

GARY GABELHOUSE

THE
THIRD
TEMPLE

A GABE TURPIN NOVEL



In Ethiopia, anthropologist Gabe Turpin is pressed into service by a society of modern Knights Templar to find the Ark of the Covenant. The society wants to rebuild the Temple of Solomon, and harness its power to transform the human spirit. Turpin and the modern Templars enter a deadly race against a secret cabal that also wishes to possess the Ark's power, and unleash an apocalyptic final solution in the Middle East.

The Third Temple

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GARY GABELHOUSE

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Prologue

Thebes, Egypt 1462 BCE

Pharaoh Akhenaten watched the High Priest of Ra and his attendants, as they conducted the ancient ceremony within the King's Chamber carved deep within the great pyramid. Every symbolic action found its place and formed a more-sacred ceremony within the chamber. The wonderful *Bari*—a gilded, rectangular reliquary, was slightly over two cubits long and less than two cubits deep and across—beckoned the Pharaoh. The *Bari*—a holy reliquary for a God, was decorated with winged, sphinx statuary, and shone golden in the candlelight as the fog and clouds of the God cascaded out and onto the floor of the chambers. The priests of Ra carefully approached the *Bari*, knowing of its deadly potential as it also generated life and peace that was the will of the God. The priests wore the protective cowls and robes as they sought the presence and witness of God. The priestly contingent had been partaking of the food of the God—the manna whose ingestion made all attending the cask as brothers and full of the divine light.

Throughout the years Akhenaten had been schooled in the arts of the priests. He knew the signs of power, the numerology of the divine, and the rules of sacred geometry. The *Testimony of the Gods* were within his understanding, and he was comfortable within the arcane worlds of Egypt's cosmology. However, the priests were always guardians of the secret ways, and prohibited his complete entry into the final mysteries—despite he was Pharaoh. He longed to sit in the throne seat of the great pyramid in the presence of God, Aten. Somehow he knew that such an experience would magnify his will and intent ten thousand fold.

The Pharaoh had laid intricate plans—and for months now, studied the routines of the priests of Ra. His purpose was singular and focused: to possess the *Bari* containing the

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God—for he was certain it was the earthly home of the one God, Aten. He felt it was his destiny to rescue this earthly home of God from the spiritually greedy priests of Ra. It had been months now since he had first looked upon the light of the God's face—the light of the *Bari*. It had lured him—taunted him, and merely being in the presence of the *Bari* gave him a feeling of contented bliss. A peace flooded through him whenever he was *touched* by the clouds of the God. The first experience those months ago had been so life changing that the Pharaoh now risked all to possess the experience forever, and for himself—to have the home of God for all time.

The Pharaoh crept closer to the band of priests as the dry, cold air of the chamber drew goose flesh on his arms. His sword drawn, the King of Egypt arranged his mind into an empty and calm place—a softly silent place—as he beheaded the priests. The goggling eyes of the priests shuttered open, wide—as surprised looks came over the faces on the heads that rolled across the sandy soil of the King's Chamber—still alive in part, though dismembered from their life force. The head of the High Priest of Ra, disembodied, lie at the feet of the Pharaoh, and instinctually spat sand from its mouth as a last act of life.

Akhenaten wielded his sword with abandon as priests fell amidst the gathering clouds of the *Bari*. Suddenly, and in an eerie and lonely silence, the Pharaoh finally found himself alone with the *Bari*, out of which was billowing the vapor and mist of God over his feet.

Akhenaten's bronze blade found no more necks to cleave. In the gloom of the King's Chamber of the pyramid, the young Pharaoh again focused on the *Bari*. It now appeared to be a cascade of living liquid with form—as it crept up the walls of the chamber. Then, a spider web of blinding light began to emanate from between the wings of the sphinxes perched atop the *holy reliquary*. Arcs of blue-white light began to dance within the wings and veritably entered Akhenaten's eyes, nose, mouth and ears. The

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Pharaoh was flooded with the light of God and fell to his knees as he wept at seeing his deadly handiwork. Rather than priests lying bloody on the floor of the chamber, Akhenaten saw the slaughtered bodies of his son, Tutankhaten as well as his six daughters. Grief flooded him and he kneeled down, as his resolve to possess the *Bari* of God waned and became only a dull ache. But then, a tremendous peace and bliss entered the Pharaoh, seemingly washing away his sins in the chamber deep within the pyramid.

Levi, Akhenaten's adopted father, patiently waited for the Pharaoh's sign. In the cool of the desert evening, Levi talked in low tones with the men of Goshen. As fellow Israelites, they had all come to help Akhenaten rescue the earthly home of the one God, Aten and remove it from the possession of the Priests of Ra. Nighthawks flew over the stands of papyrus that, in turn, issued tickling sounds as water crept through the green stalks. The scent of charcoal fires mixed with the smell of the great river in the night. A sliver of a moon, which nearly framed a bright star, rose above the palms as Levi saw Akhenaten stumble from the chamber of the pyramid.

The Pharaoh seemed to be in a trance—sleep walking as he shakily walked toward the Israelites of Goshen in the watery light of the moon. Laconic, the King of Egypt offered a disjointed statement to Levi.

"My father, the home of God on earth—the *Bari* is ready to be freed. Take care to wear the robes and cowls of the priests as the holy cask is still...very dangerous to mere men. God can yet smite those without faith or knowledge."

"I understand, my son," said the elderly Israelite. "We are anxious to rescue the home of the one God on earth from these blasphemous worshipers of false gods. We revel in knowing we take Aten and His earthly home with us tonight."

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Within the close confines of the Kings Chamber, the men of Goshen, draped in the ceremonial garb of the priests, ran the long, wooden poles through the loops of gold fashioned on the side of the *Bari*. They lifted the cask and its God and spirited it out of the pyramid and into the cool air of the desert night. A loyal contingent of Akhenaten's personal bodyguards provided escort out of the old city for their Pharaoh and the Israelites along with their holy treasure. The unlikely group marched to the East toward the unknown vastness of the desert of the Sinai. On the outskirts of Thebes, walking in hushed silence and using only the light of the moon to navigate by, the group was suddenly challenged by a guard detachment of the Priesthood of Ra. There was no avoiding the large contingent and both parties stopped, as the flames of the torches of the priests' guard detachment whipped in the gathering wind.

"Proclaim your station and intention," issued a menacing voice in the dark of night.

"We are the royal guards of the Pharaoh, Akhenaten!" cried out Levi, speaking for the soldiers who he thought were probably dullards. Also, Levi did not want to betray the fact that the Pharaoh was among them.

"We have arrest warrants for the Pharaoh, for he blasphemes our Gods—warrants issued from the priests of Ra and Amun," cried out the voice in the dark. "The Pharaoh cannot be far from his royal guards. If the blasphemer is in your party, he is advised to surrender to avoid violence."

With only a nod from the Pharaoh, the bodyguard contingent was released like a raptor from the falconer's glove. The clash of armor rent the quiet of evening as the bodyguard troops of the Pharaoh, outnumbered three to one, grimly lay down their adversaries into the sand—like stalks of wheat reaped by a terrible sickle. It was quiet again with the exception of the moans of a wounded soldier which were quieted with a sword thrust. The all-too familiar

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smell of blood, mixed with the dry scent of the desert air. Levi, walking briskly beside the bearers of the *Bari* said to his godson, "You will now be called by the name of *Mosis*—for you are one who was born to be the Pharaoh—the King of Egypt to bring the one God to the idolaters."

Free from priestly claim, the *Bari*—the home of God—born by the Israelites, was carried into the desert in the wake of dead Egyptians.

Qumran Caves -28 CE

Yeshua, resplendent in his white robe was covered in the clouds of vapor that issued from the Ark. The mist clung to Yeshua's beard and long, dark hair, worn in the manner of the Nazarenes. The Northern Essene ascetic smiled broadly, reveling in the cleanliness of being bathed by the strange Brother of the Qumran community and now, being bathed in the light of God. The *Shekinah*—the veritable face of God was a white web of light and leapt from the arching wings of the Cherubim, and entered Yeshua's body like a white-hot dove on the wing. In the holy cave and after having fasted and prayed to God directly in His presence, the Essene priest was transformed. Yeshua sat before the Ark, the tears of joy running down his olive cheeks into his dark beard as he spiritually shuddered at the power of his...*sanctification*.

The next day and upon exiting the holy cave that held the face of God, the ascetic Essene was greeted by the strange brother of the Qumran community.

"Yeshua, my brother," said the one called John—the Essene of Qumran who wore a camel-hair coat and was motley and unshaven. "You have the light of God in your eyes! Yea, my brother—you are one of those for whom I have waited and prayed. I am a voice crying out in the desert wilderness, and I prepare the way for the coming of the Messiahs, prepare my brethren to meet the Sons of the Lord!"

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Yeshua smiled, with the glow of sanctification warm in his belly. He walked to the Essene named John and it seemed as if his feet barely touched the bedrock of Qumran. He placed his hand on John's forehead and closed his eyes.

Yeshua quietly said, "Just like Elijah of old, you prepare the way. Continue your work of cleaning the spirits of our brethren here in the South. Now, I go back to my Mt. Carmel and with wonderful purpose. I am full of the spirit of God and must teach the ways of God and heal those afflicted with evils. In the caves of Qumran I have looked into the very eyes of...God. His gaze has purified me in a holy fire. Farewell, my brother."

The Essene from the North with purpose and appearing as a bright, white light, walked down to the bed of the river. There, he found the foot paths that were colored a dark and shiny jasper, from having been packed smooth by the feet of the Essene adepts over the centuries. The river flowed dark against the papyrus along the banks, and Yeshua could smell the wood fires burning in the gathering dark of evening. A night heron cried as it glided low over the water.

Deep in the holy cave of Qumran, another adept, clothed in the white linen of the Essenes took up his fast and prayers in front of the Ark. Soon, the vapors of the Ark ran down from the altar on which it was placed. The air started to glow between the arched wings of the Cherubim and the adept shuddered in awe and wonder as the face of God manifested itself deep in the caves of Qumran.

Miles away from the holy caves, Yeshua continued to walk North into Judea as the moon rose over the River Jordan lighting the water with white fire.

CHAPTER ONE

Axum, Ethiopia

Gabe Turpin looked into the bloodshot eyes of the priest and knew he was getting nowhere. The Ethiopian priest had the eyes of the third world—tired, rheumy and shot with red. White stubble speckled his gaunt jowls and his traditional fez sat atop coarse, wooly and white hair. The priest spoke with a tickling, quiet voice, soothingly typical of Africa.

The priest patiently continued, “Doctor Turpin, you must re-apply for the permit in Addis. You cannot stay here. You may go back to your hotel—but your group must leave the compound.”

In Axum proper was a relatively large monastic compound that housed the churches and monasteries of the Ethiopian Christian Church. Most prominent within the compound was the old, 17th century cathedral, made of stone and dedicated by the line of Haile Selassie as the Saint Mary of Zion Church—home of ancient, Christian art and artifacts. Just outside of the church, Gabe argued with the growing group of Ethiopian priests.

Suddenly, Gabe stalked off, leaving the priests and his assistant, Ben Ashman, in the wake of his frustration. Rock doves cooed in the cooling air of the Ethiopian high country as night hawks cut lazy circles in the sky. The night was slowly draining the sky of its color.

Gabe Turpin resolutely walked to the Yeha hotel—the government-run hotel overlooking the ancient stellae of Axum. Turpin, a professor of cultural anthropology at the University of Nebraska, was a large man, both in spirit and frame. At six feet, four inches tall, and weighing in at a solid two-hundred, fifty pounds, the fifty-five year old anthropologist sported a new mustache hoping to draw attention away from his thinning hairline. Despite his advancing age, Turpin had an imposing presence that

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exuded energy and intent. Turpin remained fit, largely through his sessions of martial training in the dojo—as he trained and taught *Goju Ryu Karate* and *Daitoryu Aikijujitsu*.

Turpin specialized in the sometimes dark sides of cultural and religious ceremony and practice—often chasing legends and ghosts in far-off places. His cadre of graduate students sometimes referred to him as *Doctor X-Files*. Turpin had developed outside funding for this expedition to Axum—allegedly to study the similarities of the huge *stellae* or obelisks of Axum and those of the temple of Solomon and the *Needles of Cleopatra* in Egypt. The funding source of the expedition was provided by a Doctor Norman Ackerman—a Jewish physician practicing in New York City.

Months before, Gabe had been attending an Explorers Club lecture on the origins of the Ark of the Covenant when he was button-holed by the small and meticulous man. After an intense conversation and a final exchange of business cards, Gabe left the Club's atrium and walked out of the lobby, ostensibly with a quarter of a million dollar budget for a field expedition to Ethiopia.

Despite the expedition was outwardly funded to study *stellae* and obelisks, the *Sub Rosa* purpose was to prove or disprove the storyline of the Ark of the Covenant being housed in the Saint Mary of Zion Church in Axum, Ethiopia. What with the amazing no-excavation imaging technology currently in use by archeologists and anthropologists, Gabe could basically inspect the purported resting place of the Ark from some distance. With laser-driven analysis and even thermal-imaging technology, one no longer had to dig or excavate—the stone and dirt digitally turned transparent to the scientist.

Gabe and his team of graduate students had been trying to set up a Lasermetric system in the courtyard outside of the Saint Mary of Zion Church. Gabe had been responsible for developing the Lasermetric technology along with his chief techie at the university. Only Gabe's

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expeditions had access to the Lasermetric technology which was maybe two generations ahead of the technology held by the black-ops project tank in Maclean, Virginia.

Just as they had been hooking up the cables, a group of priests had hurriedly gathered around them making motions for them to leave. Gabe had shown them their permits which they skeptically studied, probably unable to read the mixture of Amharic and English.

The priests had studied the permits, squinting into the setting sun. The permits were certainly good and valid—Gabe was certain of that. Gabe had had Ben, his assistant, purchase five-hundred dollars worth of pornographic magazines before shipping out to Ethiopia. The common currency of porn always worked in the third world. Deprived of most things media, good old U.S. porn oiled the gears of third world bureaucracies even better than cash. Many times Gabe had watched an expedition landlocked and trapped in sheaves of maddening, third-world, triplicate forms, waiting for proper permits. Meanwhile, Gabe's porn-fueled expedition would sail smoothly through the administrative gauntlet, taking the field weeks ahead of the crew which was *sans* porn.

Walking into the Yeha hotel lobby, Gabe went directly to the bar and ordered himself a proper gin and tonic and an order of *dabo kolo* which were spicy, peanut-like, fry breads full of cayenne. He drained his gin and tonic, ordering another along with a serving of *injera*—sourdough pancakes into which one rolled an Ethiopian antipasto of *kitfo*—raw ground beef, along with chicken and lamb *wat*. He chewed the food and sipped his second drink reflectively as the beautiful waitresses wearing the traditional, gauzy, white *shamas* scurried about against the noise of the kitchen which was coming alive and shifting into full gear.

He should have known that it wouldn't be this easy, taking a thermal-image snap shot of the greatest religious mystery of Christendom. The priests had quelled their first attempt of confirming the Ark's presence in Axum through

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their wickedly effective third world flummoxing and ineptitude. As Gabe grazed through his food, he mused as to his next steps.

In the corner of the lobby, guarded from Gabe's view by a large, potted, succulent plant sat a dark man dressed in an impeccably pressed linen suit and hand-made loafers. His ascetically thin face set off his sharp, chiseled features which framed a pair of black, piercing, raptor eyes. The man wore a trimmed, black beard and appeared as a well-dressed Bedouin. He sipped coffee held in his slender and graceful hands. Unheard by all of those in the noisy lobby, he bent his head down slightly toward a gold lapel button on his jacket and spoke, hiding his lips behind his coffee cup.

"Doctor Turpin is taking an early dinner. He and his team were setting up some sophisticated equipment earlier—a telescope-like device with cabling attached to a laptop computer. They were stopped and dispersed by the priests. Turpin came back to the hotel straightaway."

"Good Mustafa—very good to have picked up the scent of the game so soon," said the hollow voice over the satellite phone. "Are your men in position?"

"Yes. It was comically easy to gain entry from Yemen through Djibouti—no problems whatsoever. The men are in good spirits with the exception of the Somali who ate a meal of lamb *wat* that had gone bad. He is pensive and a bit weak, but we are keeping him hydrated. He will perform when the time comes."

"Were the armaments in place?" asked the voice in Mustafa's ear piece.

"Yes. Just as we planned—the shipment was secure in the mosque in Addis. We were one RPG short, but that is of little consequence. We have adequate capability to deal with anything this lice-infested country can mount in the way of a military challenge. We will succeed Mullah..."

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The voice in the dark man's ear responded quickly. "No need for my name to be used, Mustafa. I need not be linked to this, this...project."

"Of course," said Mustafa, somewhat chagrined. "Forgive me. My confidence can sometimes lead me away from caution. Forgive me. Know that we are ready and will have the game trussed and ready for the market within the next nine hours. I will, contact you when we are in route to Addis with our...chattel."

The line was disconnected without a response. Mustafa sipped a last bit of coffee and casually walked out of the lobby and into the streets of Axum. He sought out the public latrine near the market and entered an unspeakably foul stall. He delicately dropped the satellite phone into the shit-coated hole in the concrete floor that served as a toilet. He hurriedly walked out and breathed in a lung full of fresh air once out of the confines of the sewer of a toilet. Mustafa suddenly felt the need to bathe away the stench of these backwards people. He walked down the dusty street to the small mosque and entered after checking to insure he was not being followed. He said his prayers to Allah as he made his way to the back room and his soldiers of the cause. He opened the door to the mosque's back room and was greeted by the sound-suppressed barrel of a Kalashnikov. "*Lala Asalama* (There is no other God than Allah)," said Mustafa with a smile to the Saudi behind the gun.

Gabe walked up the stairs from the lobby to his room. On his way down the hall he knocked on the door to his assistant, Ben Ashman's room. The knock sounded hollow and lonely as there was no reply and Gabe continued down the dim hall toward his room. *Big Ben was probably out chasing Ethiopian poon tang*, thought Gabe with a smile.

Gabe collapsed into a thread-bare chair behind the plastic-wood desk in the plain and rustic room. On the far side of the room, there was a window that looked over the field of giant *Stellae* and the ruins of the Queen of Sheba's

court, as Gabe saw the moon rise over the highlands of Axum. The dust-laden air gave the moon a reddish glow and it hung in the sky like a bloody skull.

Eiger North Face: Switzerland

Rabbi Janice Whitmore was spent and empty, her eyes barely able to focus. She found herself staring unfixed at the ancient scrolls on the high table in front of her—the old documents basking in the glare of full-spectrum lamps. One of the lost books of the old Hebrew Apocrypha she was studying served to fill in some gaps of the Christian Old Testament and the Jewish Torah. Rabbi Jan was a Talmudic scholar and had spent the last ten years of her life studying the newly excavated scrolls found in the Qumran caves, putting them within the context of the Kabala and other mystic writings of the ancient Hebrews.

Her passion for dry parchment and cryptic theology was a strong life force that had, for the most part, burned away the normalcy of her life. As a young girl, estranged from her Iowa farm-family life, and a hideous beast of a father, Jan had listened with fascination to Rabbi Friedman and her adopted father figure, Doctor Norman Ackerman, as they argued fine points in Talmudic interpretation and the Jewish cosmology. Years later she would enter into the fray—arguing her points which were tinged with mysticism, and conflicted with the orthodoxy of Rabbi Friedman and the common sense of her physician, *Godfather*, Norman. Rabbi Jan's knowledge and faith was tempered by old Rabbi Friedman and her God father. Soon, she was outpacing both, finding arcane Jewish translations that nullified all points but those she held as truths.

Rabbi Jan was naturally attractive, though perhaps a bit shy of beautiful—her blond, curly hair falling beside a practical and no-nonsense face that rarely saw make up.

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Her eyes were sad and piercing all the same as a quick intelligence would set them on fire. She had a *protected* smile and a tight body. Her fitness was due to her Tai Chi and yoga. She tended to gesticulate and talk with her hands that bespoke a gentle strength—hands of a seamstress. She had followed her path of reformed Judaism and became deeply imbedded within the mysticism of the Hebrew Apocrypha and the Kabala.

Jan was studying the book of Enoch—a part of the Old Testament and the Jewish Torah that had, for some reason, not made the cut in either the early, Christian Church or the old, Jewish synagogues. Whether it was a dispute in the lineage of Adam or for some other arcane reason, the Book of Enoch was known only to theological scholars.

Jan, as Director of Research of the *Société de le Troisième Templar*, combed the old texts for any mention of or allusion to the *Société's* obsession—the Ark of the Covenant.

The *Société de le Troisième Templar* was secretly housed in a warren of abandoned tunnels and caverns carved deep within the Eiger by the Swiss Railroad. Currently, only one rail line was functional—it going from the Kleine Scheidegg Hotel to the col between the Eiger and Jungfrau. On the col between the Jungfrau and the Eiger, an improbable hotel was perched above the glaciers of the Bernese Oberland. Plump, German tourists, with a brat and beer in hand, sat behind the telescopes mounted on the hotel's patio to watch real life-and-death struggles play themselves out by alpinists climbing on the frozen, alpine walls of the Eiger, Jungfrau and Joche.

The Eiger was riddled with tunneled railroad lines and Jan sought one of the tunnels to relieve her headache and clouded vision with a dose of alpine air. She donned a Thermapile parka and an alpaca wool balaclava she purchased in the Otavalu market when she was trekking the volcanic peaks of Ecuador. She also pulled on a pair of

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Thermopile mittens, as she exited the offices and found herself in the dim light of one of the Eiger tunnels.

Jan breathed in the thin, cold air and her headache began to disappear. The air was always cold here—sometimes unbearably so. Jan hugged herself as she strode down the tunnel, walking toward the gray light of the tunnel's exit onto the North Face of the Eiger—her breath hanging in wispy, gossamer shrouds around her head. The wind off the mountain's face began to make its presence known even thirty meters deep in the mountain's gut. As Jan approached the tunnel's exit onto the face, the wind became a living thing, forcing her to lean slightly forward—the air more difficult to breathe as it streamed past her mouth. With eyes squinted nearly shut, Jan stopped at the exit of the tunnel and had to adjust her eyes to the light of the North Face of the Eiger.

Ice pellets were blowing horizontally across the face, coating the Eiger's rock ramparts with *verglasse*. The moaning wind blew waves of ice and wet cold—the ice pellets burning Jan's face with frozen fire. She looked at the mountain's face and wondered at the drive or obsession that made people perform heroic acts within this frozen hell in order to spend a mere three minutes on top of the *killer of the Bernese Oberland*. Adjusting her eyes to focus past the sheets of ice and dim light, Jan saw three red dots of color below the *Spider*—a treacherous avalanche chute of roaring snow and white death. She realized the dots of color were bivouac sacks—each containing a human body. Looking out over the face, Jan wondered if the bodies cocooned within the nylon were dead—frozen to death in the *foen*, or just sleeping and waiting out the storm.

She stared into the dreary light and its horizontal waves of ice, trying to find the peace and assuredness that had been deftly stripped from her like a fish monger filets a salmon. The *Société's* cause was now infused into Jan's being, leaving little room for the *every-day* that had once comforted and sustained her. Now, the *cause* and Jan's life

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had evolved into a frightening race from evil through...evil. All had become movement along a razor's edge—a barefoot dance on broken glass. The pain of life and the urgency of her action spurred Rabbi Jan ever on, seeking that time of final achievement, when her personal pain would cease to be.

The *foen* had blown itself out on the mountain's North face as the waves of punishing ice yielded to broken clouds and a flirting promise of sun. Suddenly, the sun broke strongly onto the face and flooded the railroad tunnel with yellow light. Jan saw the rock walls were now adorned with a layer of ice—the *verglasse* dripping off the walls like the melt of an icy candle. The mountain was now not climbable and in this hall of icy, rock walls, human offerings in nylon were placed as sacrifices to a vengeful God.

New York City

The Colorado militia commander studied his evangelical, luncheon host, and the slippery looking Jew. He didn't much like what he saw. More so, Mike "Andor" Anderson—a simple, raw-boned man—trusted less in what he heard in their conversation over caviar and toast points in the Plaza's dining room. The Jew had fastidiously refused all food, claiming to have *taken a late breakfast*. He drank only water with a twist of lemon in it as the other two at the table picked through the extravagant offering of hors d'oeuvres.

Foods probably not Kosher for Jew boy, thought the militia man. Though Andor Anderson's appetite ran more toward beer, chips, and salsa, followed by a juicy burger, he studied the Plaza's fancy food and appeared to consume it with relish.

The Reverend Jeremiah Pickens was as plastic and fake looking in person as he appeared to be on his syndicated, Cable TV broadcast, *The Glorious Day*, produced by *The*

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Blood of the Lamb Ministries out of Phenix City, Alabama. His longish, white mane framed a smooth, tanned face that perpetually wore a brilliant, capped-teeth smile. He wore a Hong Kong-tailored suit that was somewhere between a khaki and a pumpkin color. He wore a spectacularly white, French cuff shirt from Brooks Brothers and a peach-colored, Carrais Mara tie and pocket square. His gold cufflinks sported fiery opal stones that played well with the colors of the suit and tie. His soft, leather, Gucci loafers seemed to be in perpetual motion, and the tassels showed the wear of the reverend's nervously wringing of his feet.

The reverend spoke with a genteel, Southern drawl as he said, "Ido, I'm here to assure you that we, your Christian brothers, have as much at stake as do you, the Jews. As long as we have Palestinian boots trompin' around the *Holy of Holies*, we're all trapped in a bad deal. But just as sure as I'm sittin' here, I know that Commander Anderson's team is just the group to retake what's rightfully ours. *OURS*, mind you—both Jews and Christians.

Ido Pariente was a quick-witted, whippet of a man with eyes that were at the same time both intelligent and *dead*. His gaze unnerved most, with its cold, predatory focus. Pariente was not a large man, yet his presence among others was daunting and powerful. He wore a generic, dark blue suit and a blue Oxford shirt that showed wear and pilling around the collar. A blue-and-grey, striped tie, by design, commanded no attention whatsoever to the small man. The Deputy Director of *Mossad's* Special Covert Operations sipped his lemon water and studied the zealot of an evangelist who was in total contrast to the militia commander sitting across from the same table.

The Mossad officer spoke quietly—almost delicately--enunciating each word.

"What you say may be true, Reverend Pickens. But, I fear Commander Anderson's small army has little *real* experience in dealing with the factions we in Israel must deal with every day. It is one thing to shoot paint ball guns

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at friends after a few beers, and quite another thing to remove a hundred trained Hamas fighters armed with RPG's and automatic weapons."

Andor bridled at the derogatory statements of the Mossad officer. His gaze slowly came up from the table, and locked with the feral eyes of the small Jewish spy.

"Listen Jew boy, this Goya mother fucker was slittin' the throats of sand niggers when you were a snot-nosed kid playin' in the dirt at the kibbutz. And my boys are all hand-picked, and have spent their share of time in the shit—Afghan caves, deserts, and mountains, poppin' rag heads so they wouldn't pose a threat to you and yours—your nation of Israel."

Andor glared in open animosity at the Jew as Pariente held his gaze, unblinking. Andor was the Commander of the largest state militia in the country. His ultra right-wing ideology was forged by his time in Special Forces, and deep inserts in the first Gulf war, and covert campaigns in Yemen, Somalia, and Indonesia. Andor Anderson was a genius at being straightforward, and his self assuredness cut everything to the bone. He had, and was still willing to lay down his life for his country—though his idea of *country* had shifted to the extremes of open bigotry, anti-Semitism and unbendingly fundamentalist Christianity.

Andor wore short and gray, crew-cut hair atop the sharp features of an athletic face. His shooting jacket, black turtleneck and khaki bush pants hung tautly on his chiseled, muscular frame. Andor was used to command and gave no one else in his life any quarter.

His emotions still running hot, Andor continued, "If we say we're in on the preacher's little operation, well, then, we'll get the job done. Even if your end turns out to be goat-fucked—we'll deliver the real estate on time and hold it until you Jew boys can find your ass."

"Commander Anderson," said the Reverend, "There's no need for this profanity and unfriendliness. We're all on the same side in this," said the Tele-evangelist as he started on

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his grilled Sea Bass entrée, licking his lips. Then, the Reverend actually closed his eyes in apparent bliss as he slowly, and with great relish, masticated his sea bass. All was quiet at the table as both the Jew and the militia man watched the epicurean histrionics of their host.

Andor, without comment, began to eat his entrée, keeping his eyes on his food. The Jew continued to sip his water.

"Commander Anderson, why don't you enlighten Ido as to your...capabilities," said Reverend Pickens between mouthfuls of sea bass and Caesar salad.

Andor finished chewing his food and then, re-engaged the gaze of the Mossad officer.

"We have the equivalent to twelve SEAL teams within the Colorado Militia. That's more bodies than train at Coronado. All those boys are under my command." Andor sipped his ice tea and continued, maintaining his eye contact with the Mossad man.

"All teams are armed with the normal SEAL compliment: Heckler and Koch MP-5's plus side arms, and specialty arms as appropriate to the op. We have scrambled voice com with personal combat HUD tied in with the best GPS units and infrared and thermal technology available—perhaps a year or two ahead of the U.S. Special Forces. For total mission flexibility, we have at least one chopper and one fixed wing pilot per team. All have been flight trained in everything from an *Apache* to a Russian *Havoc Mi-28*. Of course, all team members are fully trained in operation and maintenance of every military vehicle from a *Hummer* to an *Abrams* tank."

Pariante held a poker face as he sipped more from his glass of water. He studied the militia commander and sipped again, slowly and methodically, from the glass as the din of waiters scurried about the marble floor of the Plaza's dining room.

THE THIRD TEMPLE

"Commander...how many people has your militia killed?" asked Pariente, quietly, waiting patiently for the militia man's response.

Andor flushed red around the collar as he responded.

"As a militia, we have not killed anyone since our respective military discharges," said the militia commander. "However, our collective body count from previously *sanctioned* wars is over a thousand. Trust me, Jew boy; we know how to kill rag heads. In fact, we enjoy killing dune coons—the closer up and more personal, the better."

The Mossad man reflected, and slowly rotated his glass round and round on its cushion of a water ring. He quickly looked up and his gaze was a bit less threatening.

"Perhaps you are up to the task, Commander. Although I have reservations, you just may prove to be an anomaly. Tell me, Commander, how long could your militia hold a high position against, say, two to three-thousand hostiles occupying ground, say, a hundred to two hundred feet lower?"

"Indefinitely," replied Anderson automatically. "As long as we have the high ground, we are in command. No one can pierce our cordon. No one."

The Mossad man quickly finished his water and began to adjust himself to leave. He shook the hand of the Reverend and guardedly, clasped the strong hand of the militia man.

"I have heard enough for now," said Ido Pariente. "Reverend, I will contact you as to next steps...if any. Thank you for your time. Commander." The Mossad man again engaged Andor. "I will require further information if we decide to continue along this path, and use your troops. I would appreciate your full cooperation."

Andor slightly nodded his head in affirmation without verbally answering the Jew.

Ido Pariente walked out of the lobby of the Plaza and jaywalked across Central Park South. The Mossad officer found refuge in Central Park as he walked without pattern

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through the trees and rock outcroppings as carriages ran close by. The hooves of the horses clacked on the black asphalt as pigeons flocked in clouds around the ramparts of the apartment buildings—stone citadels that loomed over the park to the West.



In Ethiopia, anthropologist Gabe Turpin is pressed into service by a society of modern Knights Templar to find the Ark of the Covenant. The society wants to rebuild the Temple of Solomon, and harness its power to transform the human spirit. Turpin and the modern Templars enter a deadly race against a secret cabal that also wishes to possess the Ark's power, and unleash an apocalyptic final solution in the Middle East.

The Third Temple

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