



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

Prologue

Kalia - The West Bank - Thursday June 12th

The boy shielded his eyes from the midday sun and looked towards the west. He heard the familiar beat of chopper blades before he saw them. Within a few seconds a tiny black speck swept in low across the desert horizon, disturbed sand in its wake.

Living on The West Bank, near the Dead Sea, the boy had grown used to military activity during his short life. Israeli, Palestinian and NATO aircraft made all too regular sorties across the disputed land of his fathers. The boy was not unduly alarmed - at first.

As the helicopter drew closer, unease tightened in the teenager's chest. There were no markings on the matt black exterior. But there were armaments. Rockets, bombs, and what looked like an array of radar and sonar tracking devices with the tell-tale red dots of laser guidance systems. And curiously, the sound of the chopper blades grew muted as the dark hulk approached, as though some method of sonic damping was in use.

As the strange helicopter flew overhead, warm wind ruffled the boy's hair and linen shirt, like dread taking physical form. His thoughts flashed to the priest.

I must warn him, the boy thought.

He ran full pelt across the dry earth toward the kibbutz, his home.

*

Pastor Ibrahim Al-Dawud dozed at his desk. A tattered leather-bound Bible lay in front of him, open at his favorite passage: the resurrection of Lazarus in the Gospel of John. The Jordanian priest had grown tired during his voluntary fast and let his eyes close in the stifling heat of his small brick-lined study.

In his dream he saw the Christ, arms extended, calling to him.

Where have ye laid him?

The pastor opened his mouth to speak but no words came. He could not answer. No way he could lie to his Lord.

Thunder cracked overhead and the white-robed Messiah dissolved.

Ibrahim was jolted awake by an incessant pounding on the church door.

Disoriented, he wheezed as he stood and made toward the sound. He pulled back the carpet that acted as a door to his study and stepped into the chancel. It was dark, despite the bright sun outside. Small windows housed heavy stained glass, barely illuminating the dusty interior. A metal crucifix on the crude altar glinted dully in the half light.

"Father! Father, quickly!"

The voice came from outside and belonged to Hashim, the pastor's thirteen-year-old charge. He sounded upset and out of breath.

"On my way, Hashim," the pastor said, almost to himself.

Ibrahim navigated the twenty pews that represented the church's total capacity and retrieved a key to the double doors from a chain that hung on the wall nearby. The pounding intensified.

"Father!"

"I'm here, Hashim. Don't fret so!"

The pastor hauled open the doors. Sunlight burst through like a flood. The old man squinted at the silhouette of Hashim. Beyond, Ibrahim saw a helicopter hovering above the palm trees about a hundred meters away. Sand and dirt spiraled upwards like some incorporeal phantom. Engines pulsed, whirred.

"Father! They're here!"

Ibrahim wasted no time. He grabbed the boy and tugged him inside the church, quickly pushing the doors closed. Hashim helped him pick up a heavy wooden plank which they slotted into two struts on the doors.

"Come with me," Ibrahim said. "You must help me."

They hurried to the back of the church. Ibrahim stepped behind the altar and lifted a thin cloth that hid a slight depression in the plaster wall.

"Break it," the priest ordered, pointing. "Here!"

The young man knelt in front of the wall and tested the surface with his hands.

"Break it, now!"

Hashim genuflected then balled his fists. Punched. The plaster split and fell away. Ibrahim pulled the boy out of the way and reached inside. An old wooden cask the size of a cinder block came out in the pastor's grasp.

Outside, the helicopter landed in front of the church. Out spilled eight commandos dressed in desert colored fatigues, no insignia. Each wore helmets with mirrored head-up displays, small cameras bolted at eye level. The men held Heckler & Koch M16 assault rifles with M320 portable grenade launchers attached. Two soldiers ran around the back of the building while the rest spread out in a V formation around the church doors, awaiting orders.

Guus Van deHoor stepped out of the chopper. He was tall and wire-frame thin. In his mid-forties. Unlike the others, his head was not helmeted and he wore an incongruous red acrylic jumpsuit that was baggy around the waist and thighs. His shaven head was a mass of pock-marks and livid scars. One ear looked almost melted away to nothing. On the other hung a thin radio mic that extended round to his mouth. He smiled as he took in the surroundings. Gold teeth briefly dominated his face.

DeHoor didn't know what he'd expected - but not this. Hardly a church. More a brick shack with a corrugated tin roof, no doubt hastily constructed by devout Christian locals. The shabby structure was maybe thirty years old, more.

A small crowd of disheveled people had gathered off to the side of the main street, drawn away from their work on the kibbutz to witness the new arrivals.

"Back!" deHoor barked. "Right. Now."

The commandos turned their rifles on the gathering, which retreated. A woman clutched at her child to pull him back - too late. The small boy ran towards the gunmen. A blast of gunfire shredded the boy's body into a mist of blood and ruptured flesh. The woman shrieked as the child dropped to the ground. The crowd scattered, taking the inconsolable mother with them.

"Fucking peasants," deHoor hissed.

The commandos retrained their sights on the church. One of the men glanced at deHoor, who nodded his assent. The soldier then stepped forward to the door and tested it with a gloved hand. He stood clear and fired a dozen rounds into its center. Wood splintered. The soldier tested the door again but it remained shut. He took several paces backwards. The other commandos also retreated, acting on instinct. The soldier inputted data into a small keypad on his wrist then unleashed a grenade from his launcher. The missile punched a small hole through the wood before

exploding, as programmed, on the inside of the church. The doors flew outwards in a storm of dust, broken wood and concrete.

Before the cloud had settled, the soldiers entered the church.

DeHoor waited, listening appreciatively to the sound of cacophonous gunfire, breaking glass and destroyed masonry. In places the walls erupted and broke apart from the onslaught within.

"Halt," deHoor said into his mic. The assault immediately ended. The Dutch Afrikaan sauntered up to the ruined church and stepped through the threshold.

Inside, the place was a mess.

Good. DeHoor hated places like this. Places of worship. Worship of what? Whom? *God? Ridiculous.* There was no god sitting on high. Only the god inside. The one inside deHoor. He was the only one that mattered.

Amongst the debris his troops were overturning rubble, kicking at crumbling brick and clearing what was left of the chairs and the altar. A crucifix lay amidst the plaster, broken in half and bullet-dented. DeHoor made his way through a door to the side of the chancel to the pastor's study. It was empty.

"Status?" deHoor spat into the mic.

"Building clear, sir."

DeHoor pursed his lips. "Target?"

"Negative, sir. Zero personnel, dead or alive."

"The artifact?" Static crackled in deHoor's earpiece for two, three, four seconds. "Well?"

"Negative, sir."

Anger flared in the commander's throat. He turned to leave.

"Raze the fucking place," he whispered.

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

<http://robparnell.blogspot.com>