

The Paladin Initiative is the final book of Dan Gordan's Trilogy where it looks like it could be the end of the world or the beginning of a new one.

The Paladin Initiative

By Dan Gordan

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THE PALADIN INITIATIVE



DAN GORDAN

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CHAPTER 1

A black streak flashed across the beach from the jungle's edge. A thunderous crack filled the air as the jaguar pounced on his prey.

"God, was that the turtle's shell?" whispered Agni.

"Yes. They have the most powerful jaws in the cat kingdom," answered Abhasa.

The 200 lbs. of Black Death grabbed the large sea-turtle with its claws as it struggled to reach the ocean waves a few feet away. The helpless turtle's head made one last lunge from its shell towards the surf before the predator crushed it with a vicious snap of its jaws. The victorious jaguar stood over its prey and peered back towards the jungle as the two men held their breath in the bushes.

The blazing sun had made it's decent into the West leaving prismatic streaks across the southern sky. The waves seemed to suddenly turn gray and cold. The killer's eyes flashed with a strange fire as it seemed to look directly at them. Then confident that he remained unopposed, the cat grabbed his prize almost effortlessly and disappeared back into the jungle.

Agni looked up at Abhasa with wide eyes.

"Young prince you have been treated to a rare sight. There are only a handful of people on earth who have ever witnessed what you have just seen."

"Death comes suddenly, doesn't it?" said Agni.

"Only if we are blessed. Let's build a fire on the beach and I'll catch a fish for us to eat. The sound of the waves will be good to sleep with."

"Wouldn't it be safer to find a place in the trees?"

Abhasa laughed.

"You mean up there where he and the snakes live?"

Both laughed together.

"The jaguar is shy and secretive. He has food for now and our fire will make us king of this domain for the night. Tell me how the young girl Angel is doing."

"She has recovered from the gun shot. I don't think we will ever get over the event."

"What memory is the most painful for you?"

"There are a lot of sad memories. I'll never forget holding her in my arms, looking into her eyes thinking that she was about to die because of me. The last thing she said before closing her eyes was, I love you."

"Why do you feel responsible?"

"The shot was meant for me or my father."

"Do you love Angel?"

"I feel deeply for her. I've tried to spend time with her as she recovered, but I don't know if it's love. I care for her and she wants me with her all the time."

"Try giving her some time to sort out things."

*

"Can you believe that it's already been two years since we began this monster hunt?" said Adrian.

"Two years, sometimes it seems like a lifetime and there are times when it feels like a few weeks," said Bryan.

"How bout a wee bit more of that fine Irish whisky to celebrate the anniversary?"

Adrian stood and pulled a key from his pocket.

"You're right, but this calls for a true celebration."

He walked over to a cabinet across from his desk as Bryan watched with curiosity. He unlocked it and pulled an aged looking bottle out and held it high.

"This is a bottle of *Macallan 1939 Single Malt Scotch Whiskey*. It's been waiting to celebrate with us for over forty years. Get us a couple of fresh glasses."

Bryan got the glasses and sat them down on the desk between them.

"I know it's a wee bit crass, but I need to ask."

"\$10, 000," said Adrian without waiting for the question.

"I might be in need of an Irish lass to steady me hand with whisky this rare," said Bryan with a chuckle.

Adrian poured the golden nectar and both men sniffed the fragrance before raising their glasses for a toast.

Adrian held his glass out saying, "To the finest Irishman that ever drew a breath, Danny O'Farrell!"

Bryan clicked his glass as his eyes watered and said, "To me brother, who gave his life for us and the children!"

Both men took a sip of the fine whiskey and were quiet for a moment as they reflected on Danny, Bryan's twin.

Bryan broke the silence.

"It's powerful with woody undertones and a finish of sweet toffee. Like me brother was, unique and earthy. Together mate, we've cut child kidnapping by a third."

"Yes, and Christian will soon be able to take control of the Academy."

"When are you expecting him back?"

"He's going to Bogotá to speak with our rangers and touch base with Angel on his way back from The Gap. I'd say about a week."

"Did I hear you say that my son will be home in a week?" said Dagan standing at the door.

"You did. Come and share a glass of the finest whisky to ever touch a lip in celebration."

Dagan walked over and threw her arms around Adrian's neck and motioned for Bryan to join them with a hug.

*

"Ms. Harrell Captain Gudren said we should reach Tampa by noon. Would you like breakfast on deck or in your cabin?" asked Aakar one of her Gurkha crew and personal guards.

"I think breakfast on the aft deck would be nice. Please tell Alita to join me there in half an hour and have the chef prepare a small buffet with items for a Spanish omelet. Oh, and we would love to have some of his special hot chocolate."

"Very good my lady."

Brigitte had blossomed into a beautiful young woman. Her curly red hair fell to her shoulders framing a heart shaped face with a flawless cream complexion. Green eyes that foretold of mischief about to happen peered out over a pixy nose. Her 5'6" frame was very feminine and supported a graceful, curvy body that suggested something sensual.

Alita Gomez was a beautiful Mexican girl in her early twenties with bronze toned skin and perfect sparkling teeth. It was hard to imagine her without a smile and she must have been what the Brazilian, Vinicius de Moraes had in mind when he wrote the lyrics to *The Girl from Ipanema*.

They met six months ago when Brigitte was exploring the Pyramids near Cancun. Alita was an innocent girl from a poor, but loving family and although their backgrounds were vastly different, they hit it off from the start. Brigitte had longed for a companion since Gerard; her step- brother had left to live on his own in the old Harrell mansion. Alita became her companion to explore life's adventures and Brigitte helped her family move up from the world of poverty.

The morning was gray and overcast as Alita waited on deck for Brigitte to join her for breakfast. The sounds of Kokomo by The Beach Boys flowed across the deck on a crisp breeze as the two of them met with wide smiles.

They embraced and danced across the deck towards their buffet laughing like children as they went.

"Let's have them make Spanish omelets for us. Just tell them how you'd like it. We have everything," said Brigitte.

"That sounds yummy!"

Hans, the other Gurkha pulled out his *Kukri knife* and began to chop green onions, peppers and tomatoes.

They sat at the table prepared for them with a white tablecloth as Hans poured their hot chocolate. Brigitte watched as Alita took her first sip.

"Wow! This is so creamy and delicious. Have you always lived like this Brigitte?"

"No, my childhood was a nightmare."

The gloom of the morning descended, as memories of her being molested and kept prisoner invaded Brigitte's thoughts.

*

Mateo Lopez gazed out the enormous picture window at the stormy waves crashing on the boulders below. The only place he liked better on the *Faroe Islands* were the cliffs where he could feel the cold Atlantic spray as the powerful winds threatened to sweep him into the sea and rocks below.

"Mateo, the master wants you," said Dragan in a gravelly voice.

"Killed any children lately?" said Mateo with a scornful look.

"No, but I still have hopes for a second chance at you."

"I'm still waiting for my first chance at you," said Mateo with an evil grin seldom seen from a young boy.

*

Shafts of light cut through the triple canopy creating colors that resembled the stained glass of *Roman Cathedrals*. Only a small amount of the blazing sunlight from above reached the jungle floor creating a damp and dark beauty.

"The lack of sunlight prevented growth and resulted in an almost flat ground.

"Do not be fooled by the openness. We must still be on guard for snakes that lie in wait to ambush pray," said Abhasa.

"Don't jaguars, snakes and other things live up there?"

"Yes, but the canopy is over a hundred high and we don't need to be concerned about an attack from that height. It's what dwells on the floor that we need to keep an eye out for."

"The beauty and colors of this place is something I've kept in my mind since I first saw it," said Agni as he twirled his running lance around from one hand to the other.

"The time has come for us to increase your lesions in real history. We need to share the secrets that our agents have collected about other nations and the true power behind them."

"What kind of secrets? What power?"

"The world has been guided by cooperating families for centuries. We believe that a catastrophic shift for the planet is coming and will create a new beginning. We plan to offer a more harmonious option for going forward."

"You plan for me to lead this movement?"

"We do."

"I'm not experienced enough for something like that."

"You will soon have more real information at your disposal than any leader in history. Your advisors will be able to provide you with more detailed knowledge. They are not motivated by greed and will not desire to rule."

"How can we guide the whole world?"

"Our agents have been embedded in governments and places of power for centuries. We have not always been successful, but we have been able to guide man away from much self-destruction. The main reason that we have been effective is that we have remained clandestine. Our agents have been the whispered word of reason for centuries."

"Are your agents really hidden in that many places?"

"They are now closer to acting as your agents than mine. Now you can see the value of secrecy and as to being in many places, we even have key people in the Drost Banking Empire."

"Does my father know about them?"

"No. That will be your decision to reveal them but remember their value to you will be gone if their identity is known. I would advise you to read their reports before I made that decision. A formula for making good decisions is first obtain enough information to get a clear picture, and then decide on a course of action and act with passion."

"Have you been spying on my father's business?"

"No. I consider him and your family to be an extension of my own family, so I have chosen not to avail myself of their findings. I have however told my overseer to inform me if any serious threats present themselves so that I could warn your father."

"All this gets heavier every step I take."

"Look at the large number of young people that started their leadership at noticeably young ages and became overwhelmingly

successful. *Howard Hughes* is one that comes to mind. He inherited a fortune of \$800,000 when he was 18 and became America's first billionaire with a worth of over \$4 billion. We have been planning to make this a better place for centuries, and we now possess the knowledge and wealth to make it happen."

"This is just overwhelming for me."

"Don't let it be. Allow us to teach you things about this world and its governments that only we know."

"Give me an example."

"America has enough oil in the ground from one place in North Dakota known as *The Bakken* to fuel the American economy for over two thousand years. This is light, sweet oil and at current market prices it would only cost Americans \$16 a barrel. They have also discovered the largest untapped oil reserve in the world. Two trillion barrels lie beneath the Rocky Mountains. America has more oil reserves inside their borders than all other proven reserves on earth put together."

"Why aren't we using our own instead of paying so much to countries that hate us?"

"Why not use up all of theirs first, then what will America's oil be worth? Drill for it now and its oil. Wait till the middle East dries up and America's oil turns to gold."

Agni stopped and shook his head in amazement.

"We have much to teach you about the true history of our world. Frightful things exist in this world that very few people know anything about."

"Give me another example."

Abhasa smiled broadly.

"It's good to see your interest, but our scholars are going to teach you many things in a proper forum."

Their village could be seen in the distance.

"Share one more secret with me before we return. Please."

Abhasa stopped and looked at Agni with a serious face.

"You must guard this information till we can intervene."

"I give you my word."

"An ethnic biological weapon has already been developed."

"What does that mean?"

"The weapon can be set to kill say, only Orientals."

"A nation would need to respond with everything they had to defend against that," said Agni.

"Exactly. If that isn't managed correctly, it could be the end of civilizations.

*

"Mr. O'Farrell this is Alejandro Rey. I am the Public Prosecutor in Granada, Spain. You may not know me, but I am aware of the good work you and the Drost organization are doing."

"Thank you. What can I do for you?"

"I have a lead on a man named Eric Roux. I believe he is a major player in child molestation rings. He is both clever and powerful which allows him to operate in Granada beyond the law."

"We can help in that area."

"I will email the address, description and all the information I have. Unfortunately, I believe he is torturing children and has remained beyond our reach."

"I think we can do something about that. Let's stay in contact and remain vigilant."

Bryan punched in a number to Ireland as soon as he clicked off.

"Shane, Bryan. I'll soon have some information concerning a child molestation ring in Granada Spain."

"We're always available for that sort of thing mate."

"Be ready on short notice."

*

Paddy and Agni sat by the pool near the waterfall. Twilight in the jungle created both feelings of calm and danger. Mixed sounds from unseen animals formed a kind of jungle symphony. Agni thought that he heard the scream of a panther off in the distance.

"I have missed you," said Paddy as she looked at him with her turquoise eyes and smiled.

"I think that you become more beautiful every time I see you," he said.

"Have you found a girlfriend out there in the other world?"

Agni felt uncomfortable as he looked off again into the trees beyond the village.

"Do you remember Angel?"

"Yes. She is the girl that you saved from those bad men."

"We have dated, and I like her a lot."

"She is exceptionally beautiful. I like her to."

"What about you? Have you found someone that you like?"

"Oh yes."

"Who is it?"

"I think you know. He is constantly in my thoughts and one day I will be in his."

*

Christian had returned to the academy in Bogotá and it had been a long day. He had given a report on plans to bring *The Paladin Rangers* up to battalion strength of over seven hundred rangers. The Marines of the USA would be their operational model and they would pay for it by providing security around the world for different banks starting with Drost Banking. It was a plan conceived of by Christian and approved by his father, Abhasa and Commander Duval.

He had also conducted interviews with prospective cadets. There was one who stood out. A young black man from South Africa named Tau Kalu. He liked him right off and looked forward to them hanging out together.

Dalmi and Bakura, two of Abhasa's people who had volunteered to become Agni's personal guards stood outside the auditorium as Tau and Christian walked out.

"Let's go have some Dop together," said Tau.

"What is Dop?"

Tau laughed and shook his head.

"Beer my man. I've heard Bogotá has some great clubs."

"I've never been to one or had a beer."

"It's about time you did. We need to celebrate. What about your friends here?"

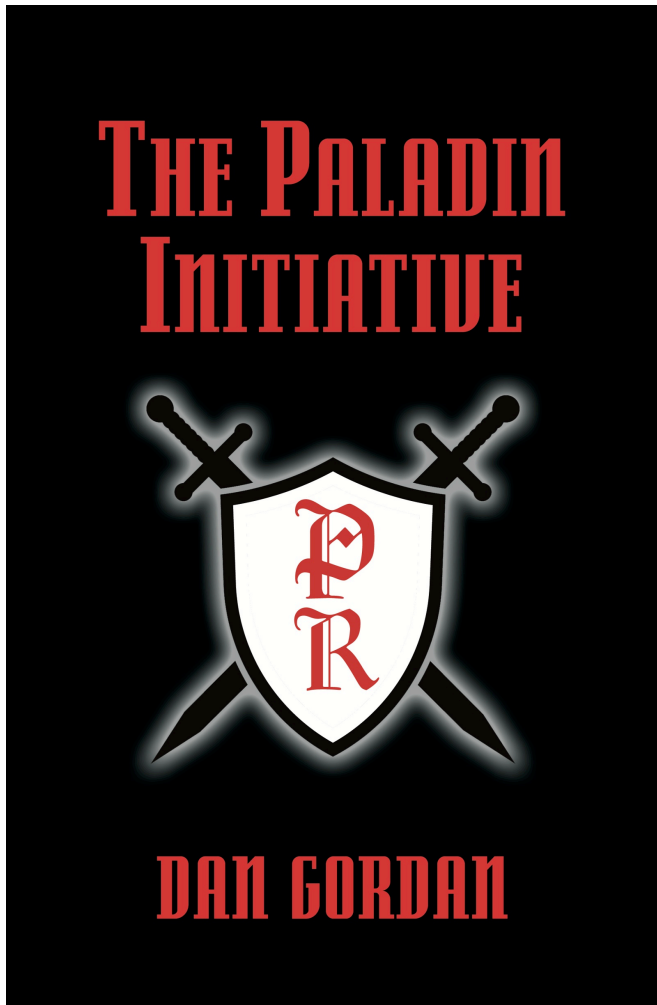
"We go where he goes," said Dalmi.

"Let's do it!" Said Christian.

Christian had refrained from alcohol up to now, but it seemed like a good time to find out if it really had the magic that everybody talked about.

"So, this is your first time for a taste of the jungle fire? Come on I've heard of a place not far from here called the BBC where I think we can get in. We'll start with a couple of beers and see what you think," said Tau.

"You're on."



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