



# THE ESSENE HERESY

ROB PARNELL

© Rob Parnell. All rights reserved 2013

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form, graphic, electronic or mechanical without express written permission from R&R Books Film Music.

ISBN: Pending

An **R&R** Production  
PO Box 485 Morphett Vale SA 5162 Australia  
Contact: [info@rnrbooksfilmmusic.com.au](mailto:info@rnrbooksfilmmusic.com.au)

## Chapter One

*Harvard University - Cambridge, Massachusetts - Friday June 13th*

Dusk. Professor Itamar Leibnitz enjoyed this time of day. The bustle of students had thinned as the light on campus dwindled. Itamar was old by Harvard professor standards - way past retirement in any normal occupation. But he enjoyed teaching. He liked the idea of transferring knowledge to the young people who thronged to his lectures on Judean-Hellenistic history. He found comfort, too, in this sprawling American institution after the pressure of deanship at the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. He especially loved the solitude of his private study on the second floor of Sever Hall, in particular after six o' clock, when the Grossman Library closed.

Leibnitz stood at his office window, looked out across the grass quadrangle of Harvard Yard and let loose a sigh of contentment. The sky was pale blue, turning to a soft gray. Peaceful, unlike the war-torn Middle East where bullets and explosions and death were so prevalent. Here, on the grassy concourse below, the tall black oaks and American elm trees were in full bloom. A lone gardener wandered among them, idly spiking leaves and litter, depositing his haul in a large brown sack thrown over his shoulder.

The professor closed the vertical blinds and went back to his workstation.

He should go home, he decided. Much as he'd have preferred to sit there all evening, studying, soaking up the ancient past, the janitors would soon be making their rounds. He felt self-conscious when they arrived, as if he'd overstayed his welcome. His wife would be missing him too. She was used to his long hours of course, but he should get back, to spend time with her. It wasn't too late for a glass of port over dinner on the balcony of their River Street apartment.

One more look at the inscription. Couldn't hurt. Just one.

He hit the space bar on the keyboard and the screen came back to life. On it was a close-up of etched red copper, tool marks so enlarged as to be almost unrecognizable to anyone unskilled in epigraphy. The professor frowned. Was that an oblique left-facing accent? Or merely an accidental slip made by the two thousand year old etcher? The difference was crucial. If the scratch was made in

error, the hieroglyph meant nothing. But, if the marking was deliberate, it denoted something incredible, too fantastic almost to be taken seriously...

The professor's forehead slammed into the keyboard. Pain erupted at the bridge of his nose and a white hot flash exploded behind his eyes. Leibnitz had barely time to recover before being hauled backwards by an unseen hand. The base of his spine hit the carpet. Agony. The professor looked up, unable to fully grasp what he was seeing. A figure, dressed in tight black clothes, stood over him. His attacker's face was obscured by a balaclava.

"The Essene file," the man in black said. "Where is it?"

\*

The CIA field agent stood at the northeast corner of Harvard Yard, considering her options. She was dressed discreetly in a tee-shirt, green hoodie and blue jeans so as not to draw attention to herself. Semi hidden by her shoulder length auburn hair, she wore what looked to a casual observer like a Google Glass, but was in fact a high powered Leica-built mini-scope that displayed a magnified image of the professor's office window. She'd seen the old man looking out a few minutes previously. She wondered how long she should wait to contact him.

She'd be in trouble if she did.

Security briefings recently had made it plain that Harvard University was out of bounds to CIA agents - at least publicly. If anyone spotted her here - and reported her - she'd be on a reprimand and most likely sent back to Langley for re-orientation before she could take a second breath.

Besides which, she wasn't here on official CIA business. This was personal.

*That man can save my daughter's life.*

Special Agent Drake pursed her lips. Ever since she'd read the professor's article in May's edition of *Nature*, she'd vowed she would speak to him. If she was honest with herself, she wasn't sure she completely understood the entire article. Most of it was dense intellectual verbiage that focused on the significance of a recent archeological find in the basement of *Beit Hatfutsot*, the Diaspora Museum in Tel Aviv. But one section of the article, near its end, caught her eye. The professor, an acknowledged expert in Coptic script, had mentioned he'd discovered an inscription that referred to an Essene "*Rite of Resurrection*". It seemed to indicate

that some sort of alchemical potion was used in early Christian rituals designed, as far as he could tell, to bring people back from the dead. Although the professor had downplayed the literal translation, he did wonder whether the rite perhaps referred to some hitherto unknown chemical compound that might have miraculous medicinal benefits.

Drake had immediately thought of her three year old daughter. Diagnosed with chronic myelogenous leukemia a couple months' back, the doctors said her child's prognosis was grim. *Dead within the year*. No known cure. Since then, Drake had looked everywhere for some alternative therapy, something to contradict the experts. She'd tried herbal medicine, faith healers, even positive thinking, but her daughter's condition continued to worsen. Sure, the professor's potion was a long shot. Maybe an impossible long shot. But she wasn't the kind of mother to give up hope, not without exploring every avenue, no matter how tenuous.

The agent frowned. There was sudden movement behind the blinds in the professor's office. Shadows played. Then, someone appeared to be pressed up against the window. Hands scrabbled rapidly at the blinds, which were gripped and then torn from their housing. At that instant, Drake saw there were now two men in the office space. One was the professor, the other a dark ninja-like figure who was beating and roughhousing the old man. In magnified close-up, a silent cry was etched on the professor's alarmed and blood-stained face.

Drake ran. Hard. Halfway across the yard, she bumped into an individual holding a sack that was wrenched from him, spilling leaves and debris in the agent's fevered wake. The man cursed her and automatically she yelled, "CIA," and momentarily wished she hadn't.

She bounded up the steps into the portico and reached the double doors of Sever Hall. Slammed into them. The damn place was locked. She beat on the thick glass with her fists. Peered inside. Dark, no one visible.

"Open up. Open up," she yelled. "For God's sake, hurry!"

\*

The professor's life drained from him. His face felt wet - with blood he guessed. Through increasingly blurred vision he saw his attacker bent over him, breathing hard, pushing a gloved hand into the old man's windpipe. Itamar wished to God he

could have told this man what he wanted to know. But that was impossible. He couldn't risk his wife's life. Dimly it occurred to him that his apartment would be the thug's next port of call. But perhaps by then people would know he had died to protect her - and the wall-safe that contained his most precious files.

"Last chance, old man." The black figure released the professor's throat - just long enough for him to speak.

"I. Don't. Know-" The tight grip returned. Itamar saw a glint and a thin knife appeared as if from nowhere. The attacker held the blade up to the professor's eye. Next, he felt the cold metal press against his throat.

"Your choice," said the assailant.

The professor's grunt of anguish was cut short as the blade swished through flesh and warm blood spilled out across his neck.

Unable to move, Itamar watched the man stand and studiously wipe blood from the knife on the back of his gloved hand. He saw the masked intruder shake his head, as though marveling at the old man's stupidity.

Then, Itamar Leibnitz closed his eyes for the last time.

More - coming soon. For regular thrilling installments of this story go to:

<http://robparnell.blogspot.com>