the frustration of The Brotherhood

and other Arab extremists. The jihadist's desire to have an independent homeland was in direct conflict with the goals of Zionism; and because of the Turk's complicity in Jewish relocation, however benign, the Ottoman Empire joined the British and Jews as a Palestinian Arab enemy. Since the beginning of the war in nineteen-fourteen, however, the Turks had begun increasingly to turn a blind eye toward Jewish persecution, allowing organizations like The Brotherhood of the Jihad to operate even more boldly.

By the summer and fall of nineteen-seventeen, The Brotherhood's attacks on the Zionist camps and villages occurred with the tacit approval of the Ottoman leaders who wanted improved relations with their Islamic brothers. All over Europe, Jewish leaders were pressing British and French political leaders for open support of the restoration of Israel as the homeland of the Jews. In retaliation, the angered Turks went so far as to expel the Jews living in Jaffa, Tel Aviv, and Jerusalem to thwart the growing nationalist movement.

As the Arab groups became emboldened, so did their deeds. With the increased violence, Jewish defense organizations, like the Jaffa Group<sup>2</sup> and *Ha-Shomer*, began to expand. Six hundred and fifty expelled Russian immigrants joined the Zion Mule Corps, most serving in the Gallipoli peninsula, and a spy ring known as NILI began to operate behind Turkish lines.<sup>3</sup>

Founded by the Aaronsohn family, and primarily operated by brother and sister, Aaron and Sarah Aaronsohn, NILI tried to assist the British by supplying sensitive information. Sarah Aaronsohn was captured, tortured for four days, and committed suicide with a small pistol. The last words she wrote were:

*"I haven't the strength to suffer anymore. The tortures are something terrible. Better for me to kill myself than to remain any longer in the hands of these beasts. They say they are going to send me to Damascus, and there they will certainly hang me. I have a small weapon. I don't want them to defile my body. It was terrible seeing my father suffer so. But no, we will not speak [reveal secrets]. In vain did they try all kinds of tortures on us. We do not speak. And remember them as heroes, those who died without informing on us."*

Aaron pledged to end Turkish rule and spent the rest of the war championing a Jewish state. He died tragically in a plane crash in nineteen-eighteen.

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<sup>2</sup> Jaffa Group was formed by Eliahu Golomb and Dov Hos, patriots of the Zionist movement.

<sup>3</sup> The name, NILI, was taken from the first four letters of a verse in Second Samuel: *Nezab Yisrael Lo Yeshakker* – The strength of Israel will not lie.



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Though their numbers had dwindled since the collapse of the cave in nineteen-ten, the Synagogue Savants continued to operate surreptitiously in the Jaffa and Jerusalem area. The sailmaker and his friends often provided information to the NILI.

\* \* \* \*

**Jerusalem, Palestine, Ottoman Empire – April 7, 1917**

Paul Ardsley, known to his friends and customers as the *Sailmaker*, was a Messianic Jew. Born a Jew, he accepted Christ along with his entire family as a youth. The family continued to practice their Judaic traditions, but with the recognition and in the context of Jesus as the Messiah. His shop and home were in Jaffa, but he had elected to celebrate the first day of Passover with his friends at the church in the Christian Quarter of Jerusalem. The church service was just beginning when they heard the boots.

The rhythmic stomp of thirty-five pairs of leather boots echoed on the stones of the ancient streets for sixty seconds before the platoon entered the courtyard and formed lines in front of the church. Regally dressed in the uniforms of the Turkish Army, the troops were colorful and intimidating. The lieutenant issued a command and the unit broke into pairs and surrounded the church. The officer and his sergeant, flanked by two guards with weapons at port-arms, entered the church and marched down the aisle. The standing congregation, interrupted in their singing, stood aghast as the government forces entered the sanctuary.

The Turkish officer unfurled a piece of paper and began to read. The words were so incredible, so inflammatory, and so unreasonable, that no one moved when the commander had finished his recitation. The officer waited for a response. There was none, the silence testimony to their shock.

The instructions required that all Jews in Jerusalem and Jaffa leave the land of Palestine. Refusal to go would mean death. Fifty-five thousand people fled their homes, their businesses, their history, with most going to Egypt or another British held territory.

Suddenly everyone spoke at once, his or her animation increasing by the minute. The Turkish officer began to fear that he and the handful of men in his detachment would be overwhelmed. He blew a whistle hanging around his neck. Instantly the remaining thirty soldiers stormed into the church, leveling their weapons on the men, women, and children in the pews.

The sailmaker realized the danger and began to shout for everyone to be quiet; his fear that the troops would overreact and open fire on the innocent

civilians was rapidly approaching reality. The sailmaker and his friends were unaware that the Ottomans made the same ultimatum at every synagogue and kibbutzim throughout the region.

With the British and their allies closing in on Palestine, the Ottoman Empire was desperate to eliminate any advantage the advancing Allied armies might have. With the fall of Baghdad to the British in early March, the NILI, Synagogue Savants, and other underground Jewish organizations had become more emboldened.

Only thirty miles south of Jerusalem, the British were beginning a second assault against Gaza. The German-led Ottomans repulsed the first attack. Fearing Jewish complicity with the British, the Turkish leadership issued the expulsion orders requiring Jews from the area surrounding Jaffa and Jerusalem to leave Palestine.

“How long do we have to leave?” the sailmaker asked the lieutenant when the crowd had finally calmed.

“You must move immediately,” the man replied.

Cries of lamentation from the women and shouts of protest from the men filled the chamber. Again, the nervous troops surrounding the congregation stiffened and gripped their weapons more tightly.

The sailmaker, now the *de facto* leader of the group, waved his arms for quiet.

“Where do you want us to go?” the sailmaker asked, bypassing the questions of the time involved in preparation to move.

The Muslim man’s thoughts were much cruder than his vocal response, “No one cares. You must leave Jerusalem and Palestine now. The Ottoman government will *not* provide you with transportation, food, shelter, or protection. You are on your own, but you must leave now.” No one missed the emphasis he placed on the negative.

“But we’re Christians,” the rabbinical head of the church protested. “Why are we being expelled?”

The Ottoman edict did not differentiate between Jewish sects.

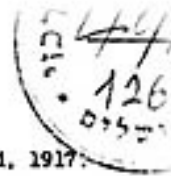
“You are Jews. My instructions are explicit. You must leave,” and with those words, the Turk motioned for his men to begin to herd the men, women and children from the building.

With heavy hearts, each family returned to their homes to collect what belongings they could carry. In the Jewish Quarter, the wailing of the soon-to-be homeless carried throughout the city. Over the next few days, soldiers began a house-to-house enforcement of the edict. The roads south toward Egypt filled with fleeing Jews.

In the vacuum that followed, Arabic groups, like The Brotherhood, moved in.

Foreign Office,

November 2nd, 1917.



Dear Lord Rothschild,

I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet.

"His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country"

I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

Y. v.  
Arthur Balfour

## Chapter Two

~

### Balfour's Declaration

**London, England – November 3, 1917**

Four men and one woman clustered around a stained table in a shabby hotel room. All were trying to speak at once, waving copies of a letter through the smoky air to gain attention. To punctuate their excitement, their free hands alternated between hoisting their glasses to thirsty lips and slapping the table; the enthusiastic blows bounced overflowing ashtrays filled with charred ashen tobacco and splashed drinks. Their smiles and laughter became broader and louder and their Russian words more indistinguishable with each slug from the vodka bottle. Only the woman exercised any restraint at all, conscious of the effect of booze and familiarity.

The group represented the new leadership of the *Am Ha-Aron*, translated *The People of the Ark*, a militant Jewish Zionist organization founded originally in Eastern Europe and determined to return the ancient land of Israel to the Chosen People of the Exodus. Many of the original militants were killed in an earthquake in Jerusalem in 1910 trying to regain control of a re-creation of the Ark of the Covenant that they believed would give them a spiritual power. Now their excitement was about a piece of paper that would give them political power. The letter read:

*Foreign Office  
November 2nd, 1917*

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*The Brotherhood of the Jihad*

*and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country."*

*I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.*

*Yours sincerely,*

*Arthur James Balfour*

For the first time in fourteen hundred years, the right to establish a Jewish State in the historical land of Israel was a reality. Although only a toehold, the letter would act like gasoline on a fire, spreading hope and encouragement to Jews scattered across the globe. Immigration would begin in earnest. The men and woman in the London smoke-filled room would see to it.

In their homelands of Northern Poland and Eastern Russia, the persecution of Jews was a miasma in early nineteen-seventeen. Ultimately, an outbreak of anti-Jewish violence after the war led to mass murder and economic enslavement throughout the region. The new Communist rulers slaughtered over one-hundred-thousand Jewish men, women, and children in the Ukraine in the immediate aftermath of the *war to end all wars*.

It had been seven years since the disaster in Jerusalem, but the People of the Ark were on the rise again. Mobilized to assist in immigration to *Eretz Yisroel*, the Hebrew for *Promised Land*, the organization were also dedicated to the land's defense. For every dollar, franc, or rupee spent to relocate a compatriot, the group spent two for the purchase of weapons. Stockpiles of military supplies were growing. Though their appeals to donors were for the liberation and resettlement of the most punished minority in Eastern Europe, the majority of their expenditures were for military supplies. These purchases were a carefully concealed, well-kept secret.

Under British control of Palestine, getting the weapons into the country would become one of Am Ha-Aron's most difficult challenges. They would eventually adopt the tactics of other groups, like the *Haganah*. Every appliance, farm implement, or piece of construction equipment unloaded at a port along the coast became a hiding place for the armaments they needed.

\* \* \* \*

**Kiev, Russia—February 5, 1912**

Lesya Valanoshova, Vilna's wife, was not satisfied with the explanation of her husband's disappearance. He vanished during the nineteen-ten earthquake in Jerusalem; but her questions about his work and why it had taken him to America and then to Palestine went unanswered by the remnant of men with whom he had worked. She was not alone in her quest to justify her mate's death. The entire group of men that had left on that winter morning was dead, leaving each of their loved ones seeking answers.

Lesya was the most vocal spouse and a stubborn woman with a God-given ability to organize. After months and months of frustration, the leader of the *Am Ha-Aron*, translated People of the Ark, became aware of the fact that her questions were drawing attention to the group. He also realized that her talents could be of use to them.

Jacob Rosen had been one of Am Ha-Aron's founders. It was his place to explain to the woman what happened. For over a year, he dealt with the guilt of sending so many men to their death. That regret clouded his judgment. Rather than try to re-establish the organization, he allowed it to go fallow, but eventually the need outstripped his fear.

*No more persecution*, he resolved. Calling the remaining members of the Am Ha-Aron together, he shared with them his decision to talk with the woman and perhaps recruit her if she proved worthy. All were impressed with Lesya's drive, ambition, and ability to lead. The positive vote was unanimous.

Trudging through the snow-filled street of the Jewish Ghetto, the older man reached the home Vilna and Lesya had shared. She answered Rosen's knock on the black door across from the café almost immediately. His earlier request for an audience with her convinced the Russian Jewess that she had been right all along; her husband had been involved in something much more audacious than just raising money for Jewish causes. While she had heard rumors of Jacob Rosen's involvement in the Zionist movement, her husband had never mentioned him. She was certain that the group's leader was going to confirm what she already suspected.

Their meeting began awkwardly, a palaver of banality. Finally, after small talk about the cold weather and the courtesy of coffee offered and served, they sat and the older man began. Jacob had not come to apologize for Vilna's death, but he felt compelled to defend his actions and give her some background.

"Lesya, Vilna was a leader in our movement. He and Yegor were trying to locate a golden ark created by a Russian rabbi who had immigrated to America. The ark was considered to be so accurate in its detail that many believed it to be

*The Brotherhood of the Jihad*

God's work, the result of his spirit descending on the old rabbi like the blessing Bezalel received," Rosen explained.

She was familiar with his reference to the Torah:

*The Torah—Shemot—Chapter 31*

*And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying: 'See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; and I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to devise skilful works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in cutting of stones for setting, and in carving of wood, to work in all manner of workmanship.'*

"And what were you going to do with this ark?" she asked.

"It was our prayer that the ark would reside in the new temple when it is built in Jerusalem. The ark as you know was also an implement of war, weakening the walls of Jericho and driving out the enemies of God," he explained. "We believed if we could recover the ark it would give us great power in conquering the land that belonged to our forefathers."

"I noticed you used the past tense," she observed.

"Well, our faith in the restoration of the temple and its elements has not wavered, but only the ark created by Bezalel will empower our people. The recreation by the Georgia rabbi has no power," he explained.

"So you have stopped trying to find it?" she asked.

"No, not exactly," he knew the hesitation in his voice peaked her curiosity; and so before she could ask, he continued. "You must not share what I am about to tell you with anyone. Do you agree?"

"Would I be here if I didn't, of course, yes," she replied.

Jacob's story began with the mission he had assigned to Yegor and Vilna. He suppressed his guilt and continued trying to justify the men's deaths. Lesya listened carefully.

The description of the events from Georgia to Jerusalem took an hour. Lesya only interrupted the older man with questions about the American woman; Sarah's role in the affair seemed of particular interest to her. Jacob knew from Yegor's last report that they had located the cave where the ark resided. It was assumed since they were never heard from again, they had died in the earthquake; but he had no idea where or how.

The only additional information Jacob had was intelligence about a battle between the Synagogue Savants and The Brotherhood of the Jihad a few days later. He also had learned that Wilbur and Sarah had married and returned to America. No one had seen or heard of the golden ark since the earthquake and the disappearance of the Am Ha-Ron agents.

“I’m sorry we don’t know what happened to your husband,” Jacob said sincerely in conclusion, his head hanging in sorrow.

“I know exactly where he is,” she replied, her statement said with such confidence that Jacob snapped his bowed head up to look her in the eye.

In response to his questioning look, she continued. “He found the ark and was trapped in that cave. I know it. If we find the cave, we’ll find him.”

The old leader thought her response emotional and irrational. Doubting his original impression that she was Am Ha-Aron agent material, he nodded agreement. “Perhaps,” he said. Thinking this was a good segue to leave, he started to rise.

“Sit down,” the woman commanded, and he indulged her. “I want to be one of your agents. I want you to train me as you trained my husband; and before you throw my sex in my face, just think how effective a female agent could be.

“When I’m trained, you’re going to send me to Jerusalem. I’ll find the cavern, the ark, and my husband. When I have, you’ll arrange to have him buried with honor near the eastern wall of the city; and then you’ll melt the ark down for the gold; and you’ll buy the weapons we need to carry on the fight to retake our homeland.”

Jacob sat quietly when the woman was done with her diatribe. With eyes locked together, the old Zionist and the younger woman sat silently and waited for the other to yield. The old man’s concern that he might send husband and wife to their deaths equaled the young woman’s determination to complete her spouse’s goal, an honor she was convinced he deserved. The snow outside deadened the sounds of the city, only the cuckoo clock on the wall ticked loudly. Jacob remembered hearing Vilna talk of his wife’s iron will. In retrospect, he recalled the man speaking of it with pride; now, he understood why.

“OK,” the old leader said wearily. “But you must understand that what you are asking is very dangerous. You could be killed, or worse you could be captured, tortured, even raped. Our enemies will have no hesitation in creating a living hell on earth for you.” He wanted to go on and make the possibilities sound even worse, but he ran out of words.

“I understand, but that doesn’t matter. I am committed to pick up the banner my husband has been forced to lie down. When may I begin my training?”

Lesya was a handsome woman, Jacob realized, as he stared at the Am Ha-Aron’s newest recruit. She would certainly have abilities that none of the male agents had. He hoped he had made the right decision.

\* \* \* \*



**London, England – November 4, 1917**

The morning after the celebration in the London hotel room, Lesya prepared to leave for Egypt. Their agents in the region communicated that the British were preparing to make a strong push for Jerusalem. “General Allenby’s goal,” they said, “was to present Jerusalem to British Prime Minister David Lloyd George as a Christmas present.”

If the British did recapture the old city, Lesya wanted to be there so that she could pick up her search for the Vilna’s remains and the lost ark. She had spent the last five years of her life rising through the ranks of the Am Ha-Aron, first in training, then menial jobs and fund-raising, then simple assignments of increasing risk. Finally, just before the Ottomans expelled the Jews, she received permission to go to Jerusalem to begin her search. On the thirteenth day of her quest, the Turks forced her to run for the Egyptian border along with tens of thousands of others. When reassigned to London, she had used every persuasive technique in her repertoire to push the Zionist’s agenda, including her womanly charms. While not directly responsible for Balfour’s recent letter to Lord Rothschild, her influence combined with that of thousands of others had convinced the British government to step out and support the cause for a Jewish homeland. Now, public support was with them. Most of her peers felt it would not hold up for long.

Jacob trusted her completely and insisted that it was time to break down the barriers in the all-male society. Her work in London had won over the last male chauvinist holdout. Being able to hold her liquor had been a plus also.

Leaving London, her trip through the Mediterranean was uneventful; but with her arrival in Port Said, Egypt, she found herself surrounded by a cacophony of sounds and colors and military preparations for war. The build-up of men and material for a final push into the heart of Palestine crowded the port. Ships from around the world flew flags from Britain, the United States, and other friendly countries. Canon, trucks, horses, and crates carrying every form of lethiferous hardware crowded the docks. Thousands of men hauled, pushed, paraded, and loaded the supplies. Lesya walked the length of the wharf ignoring the stevedores’, sailors’ and soldiers’ admiring glances. As a Russian homemaker, she had never considered herself attractive; but with the help of London and Paris boutiques in the last few years, she had learned how to make every feminine asset work for her. Leaving the ship, she dressed in the fashionable attire of a cosmopolitan European woman. Shipmates shushed their friends silencing the seafarers’ curses and course words as the young woman passed. A stray wolf-whistle left the shoulder of the one unlucky *lip-puckerer* bruised by a friend. Her appearance and the respect for her womanhood were not the only

causes for this honor there was something about the way she carried herself, a confidence, a certainty, a commitment.

Two men waited at the end of the dock. Both were dressed in military uniforms, their only weapons 1914-frame pistols strapped into leather holsters at their side.

Their insignia identified them as officers in the 38<sup>th</sup> Royal Fusiliers. This military unit consisted of entirely Jewish volunteers, some from the original Zion Mule Corp that had served so well throughout North Africa during the early years of the war. The 38<sup>th</sup> through 42<sup>nd</sup> Corps of the Royal Fusiliers made up the Jewish Legion and enlisted Jews from around the world, including many deportees the Ottoman Empire had expelled in the previous year.

“Roger! Horace!” Lesya hurried forward and gave the two men an enthusiastic hug. “It’s been too long since I’ve seen you. I’m so glad you got my cable. I didn’t know if your commander would release you to meet me or not,” she said happily and hugged them once more. The two Jewish men, acting like schoolboys, responded with just as much energy; but then stepped back aware that their uniforms demanded more decorum and formality in the foreign setting of the busy port. The Arabic workers loading grain sacks into a nearby truck and grinning childish smirks at them confirmed that they had already stepped over the line. Lesya recognized their discomfiture. “Do you have a car?” she asked.

“Yes, this way please,” one of the men said, grabbing the opportunity to extricate themselves from their military faux pas.

Weaving their way through the men and cargo that seemed to be moving in random directions and always in their path, the trio eventually arrived at a Rolls Royce Armoured Car parked against a warehouse. The gun mounts were empty; the killing machine’s weapons obviously stored in the 38<sup>th</sup> Royal Fusiliers armory. The heavy vehicle encased in steel, weighed over four tons and normally carried a crew of three, two in the gun turret and one driver. Lesya started to laugh when she saw the imposing war machine. Suddenly the men realized it was going to be difficult for her to board the car with lady-like grace; and she was going to be quite conspicuous sitting in the gun turret with one of the men as they made their way through town.

Lesya stepped to the rear of the vehicle, used one hand to control her skirt, and waited with the other gloved hand outstretched for help to mount the high step that would allow her to clamber into the turret. The men, however, were still standing on the side of the vehicle pondering a solution. Leaning out, she peeked around the vehicle and said, “Let’s go, boys,” causing them to nearly snap their necks from their acceleration to get to the rear of the car to help her.

The young woman made it into the gunner’s seat practically on her own. The two men were at their most awkward as she clambered above them. They

were unsure where to put their hands to help her, and they stood helplessly aside. Laughing she waved to them to get her suitcases and climb in. Her companions sprang into action, and the group was underway in a matter of minutes.

“Where would you like to go?” Roger asked.

She laughed, “Jerusalem.”

“Well, the front line is only thirty miles away from the old city, but the fighting is tough. We may take them any day now,” Horace boasted from the driver’s seat. “Would you like to drink to their success?” he asked and pulled a bottle of contraband vodka from an ammunition box.

“Then it’s off to Gaza!” she shouted as she grabbed the bottle. Standing up in the turret, she pulled the cork and leaned far back until the bottle was vertical above her lips, air bubbles rising through the glass. Finally breaking the seal between the mouth of the fifth and her own, she shouted for Horace to go; and he did with her hanging on to the armor, the streets of the portside city roaring by. Like intoxicated teenagers, the two men and the woman sped through the fertile countryside, crossing the delta tributaries of the Nile, sometimes weaving across the road as they sang and shouted, avoiding donkey carts, and frightening the occasional oncoming traffic. As the late afternoon light began to fade, they neared the Palestinian border. Roger told Horace to stop. The armored military vehicle coasted to a stop on the shoulder of the road.

Shaking himself sober, he said, “We’re going to have to go through a checkpoint up here. You need to be careful what you say.”

“Yes, I know,” she said and handed the bottle to Horace, who finished off the last swallow and flung it into rocky terrain.

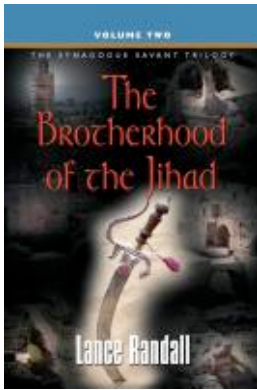
After the wild ride in the open, the dust coated her face; and it soiled her kerchief when she wiped her face. Her clothes spewed small clouds when she slapped the fabric with her hands, and her hair had aged from its normal dark black to a dusty grey. After making herself as presentable as possible, the trio approached the checkpoint. The British enlisted guards came to attention when they recognized the rank of the junior officers and gave them directions to General Shea’s headquarters. The hour travel time to HQ helped them to sober up. Upon arrival, a young private escorted Lesya to the commander of the watch.

“How may I help you?” the young captain asked, there was something about her that made him believe the woman was of more import than her disheveled appearance would indicate.

*Lance Randall*

“I want to speak to Paul Ardsley. You may know him as the sailmaker,” she replied.

Her words confirmed the officer’s suspicions.



*Caught in the crossfire of three extremist groups vying for control of Palestine, three couples struggle to protect family, friends, and faith. The Zionist movement in 1921 is resisted by Arabs, driven by Jewish hardliners, and supported by Christian groups under the influence of the British. An aging, world-traveled shipping line owner, a Georgia entrepreneur, and a professional spy face old foes and new challenges in an emotional struggle of cruelty, deception, and triumphant love.*

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