

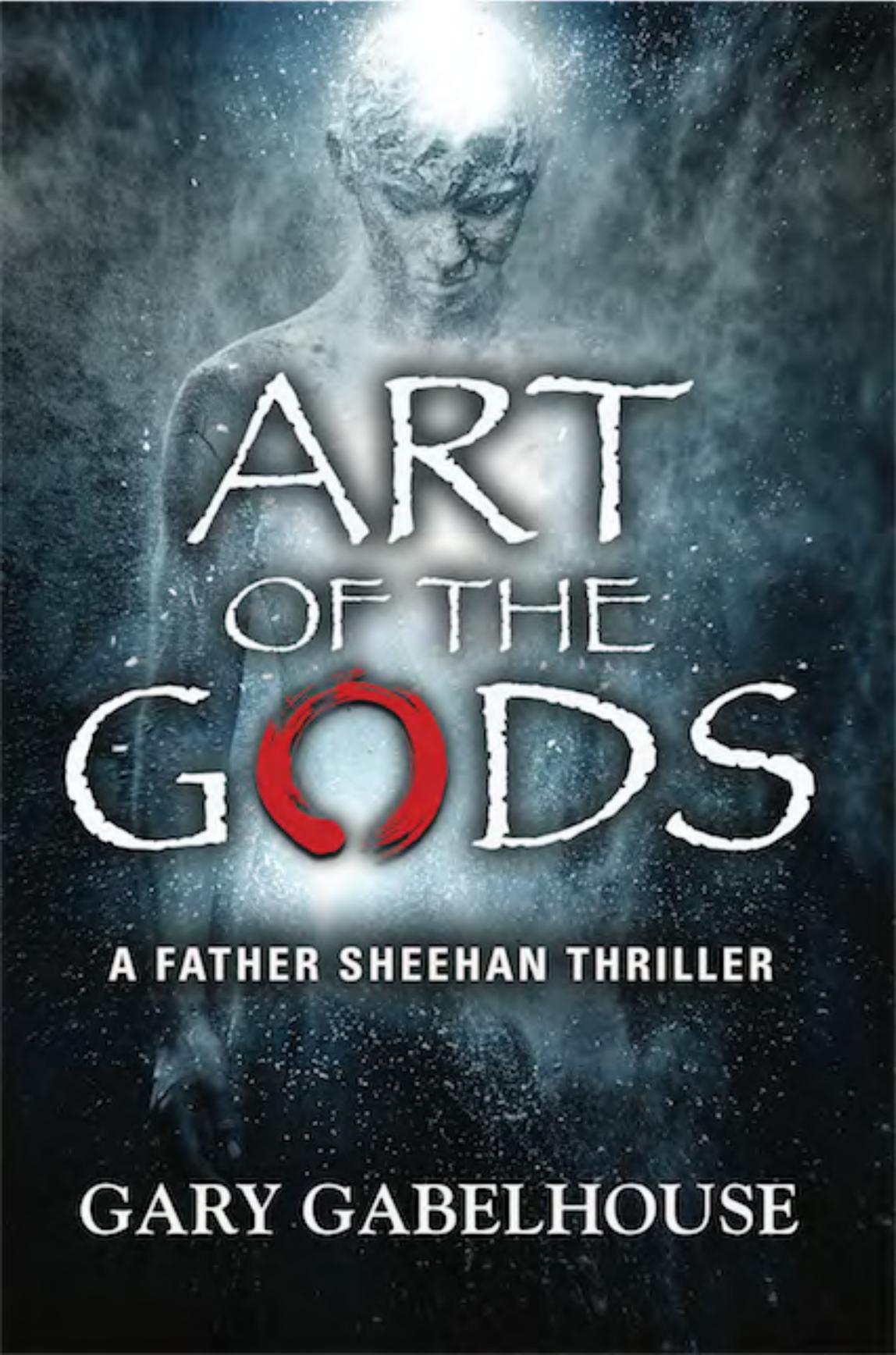
Using a religious relic, artist Pablo Cordero creates a viral, online, masterpiece. Global miracles of wealth result from Cordero's art—threatening the World's puppet masters. Vatican spymaster, Father John Sheehan—an ex-CIA-operative-turned-Jesuit priest—finds Cordero in Cannes, and seeks to discover the truth behind his art and relic.

ART OF THE GODS

by Gary Gabelhouse

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ART
OF THE
GODS

A FATHER SHEEHAN THRILLER

GARY GABELHOUSE

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First Edition

PROLOGUE

April 14, 2003—Baghdad

Delta Operator, Sergeant First Class Roberto Cordero leveled the MP5's silenced muzzle. In the gloom of the Museum's storage room, the red line of the laser sight came to rest between the eyes of an Iraqi who stood, dumbfounded, in the gloom. The man's bearded jaw gaped open and his eyes grew full of fear. Cordero could see he held something in his hands. Next to the man, sat a reliquary that burned like molten gold and silver in the dark of the room.

Cordero extracted from his BDUs the photo image of the mission's target. He grunted to himself as he confirmed the Iraqi across the room was standing beside what appeared to be the target objective. The man held in his hands a cylindrical metal tube less than two feet in length. Cordero couldn't identify what it was in the darkened room.

"I have a local possibly guarding the mission objective. He appears armed. Will attempt to secure the target without force."

"Roger that. Proceed," came the voice of Joint Spec Ops Command.

With the MP5 still on sight, the red laser painted a dot on the Iraqi's forehead that looked like an Indian bindi. Cordero addressed the man.

"Do you speak English?" asked the Delta Operator. "Sir, I need you to answer me if you understand."

"I have some English. Yes," squeaked the bearded man in the dark.

"I need for you to go down on your knees and hold that object away from your body as far as you can."

"But this is not..."

Cordero interrupted the man.

"Please do it now, sir. Quickly. Down on your knees."

Suddenly, Cordero heard the voice in his com unit.

"We are entering the room through the door at your back, Cordero. We are clear. You are clear."

Quiet as cats, the other five Operators of the Delta chalk entered the basement room of the museum. The red lines of lasers swept across the Iraqi's body, slowed and became red dots resting on the man's head and heart.

"Kneel down now," shouted Cordero.

The man slowly sank to his knees and held out the silver tube.

"I want your hands empty. Put whatever that is in your hands on the floor in front of you."

The man complied. The cylindrical object made a metallic sound as the Iraqi laid it on the stone floor of the room.

The man was kneeling beside what looked like the mission objective as its metallic finish seemed to reflect the lasers and tactical head lamps of the team.

"Put your hands on top of your head," ordered Cordero as he carefully stepped forward to retrieve the object the man had laid on the floor.

Cordero grasped the object—an oblong, metal cylinder—and inspected it. It did not appear to be a weapon, and was, from what Cordero could see, some sort of sacramental object of great age. It was made of a silver metal and full of script inlay made of silver and gold. The metal tube had seams—one side was

hinged. There was what looked like a latch on the other seam. The latch was beset with red and black stones—apparently garnet and onyx.

Cordero, shifting his eyes from the Iraqi to the metal tube, opened the relic. It looked to be a scroll of brown and ragged parchment inside the metal tube. It was like some of the scroll cases Cordero saw in the Jewish synagogues when he was training with Israeli Special Forces the previous year, but much smaller. Cordero closed the tube and slipped it into a long pocket on the leg of his BDU. He again trained his MP5 on the kneeling Iraqi. The reliquary—the target objective—sat on the floor beside the Iraqi.

“Remain on your knees and don’t move,” ordered Cordero as his com unit ear bud hissed with static and fragments of mission-status reports.

Cordero retrieved some zip-ties to secure the Iraqi, and slowly walked toward the kneeling man.

The Iraqi looked directly at Cordero as the corners of his mouth began to form a smile. He closed his eyes, tilted his head back and shouted in the still and dark room of the Baghdad Museum.

“Allāhu akbar!”

The explosion swept everything from Cordero’s sight and consciousness in a white-hot wave that pounded through his body and set his world on fire.

Current Day—New York City

Pablo Cordero attacked the giant canvas with the large calligraphy brush as the studio lights burned on the set like alien suns in deep space. The brush, soaked with pigment, left gaping wounds that bled crimson, running down the painting. Again and again, Cordero

attacked the canvas with a primal intensity. The bloody pigment violently splattered and then slowly dripped and beaded down to form what appeared to be Sanskrit mantras written across the canvas. Cordero now crouched in front of the painting like a big cat, and as the crimson mantras formed, the shirtless artist, bathed in sweat, slowly rose and extended his arms as though he were being crucified on the canvas, and transfixed, face-first, onto his art.

From behind the glass window of the control room, Roy Kamen nodded to cue his wife and artistic collaborator, Marina, as he continued to capture Cordero's artistic drama on video. Marina Kamen, a virtuoso violinist, began to saw the bow across the electric violin's strings with a mixture of passion and ferocity. Soon, with her eyes tightly shut, she became lost to her music—transcendent. With the wail of the violin literally filling the studio with spirit-driven sound, Cordero began to shout the mantras that revealed themselves through his art, and the studio seemed to grow in size. The music, chanting and living art formed a spiritual storm, as wave after wave of elation and satori broke over and engulfed the rocks of what was for the masses, *a priori* reality.

Then, suddenly, the power on the set went out with a fatigued groan, and the whole scene—Cordero—enraptured, and his canvas of crimson calligraphy—all collapsed into darkness as the violin began to sound a heartbeat rhythm and the artist's chanting fell off and came into line behind the throbbing, arterial notes of the violin.

It was then that the bloody Sanskrit symbols began to morph, and Kamen saw the miracle through the video camera's digital display. The symbols glowed

red and lit the entire studio in a fiery light. Relentless, the music somehow continued to grow and became a spirit wind that buffeted the canvas as Cordero now pounded on its surface with his fist holding the handle of his large brush. The canvas glowed now in an eerie light as the hurricane wind of the music roared against its face. The Sanskrit characters now seemed to melt, and like a massive animation, the red script became crimson petals of thousands of flowers, growing down the canvas in crimson columns. And as the red petals became tens of thousands of blossoms, they suddenly fell from the canvas to the floor, rattling and skidding across the studio with the noise of bucket-loads of gravel. Pedro Cordero stood sweating and breathing in sobs amidst small mountains of precious rubies that were as offerings from and for his art.

Despite the power was dead in the studio, Marina Kamen's last note somehow lived and echoed in Roy's headphones. All was then quiet in the studio as Roy watched his wife caringly place her violin down and walk out onto the glowing set. She walked slowly toward Cordero who had collapsed to his knees—depleted by his artistic expression. All around them, the blood-red stones glowed like embers and were everywhere in the studio and on the set—piles and heaps of them. Marina bent down and grabbed a handful of the red stones, and studied them in the surreal silence of the studio of Kamen Productions.

"Roy, I think we have a King's ransom in rubies out here in the studio," said Marina into her microphone in a voice that was full of fear and wonder all at once. "I have no idea what just happened."

"Me neither," replied Roy into his microphone as he checked the levels on his board. "But whatever it was, I've got it all on video."

Kibera, Kenya

Kibera, the largest shantytown in Africa lay like a corpse along the railroad tracks three miles from Nairobi's city center. Salim Mohammad, leader of a care and assistance center called Carolina for Kibera, rebooted the modems that provided the alien world of the Internet to the hopelessly poor of East Africa. The large monitor flickered alive in the center's community Internet room. The room was full of the younger and feral human scavengers of the shantytown who seemed to all sport dirty and stained T-shirts, baggy shorts and pants. Hardly anyone wore shoes—some sandals, but most were barefoot. These shantytown scavengers were intrigued by life outside of Kibera, but most knew they would never leave this ghetto of despair, poverty, and disease, during their short lifespan.

Salim cued up a video from all the **YouTube** clips that were going viral across the globe. The title of Salim's choice of videos was, "ART OF MIRACLES," and had been posted by a Roy Kamen in the United States.

The crowd of normally noisy Kenyan youth went unusually quiet as soon as the Hispanic artist attacked the canvas with the first stroke of the brush. When the violin music started, Salim swore he could hear his own heartbeat.

As the YouTube video aired in the Kibera Internet Center, some of the audience began to cry as others released ululations. Salim, a devout Muslim who would

not normally even look at religious art, was spiritually moved by the images and sounds of the video.

The large monitor in the room seemed to grow and loomed gigantic over the rag-tag audience of the poorest people on Earth. And as the petals fell from the massive canvas as blood-red rubies, the monitor exploded and powdered the screen, leaving a gaping hole out of which now poured a stream of gold coins. The desperate shantytown wraiths who were in the Internet Center, scooped up the gold coins with both hands. As the gold coins magically cascaded out of the monitor, the Kibera refugees began dumping them into make-shift bags, fabricated by tying the ends of their dirty and stained shirts together. They gathered the coins which were now accumulating as small mountains of gold in the Center's Internet room.

Salim walked over to a growing pile of gold coins, and grabbed a handful. They were all the same: New, gold Krugerrands—each worth nearly \$1,500 U.S. Salim looked at the mountains of gold building on the floor and saw that word had gotten out through the warrens of the shantytown. But no matter how many people lined up and carried away hundreds and thousands of coins, the gold lucre continued to pour out of the maw of the broken monitor and out onto the floor of his center's Internet room. The gold began to reach the height of the windows, and spill outside onto the packed red dirt of Kibera that was perennially littered with old newspapers and filth.

In this desperate human pit of squalor, Salim Mohammad was being witness to the most radical redistribution of wealth in human history. In three hours, lines had been formed and distribution organized by the nouveaux riche of Kenya as over a

million residents of the Kibera shantytown became millionaires and more.

It took more than five business days for the Krugerrands of Kibera to impact the market price of gold—first in South Africa, then Europe and the Americas. And as a tribute to the adaptability of humankind, only two weeks after receiving the gold manna from heaven, Mathew Odinga, who grew up living in a cardboard appliance box in Kibera, arrived on his yacht at the moorings of Corfu and on to find his way to the Palace Hotel.

CHAPTER ONE

Vatican City

Father John Sheehan absently fingered the beads of his rosary as he sipped the Meyer's dark rum from a jelly jar repurposed as a glass. Father Sheehan, the Director of *Gruppo Intervento Rapido*—the Vatican's national-security agency, studied the email messages. The emails had been forwarded to him by the Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Jon Canaday.

Father Sheehan, still a fit, fifty-something middleweight, was a priest with a dark past who had found a home within the Society of Jesus—the Roman Catholic Order of the Jesuits. As a young man he had been a Peace Corps volunteer, working on the Island of Tonga. In the Polynesian Kingdom, he created a commodities-trading company as he sold the worthless American AID grain crops that would not grow in the island climate and bought live chickens with the funds. Soon, Sheehan's chicken ranch was the largest commercial enterprise on the island—until the Peace Corps fired the enterprising, chicken-farming hippie, and threatened to charge him with numerous counts of diversion of U.S. AID and money laundering.

Sheehan had told the Peace Corps to bugger off, and was able to thumb his nose at the pencil-neck lawyers and paper pushers at State because of the protection and diplomatic status he was given by his good friend and business partner, the King of Tonga.

The rotund King of Tonga would take daily constitutionals, riding his bicycle around his small island kingdom. Sheehan would jog along beside him

and the two would talk about everything from the business of chicken farming to what made a woman beautiful. During the months that Sheehan spent as Tonga's most successful entrepreneur, and Secretary of Commerce, he met and fell in love with the King's niece. After a few months of blessed courtship, the two were married in a traditional Tongan ceremony, and for the first time, Sheehan started to consider what he should do to best support his bride and the family which was certain to follow. The couple quietly flew back to America, and to John's hometown of Omaha where he found employment as a consultant in TV programming. Then, Sheehan bounced from one business success to another, and as his wife gave him first a son, and then a daughter, John enjoyed his blessed and prosperous life.

Sheehan's life began to fall apart when his son started acting up and grew to become a young hoodlum in the private Catholic schools of a gated community southwest of Omaha. Then, at an apex of his son's delinquency, his island bride—Sheehan's true love—was diagnosed with stage-four breast cancer. She was dead within a month.

Sheehan's life fell apart and he simply walked away from everything—his family—his job—everything. Due to his cash reserves built up from large 1099 contracts, he succeeded in staying in an alcoholic haze for two years. As Sheehan spiraled totally out of control, he regularly stood drinks in a bar outside of Omaha for local Strategic Air Command, Air Force officers. One night, he bought drinks for a suit—an Air Force Intelligence type. John matched the man drink for drink and, after last call, the suit slid a business card across the bar to Sheehan.

"Whenever you want to do something of value," the older man had said.

Sheehan looked at the card.

**James J. McCann, Commander
Special Operations Group
Special Activities Division
U.S. Central Intelligence Agency**

Sheehan had received a call from McCann the next afternoon—blessedly late in the day. Royally hung over, and looking for the dog's-hair cure, Sheehan answered and stayed on the line more out of curiosity than anything else. Sheehan remembered McCann's promise those years ago.

"Listen, amigo. You're really fucked up right now. But I promise you that it is not too late. I promise we will get you unfucked Mister Sheehan."

Five years later, John Sheehan was hiding in Baghdad, disguised as a Muslim Imam, waiting to take the head shot on one of the generals of Saddam Hussein's Republican Guard. Sheehan rapidly grew to be a one-man solution for the CIA's military branch—the Special Operations Group. Specializing in improvised combat and sabotage, Sheehan always joked with his CIA SOG controls, that, "There must be fifty ways to kill your target..."

After nearly ten years, Sheehan had been involved in dirty little wars all over the globe—mean little wars that were always part and parcel of the regional and worldwide conflicts that were largely about land, water and resources. And those interested in land, water and

resources often disguised and put the battles off on religious ideology.

When Sheehan was ordered to assassinate an Afghan Tribal Leader in order to grease the skids of the agency's subterfuge, he didn't initially consider the collateral damage of painting a compound building with a laser for the missile strike. The Tribal head man happened to be throwing a wedding party for one of his daughters on the same day SOG Command had ordered Sheehan to direct the hit. Even if he painted only the Warlord's home in the compound, he was certain to be killing dozens of innocents—including young children. Hell-Fire missiles, like SOG command, didn't differentiate between targets and their friends and families. The Tribal Leader was just a high-value target that needed to die that day. John Sheehan was the executioner. The decision making was totally reptilian and absent of any humanity. Sheehan would simply solve a problem that day by killing a ruthless and hardened warlord...along with dozens of his family and friends.

John Sheehan was not prepared to knowingly murder women and children, and simply walked away from the mission. Knowing his life would be in jeopardy, he went through the egress motions of tradecraft as best he could. He escaped Afghanistan overland and by rail into Pakistan. From there he made his way on to India and the holy city of Varanasi.

It was on the bathing ghats of Varanasi he found the grizzled old, Catholic priest. The old padre had neatly stacked his western black suit, priest-collar and shirt on the stone ghat that protruded out into the sacred Ganges. Sitting waist-deep in water on one of

the stone steps, dressed only in his boxer shorts, the old priest had smiled warmly up at the CIA assassin.

"Come, my son, and I will baptize you in this holy river," the half-naked priest had said. "All of your life's sins can be washed away forever."

Sheehan had not even bothered to take off his pants, shirt or jacket. He walked into the water of the Ganges and irretrievably changed his life, once again.

The emails Father Sheehan looked at had been forwarded to the Secretary of State from Cardinal David Gaba who headed the Vatican's *Commission On Miracles*. The Commission normally dealt with reported miracles associated with a Pope or another important Church dignitary who was in consideration of sainthood. Before one could even be considered for sainthood, there had to be at least two miracles attributed to and performed by the saintly candidate. The Commission was made up of over eighty priests and scientists who rigorously studied and applied science to make sure that the potential saint had, indeed, performed a miracle, and that the act was not just an apparently blessed event due to natural causes and/or an act with a scientific explanation.

When presented with miracles that *just seemed to happen*: Madonna statues that wept blood, a corn flake that looked like Christ, or thousands of cripples healed after a Mass—such miracles were generally not the concern of the Commission. However, the miracles of Kibera, Kenya and similar miracles in over a dozen other impoverished settlements had come to the attention of many around the world, including the Vatican's Commission On Miracles. And then, as if he could do anything to intervene with miracles, all

communication about these matters now included Sheehan—the Director of National Security. The emails and file attachments about the alleged miracles Sheehan studied came from a small cadre of invisible elites who propped up the financial infrastructure of the Catholic Church. These patrons of the Church were starting to demand that the Vatican look into these miracles—all of which were miracles of stunning, new-found wealth being almost instantly distributed to the poorest of the poor. These miracles seemed they were beginning to have a measureable impact of leveling the economic playing field on a growing scale—turning thousands of paupers into players.

As well, the College of Cardinals had their noses out of joint due to these miracles of largess that were being realized with no priestly or Church-related sanction. To most in Vatican City, anything divine and spiritually miraculous had, since the early days of the Church, been the business of priests and Bishops. Only priests could intercede between God and the sinful people who sought His love and forgiveness—through confession and the sacramental ceremony of their priest. The priests were the lynchpins, and miracles that benefited the people directly had always been something that frustrated the priesthood, as they tried to get in front of the miracle, and control its miraculous expression of love to the people.

As Sheehan read the emails and saw the guarded complaints of the economic elites and the spiritual indignation of the Cardinals of the Church, he could not help but chuckle. *What the hell was he, the Director of Vatican Security, supposed to do about these miracles? Stop them from screwing around with the system? Make God cease and desist all such efforts*

to amaze the masses because it wasn't a Vatican initiative created by the Cardinals, and Bishops of the Catholic Church?

Sheehan scrolled down to the last email forwarded to him by Cardinal Canaday. It was sent from one of the super-rich patrons of the Vatican and all things Catholic.

FROM: mdraghi@ecb.eu
TO: cardjcanaday@vatican.com;
frjsheehan@vatican.com;

SUBJECT: Economic Miracles

We have documented eighteen (18) miracles involving the apparent spontaneous generation of immense wealth. All eighteen miracles took place in impoverished human settlements that included refugee camps, shantytowns and ghettos of Third-and-Fourth-World Countries. And all eighteen miracles share one other common element: They all apparently resulted from the public airing of a **YouTube**, art and music video of one Pablo Cordero. Cordero is a self-proclaimed shamanic artist who lives in Brooklyn, New York. The video was produced by Roy Kamen, of Kamen Productions—a New York-based video production and post-production company.

"A shamanic artist," said Sheehan out loud in the gathering darkness. "A shaman that creates enough wealth to threaten the world's bankers, and offers enough cause for faith to make priests useless."

Father Sheehan lit a Cuban cigar and poured himself another three fingers of Meyer's dark rum. He looked out of his office's windows over St. Peter's Square as the first stars began to reflect in the Bernini fountains.

Brooklyn, New York

With a rigor paintbrush held in his muscled left hand Pablo Cordero studied his rendering of the Thunderbolt Mandala. As he studied the mandala's gates and the deities that guarded each entrance to his temple kingdom, Cordero found his breath which had been pooled beneath his naval, at the base of his tantien and ready to form the sacred sounds—the mantra.

With the exception of the one large, track light over the easel and canvas, Cordero's Brooklyn studio was dark. The wooden boards of the old warehouse floor were polished from decades of the blood from over-ripe fruit, and the feet of Dominican workers employed by Pablo's Grandfather, Cerefino.

Pablo was a fit and handsome young man whose family roots were found in Spain and the Dominican Republic. From an early age, Pablo had traveled between the grit of New York and the soft and sensuous Dominican island—all in the pursuit of something of value. He had always been an artist. And he pursued his muse with passion. Pablo tried to capture the colorful flowers and birds of the

Dominican—without containing them—maintaining the magic of their wildness that burned strong and pure.

Then, Cordero's art grew to transcend pigment, canvas, ink and paper. It began to include music and digital images with both magical movement and sacred stillness. As Pablo and his art manifested itself, it was as if the art unlocked vast and hidden doors through which grace would pour, and drown out all of the small and mean of the world. Cordero's art awoke in his audiences the forgetful gods that would, one day, evolve to be truly human beings. His art became magically transcendent, and he trusted in its sometimes impossible manifestation.

Cordero was, at his core, a believer in the spiritual potential of art. He sensed that art was the universal calling of all humankind, and that in one way, shape or form the members of the human species were all artists exercising their creative intent—some with more outward impact than others. He not only believed that humans could create sacred art, he believed humans could more easily evolve as sacred beings through their art. He believed that the act of creation was something we shared with God or the gods, and, in fact, our ability to create defined us as deities of sorts. And Cordero mused at humans as forgetful gods who had largely forgotten that they created and made up nearly everything that was of their own world.

Pablo had not meant to work miracles with his art, but he had not shied away from the possibility. Just two years before, and while teaching an art-therapy seminar to refugees from the violence-ravaged town of Monrovia, Liberia, Pablo discovered how the West African God Plant—Iboga—changed the very DNA of

his art. Iboga was an ethogenic plant that was said to "reset" the brain, and put the adherent on a path full of unparalleled spiritual insight. Pablo felt that Iboga gave him the brain and the consciousness of God. His thoughts, his intent, his actions—even his art became divine. And when he was in the presence of the golden light of God, and shared even the very thoughts of God, it was no wonder that the art Cordero created moved into the realm of something rarely and wonderfully outside of all normalcy.

And when Cordero, fresh from a retreat at a Tibetan Buddhist Monastery, integrated the holy elements of mantra, mudra and mandala into his God-conscious art, things irretrievably changed for the young artist. His introduction of the Trinity of Tantra into his art was as if he had opened a floodgate, and was joyously swept away on currents of impossible magic and possibility. It was then that Cordero's art began to change the world.

Pablo, alone in his Brooklyn studio gazed at the script as it morphed into sutras and mantras that bled into the canvas. In front of his canvas, and lit by the single track light, Pablo began his sacred dance and used his rigor brush like a dorjee as he started to recite the mantras that formed on the canvas. Soon, his brush was gripped in his fist as he performed the ceremonial cuts through human illusion, using the brush like a ceremonial tool. He now shouted the mantra, with the cords and muscles of his neck protruding as he gave a guttural voice to the Sanskrit mantras that wrote themselves on the canvas. Then, the light suddenly exploded and the studio was covered in dark and silence. Pablo Cordero, spent and sweaty, lay on the

floor in the darkness, knowing that somewhere in the world, his sacred art had been personally exhibited by God in a gallery of human despair and poverty.

Cannes, France

The skiff's gunwale kissed the dock of the Martinez Hotel. A two-man crew secured the small craft to the long slip that stretched across the impossibly blue water of the Mediterranean at Cannes—one of the playgrounds of the elite on the Côte d'Azur—the French Riviera.

A smallish and whippet-thin man walked out of the skiff and onto the pier. He was dressed in a white shirt and baggy white pants with a navy blazer. He wore no socks and sported crème canvas deck shoes. The man's face was tanned, which contrasted with his bright, white teeth. His longish hair was thick and perfectly styled. Every square centimeter of the man said, "Wealthy." The man was relatively unknown on the world stage. But, his family line had been European bankers since the Templars formed the first banks in France and Switzerland in the eleventh century. The Euro Banker was excessively wealthy.

The skiff had come from the one-hundred-fifty-meter super yacht, TOPKAPI, anchored three hundred meters offshore of Cannes. The TOPKAPI's superstructure had eight floors of luxury, and boasted a Heli-pad, two swimming pools, tender garages and 6 staterooms.

The Euro Banker sat down in a golf cart that silently motored him to the entrance of the Martinez Hotel which was perched on the Grande Promenade of Cannes. At the door, three large men escorted the

man through the lobby and down one of the richly appointed corridors to a private elevator. Though it was a tight fit, all four men crowded into the elevator.

The banker, surrounded by his entourage of protection professionals, walked across the roof-top bar of the Martinez. In the center of the bar six men and a woman sat in elegance around a table. The table was full of finger food and each of those at the table held a drink. The sun streamed through their glasses of ice and liquor like sun catchers. The table was completely surrounded by security professionals. The banker smiled at those around the table as he sat down on the only remaining empty seat.

Mounted on framing around the table were a half-dozen video monitors. On each monitor there was a streaming video of a video-conferencing participant who was networked into the meeting using Skype or another form of video conferencing. The banker scanned those sitting at the table as well as those with only a video presence—establishing eye contact with each and every one of the conference participants.

“I hope you are well my friends,” said the banker to his wealthy friends. “Thank you for spending time together with us. Since so many of us seemed to be here for the festival, I felt it would serve convenience to have us gather and address our current concern: That is our recent share dilution due to these mysterious infusions of wealth into the global market through the economies of pauper nations.”

“What share do we currently command?” asked the woman—an elegant, albeit gaunt woman who was difficult to age. Her speech was precise and simplistically elegant.

"We have a thirty-five percent share of worldwide equity," responded the banker and apparent leader of this cabal of wealth and power. "That is down from forty percent just two weeks ago."

"So these miraculous appearances of lucre do serve to lessen our share," stated one of the video participants.

"Yes," said the banker. "We've known that trickle down does not distribute wealth to other classes," the banker continued. "But based on recent events, it does appear that trickle up strategies do apparently redistribute wealth across the lower socio-economic strata and into the middle class."

"At a cost to us," said the elegant woman.

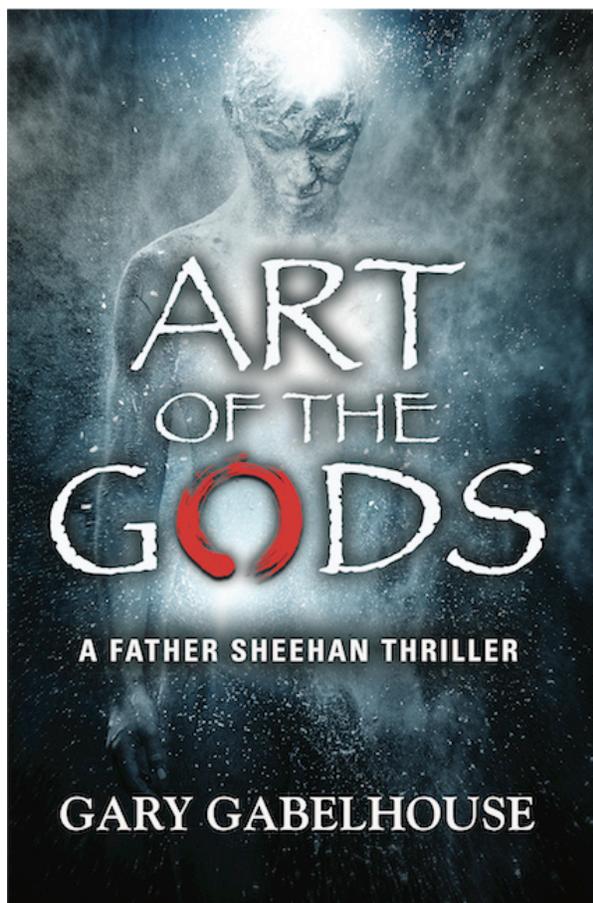
"Yes," said the banker as he smiled thinly. "If wealth is generated and allowed to trickle down from the superrich to the rich and middle class, it does not successfully migrate. Basically, we keep the money."

The wealthy man smiled and then turned down his mouth into an exaggerated frown. The antics drew chuckles that rippled through the conference members. The banker continued his monologue.

"However, when the wealth is introduced from the very lowest of socio-economic strata, it appears to flow upward, and apparently does so with speed."

"Create more wealth for the wealthy, and they hoard it," said a Texas oilman as he sipped at his mimosa. "Create wealth for the poor, and amazingly...they spend it!"

"It appears so," continued the banker. "But by the time the trickle-up wealth finds its way to our companies and enterprises, our share has become almost embarrassingly modest."



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“So, with the steady continuance of this type of market enrichment, we truly become poorer,” said the stately woman.

“And the balance of wealth will dissolve from our hands, and be truly more equitably shared around the world,” the banker finished the thought that was on everyone’s mind. “And eventually, we will not enjoy our elite status and everything that comes with it—as we will no longer be...so elite.”

The Mediterranean sun burned hot on the rooftop of the Martinez, as the planet’s wealthiest people drank cocktails. And as they made their plans to pool more wealth, they looked across the azure waters to the purple shores of North Africa that loomed in all of its squalor and splendor.