

The Emerald Tablet



Peter Salmon

Was he one or many, merging
Name and fame in one,
Like a stream, to which, converging,
Many streamlets run?

Who shall call his dream fallacious?
Who has searched or sought
All the unexplored and spacious
Universe of thought?

Who in his own skill confiding,
Shall with rule and line
Mark the border-land dividing
Human and divine?

Trismegistus! Three times greatest!
How thy name sublime
Has descended to this latest
Progeny to time!

~~Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth: Hermes Trismegistus, 1882.

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by Peter Salmon

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ISBN: 978-0-9889416-0-1

Cover art by: Judy Bullard <http://www.customebookcovers.com/>

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Acknowledgements

Nothing is done in a vacuum, and this novel certainly was not. I wish to thank my wife, Yip, for her continuous belief in me and my work. This labor of love could not have happened without her support and encouragement. I wish to also thank our son, Jonathan, for constantly asking how the book was doing, helpful suggestions, and his humor. I want to extend my sincere appreciation to you, my reader, for opening up your mind to possibilities and taking this journey with me.

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Prologue

Several months earlier...

Señor Alejo de Montoya de la Hoya's footsteps thudded softly on the large, hand-woven carpet that covered one-third of his office. The muscles of his jaw flexed and relaxed rhythmically with his footsteps. What was left of the cigar in his mouth, all but forgotten, had quickly become a wet paste.

His head shook side-to-side as his tread took him yet again between the massive teak desk and the floor-to-ceiling window that looked out over the Parque del Retiro in the city he called home. Weak sunlight glinted off the Palacio de Cristal beside La Rosaleda, whose last blooms had long since fallen and were but a fond memory.

The desk faced the rest of the one hundred square meter office. Against the right-hand wall was a long, hand-made credenza from the early 1500s, purportedly from the castle owned by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. A statuette of Athena, pulled from an underwater archeological site and still encrusted with several barnacles, adorned the

highly polished top of the sideboard.

Beside the credenza a door cunningly blended into the wood paneling so as to be almost invisible, behind which was a lavatory and water closet. In the lavatory another door led to a short passageway and a private elevator that either rose to the roof or descended to a secure garage.

Ten-foot-tall, hand-made mahogany bookshelves on the other side of the disguised door supported diverse literature in first-edition volumes from across Europe and a few from the Americas, bronze statuettes from around the Mediterranean, and two small busts. On a desk-like section of the bookshelf a locked glass case were displayed ancient bronze, copper, silver and gold coins from the Middle East, Greece and Rome.

De la Hoya strode around a plush chaise lounge and mahogany end table from the early 1830s, jaws working on the remnants of the cigar. He stopped and glanced at the office door and ran a hand through once dark hair, now liberally sprinkled with grey. No one had come through the tall, thick door since late morning, yet his dark brown eyes seemed to try to discern who might be on the other side. The expanse of glossy hardwood floor that ran from under the carpet to the door was free of furniture save a wall table that held a vase of fresh-cut flowers and another bust that sported a fashionable hat at a jaunty angle.

On the left wall hung oil paintings from Monet, Cezanne, Manet, Vermeer, and Degas sealed in thick glass cases. De la Hoya did not worry about theft of the artwork worth tens of millions of Euros; temperature and motion sensors discretely embedded in the walls, floor and ceiling provided piece of mind. The thick glass surrounding the paintings was bullet-proof and prevented all ultraviolet light from touching the masters' works.

A counter ran a good length of the wall. A wet bar with a variety of alcohol, liqueurs and wine from around Europe lined the back of the bar. A cut crystal decanter half-filled with twenty-year-old port caught his eye. No, it was too early in the day, even for him, to imbibe. Besides, a clear mind was needed to deal with the news.

Señor de la Hoya's footsteps halted behind the desk as the antique, hand-made cuckoo clock chimed the hour. He took a deep breath and sat in the plush Corinthian leather chair.

Running his hands once again through his hair de la Hoya picked up the phone, pressed a button on the side of the cradle and punched a series of numbers on the keypad.

He paused, listening for a subtle tone, and then punched another series of buttons.

* * *

Sir David Nye rushed into his home office and quickly shut the thick oaken door. The old, scarred desk, handed down from generation to generation since the time of the first Queen Elizabeth was across the expanse of creaky hardwood floors and Pakistani rugs from well before the Crimean War. A dim light on the desk showed a blotter, an inscribed gold pen and pencil set, and a phone. The patter of cold rain on the window made him shiver a little as he picked up the phone on his desk on the fourth ring. "Yes?"

"We have a problem," said a voice in Spanish-accented English.

"One moment," Sir David said and pressed a button on the side of the cradle. "All right, old boy, go ahead."

"It's Samuel Goldwyn. He has found ancient scrolls and manuscripts that relate to our search for the Power."

"What are the details?"

"According to my sources, Goldwyn has found evidence of the Emerald Tablet on a dig on the Sinai Peninsula. He is about to set off on a search for its whereabouts."

"How much does he know?"

"As of yet, that is unknown. He is knowledgeable in ancient Egyptian and Coptic history and culture, and universities around the world use his published books on those ancient societies."

"If he finds what we have been searching centuries for, its Power will be lost to us."

"The Tablet has been lost to mankind for a least two millennia, probably four or five. The League has been searching for it since before the Renaissance, scrutinizing catacombs, libraries, ancient sites, every conceivable place and even the Vatican Library to no avail. It may be time for a fresh set of ideas and a new pair of eyes to see what we might have missed."

"Do you really think Goldwyn will find it?"

"I have been pondering that. My sources say that his research into other artifacts has proven fruitful. He has the background and knowledge to piece things together. Perhaps

he will. And perhaps he may need some incentive to help him find it.”

“Help Goldwyn find the Emerald Tablet? Are you mad?”

“I said nothing about letting him keep it, señor. If he has novel ideas of where it can be, and if he has motivation to find it, it could be that he will lead us to the Tablet. And, its unlimited power.”

“Hmmm. You may have something there, de la Hoya. What do you have in mind?”

“I have been working on a way that might provide impetus for his quest. There are resources we can use who would not want the Tablet to fall into others’ hands. Especially, if we let them know it will come into infidel hands. If I alert them and let Goldwyn know that people are watching him, it could provide the motivation for him to see this through.”

“That is good, old boy. I’ll tell the Council about these events. Keep me informed.”

Several days ago...

Sir David sat behind the old, scarred desk reviewing a sheaf of papers in front of him. He made a note in the margin of the page he held, and then placed it on top of one of the five separate piles on the desktop. The phone rang as he picked up another sheet of paper. He lifted the receiver and said, “Yes?”

A voice in Spanish-accented English said, “Are we secure?”

“One moment.” Sir David pressed a button beside the cradle and then said, “Go ahead.”

“Goldwyn is getting close. I think he is on to something.”

“What can be done?”

“He can either be stopped or followed. I have plans for both.”

“If this secret that has eluded us for nearly a millennia is close to being discovered, I think you were right. We can use this fresh perspective to achieve our ends.”

“That is my thinking, señor,” the Spanish accent went flat. “We can let him do all the hard work, and then take the Tablet from him once it’s found. Then, no power on Earth can stop us.”

“Contact our friends across the pond, and have them monitor communications. Tell them we’ll need their eyes in the skies.”

“I took the liberty of alerting them a few weeks ago that we would need their resources.”

“Yes, I know.”

De la Hoya hesitated. “I will send a package to our Egyptian friends with just enough details to alarm them. We have contacts in the mukhabarat who can ensure that this receives the right attention.”

“Good. The Egyptian secret police have always been useful. Let’s shake the trees and see what falls out, eh, old boy? The Council will be glad to hear the news.”

* * *

General Tarek el-Shenawy of the Egyptian Central Security Forces, the so-called mukhabarat or secret police, sat at his desk in a government office building not far from Tahrir Square. The mukhabarat were no more secret than the MI5 in Great Britain or FBI in America. They were simply less controlled by politicians, although still used by them. Generally, the mukhabarat were used to help those in power stay in power and restrict political factions’ influence to get their message to the people. At times it had proven to be an uneasy marriage, but relatively stable.

The so-called “Arab Spring” had led to a “divorce” of sorts with the old regime, with consolidation of power of the mukhabarat along the Nile River from Alexandria to Cairo and past the Aswan Dam, with el-Shenawy near the top. He had resisted rising to the top, because he could wield power easily enough from his current position. As long as those above were dependent on him supplying information, he was secure. Besides, it was easier to amass money without undue scrutiny from the international community in the position he occupied, and to stay below the level where heads could get lopped off.

Those in power were happy if they got their cut without doing any of the work, and it was the work that he did controlling not only the political parties, but keeping the country safe from the undue influence of the Zionists and Europeans. The uprising released pressure from within the country, even though in the ensuing months life got harder for the common people. The country was still stable, thanks to the first democratic elections in decades, and as long as the populous did not feel that their lives were getting much worse and there was promise of it getting better, he could keep getting richer. If political unrest once again became a problem, he could simply support those who were the rising power. If

those in power sought his head, he could retire to one of his villas, either in Europe or the Caribbean.

El-Shenawy looked at the paperboard envelope on his desk, pregnant with papers. A call on his personal mobile number immediately after breakfast alerted him to the impending delivery of the packet. Again, el-Shenawy wondered how the person with Spanish-accented English knew his personal number. He would have it changed this morning.

Ripping open the envelope, el-Shenawy dumped the contents on the desk. A photograph slipped to the side, and he picked it up. A man looking to the left of the photographer was captured in the harsh shadows of a wide-brimmed hat. Tufts of white hair spilled out over his ears and collar. El-Shenawy felt something on the back of the photograph and turned it over.

A self-stick label read:

SAMUEL GOLDWYN
PROFESSOR OF ARCHEOLOGY
SINAI DESERT, THREE MONTHS AGO

El-Shenawy looked at the top piece of paper in the stack. It was addressed to him. His eyes scanned the words written in English. As he read, his mouth slowly gaped.

INFORMATION CRITICAL TO THE ISLAMIC WORLD IS BEING UNCOVERED.

UNIMAGINABLE POWER IS ABOUT TO BE DISCOVERED BY A ZIONIST.

His eyes slowed down.

BY THE WILL OF ALLAH, THE INFIDELS CANNOT BE ALLOWED TO OBTAIN THIS
POWER OR ALL WILL BE LOST.

El-Shenawy shuffled through the packet of papers. There were notes and pictures of artifacts and an archeological dig in the desert. He noticed one page had a section circled in red ink. A name was underlined twice: Hermes Trismegistus. Hermes, thrice great. What could anyone want with Thoth, the ibis-headed god of ancient Egypt?

Another two words seemingly leapt off the page: EMERALD TABLET.

El-Shenawy wondered what the hell the Emerald Tablet was. An ancient Egyptian artifact from the middle dynasties? The early dynasties? It didn't matter. If the infidels wanted it, it was enough for el-Shenawy to deny them it.

He rubbed his chin; the short whiskers abraded his palm. Running fingers over his large moustache, he pondered a moment.

He punched a button on the interoffice intercom.

“Yes, sir,” a female voice said.

“Tell Major Mohammad I want him in my office now.”

“Yes, sir. May I tell him why?”

“No. Tell him I want him here now.”

“Yes, sir.”

“And, get me the head of the Department of Antiquities. Tell him to come here immediately. When he arrives, show him right in.”

“Yes, sir.”

Now to find out what was so special about an emerald-colored tablet.

Chapter 1

An intermittent electronic buzz from far away intruded on the nothingness Andrew Coulter felt. A word formed in his mind: *apocalypse*. Andrew got the *feeling* that it was something he should pay attention to. Once again, the intermittent electronic buzz sounded—louder this time.

Taking a deep breath in, Andrew stretched his arms, shoulders and torso. Opening his eyes, he realized that he had been in very deep meditation. The word, *apocalypse*, bubbled to the surface of his thoughts. The ancient meaning of the word, or the current meaning of the word, Andrew pondered.

Unwrapping his legs from the position they were in, the electronic buzz of his mobile phone across the room once again sounded.

Andrew stretched his legs out in front of him, rotating his feet and wiggling his toes to encourage circulation. The sky to the east was light as he stood and bent over, stretching his back and hamstring tendons. He remembered lighting incense and starting the long series of meditation music tracks on his MP3 player a couple hours after his late dinner, and then settling in for meditation. He went very deeply into the meditative state, and easily found the “place” where thoughts did not intrude and waited. Although conscious in meditation, Andrew felt like he’d had a full night’s sleep.

The phone played a different tone, letting him know he had missed a call. He jumped up and down on the balls of his feet, and swung and shook his arms.

The mobile phone rang again. Andrew picked it up and looked at the screen. RESTRICTED NUMBER.

“Yes?”

“Is this Andrew Coulter?” a throaty, smooth female voice asked.

“Who is this?” Andrew guessed the woman’s age in her fifties. She had a deep, cultured voice, almost silky in tone. He rubbed his stomach as it growled.

“This is someone who has news for you and would like your opinion.”

“I don’t watch the news, and any fool can give an opinion.”

“Your advice, then.”

“I make it a practice to never give advice.”

“Even when it concerns a friend of yours? Sam Goldwyn and what he’s looking for?”

Andrew hesitated. He had gotten an email from Sam two nights before about information Sam had found regarding the *Tabula Smaragdina*—the Emerald Tablet, the ancient codex of the Egyptian god, Thoth. Andrew was familiar with the legend, where Thoth handed down to humans the knowledge of the gods inscribed on a green tablet.

“What about Sam?”

“I’d rather talk in person. I’ll have a car pick you up in thirty minutes.”

“I’m not getting into any car other than my own. What do you know about Sam?”

“Just that he’s in danger and needs our help. Your help.”

“That’s horseshit, lady. I don’t know you, you call me up with some mysterious BS about someone I may or may not know, and then you want me to blindly get into a car heading...where? I’m not going anywhere.”

“Really, Mr. Coulter, I could tell you all you want to know, but it’s better if it’s done in person.”

Andrew pressed the End button and tossed the mobile phone on the counter. He rubbed his face with both hands, ran his fingers through his short, curly hair and massaged his head with his fingertips. He opened the refrigerator door, peeled back the foil lid of a yogurt container and started eating. The phone rang. Looking at the display, it read, RESTRICTED NUMBER. Andrew pressed the End button, cutting off the call.

Cutting open two oranges, Andrew rubbed the halves over the ribs of a manual juicer. As he poured the juice into a glass, the phone rang again. This time the calling number was shown; a Washington, D.C. area code.

Andrew pressed the Send button. "What?"

"I understand your skepticism, Mr. Coulter. I would be skeptical, too. However, we do not have the luxury of long explanations. Especially over the phone. Now, your friend, Sam, is looking for a book. Green in color, I take it."

"Okay, I'll play along. So, let's just say he's looking for the Emera..."

"Please, Mr. Coulter," she said hurriedly. "Not over the phone."

"Okay, so it's cloak-and-dagger time. Fine," Andrew said as he took a sip from his glass. "Let's just say he's looking for a book in the color that you don't want me to say. Why are you so interested?"

"Because others are interested in what he's looking for. Bad people. And, if Sam does find it, they'll take it from him."

"So, Sam just gives it to them."

"They will leave him dead for his troubles. I said, these are bad people. Very bad people, Andrew. May I call you Andrew?"

"Sure," Andrew said, his mind going over what the woman said. "How do I know that you aren't one of those 'bad people'?"

A low chuckle. "You don't. I can only show you. Will you at least meet me?"

Andrew hesitated. "All right. Tell me where you are, and I'll come to you. As long as it's somewhere public."

Andrew wrote down an address. "It will take me forty-five minutes to get there."

* * *

The address Andrew had written down was in a complex of buildings in downtown Washington, D.C. that were immediately recognizable. The hour being early on a Sunday, he parked on the street across from the set of buildings that made up the Metropolitan Museum, one of the dozens of museums in the city. Although not as famous as the Smithsonian, the Metropolitan Museum offered exhibits from ancient cultures around the

world in a unique way that wondrous visitors from man's earliest known civilizations through the Renaissance, relaying current known information and prompting questions about Man's past civilizations, leaving open the possibility of undiscovered insights—particularly in the ancient Middle East, the so-called Cradle of Civilization.

As Andrew crossed the street, a man emerged from between two buildings and waited for Andrew to reach the sidewalk. As Andrew's foot touched the curb, the man said, "Mr. Coulter? I'm Roland LaVoie. Right this way, please."

Andrew looked at the man and shook the proffered hand. The grip was tight, and Andrew had the feeling that the man could crush the bones in his hand if he tried. In his mid- to late-forties, Roland LaVoie was not a tall man so much as he had a big presence, and he moved with a fluidity Andrew couldn't place. The tailored, buttoned suit coat fell flat from his chest to hips, and as Roland led the way between the buildings with mirrored windows, Andrew noticed his coat back was as flat as the proverbial board. Andrew also noted that Roland's left arm was a little farther out from his body than his right.

He looked around, and Andrew was comforted that he saw a few people in the plaza between the buildings. Andrew looked at the reflection of he and Roland LaVoie walking past one of the buildings. Andrew's dark, curly hair was a little long for what was fashionable, but that did not bother him. His shirt beneath a brown wool blazer ran flat from his chest to waist, the result of changing his lifestyle several years before; exercising at least four times a week and eating very little processed food. The mirrored windows did not accurately show his somewhat broad, flat nose and perpetually tanned complexion as they rounded the corner.

On the other side of the plaza Roland walked up the granite stairs to the Museum of Archeology. As they passed through the glass doors, a man handed Roland a pass. He handed it to Andrew as they bypassed the turnstiles at the entrance to the main gallery and went to a heavy door to the right.

Roland swiped his own card and the heavy door opened.

"Swipe your card, too, please, Mr. Coulter. We swipe in and out."

Andrew swiped his card and followed Roland into a passageway that took a ninety-degree left turn. They passed several unmarked doors and came to a small elevator bank.

Roland pressed the only button, and waited. No indicator lights were above the

elevator doors, but relatively quickly, a muted bell announced the arrival of the car.

Inside, Roland swiped his card and pressed the bottom button. Several short, muted buzzes later, the elevator doors opened and they stepped out into a fluorescent-lit corridor. The smell of old and ancient hung in the air as they walked half way down the corridor and Roland opened a door on the left.

The conversation that was going on immediately stopped, and the occupants of the room around a wooden, oval conference table turned to look at the newcomers.

“Ah, Andrew! Welcome. Please, take a seat,” a woman with a voice that was throaty and smooth said. She had immaculately coiffured silver hair complemented by a dark silk blouse and a thick gold necklace that lay flat against the smooth skin of her neck. Andrew sat in an ergonomically correct chair that matched the others around the teak conference table.

The woman’s face was well-known, as anyone aware of arts in America or familiar with society magazines would likely recognize her. Sharon Messer, wife of the late Aaron Messer, the iron-fisted ruler of Messer Holdings, a conglomerate of businesses across America, Europe and Asia, including China. Turning toward philanthropy in his final years, he and Sharon had built a dozen schools of archeology across the U.S. and Europe, funding excavations and re-excavations at ancient sites, primarily around the Mediterranean Sea and elsewhere in the Middle East. Sharon was now Chairman of the Board at Messer Holdings and for the Metropolitan Museum.

“We were just discussing the Emerald Tablet and what its find might mean for humanity.”

Andrew looked at the others around the table, not recognizing them by sight.

“Let’s make introductions, first of all. Andrew Coulter, this is Gina Ramirez, Professor of Ancient Egyptian Studies at University of California at Berkeley,” Sharon indicated the swarthy woman at one end of the oval table. Andrew saw the large ringlets of her black hair were pulled back by some device hidden in the dark tresses. Her large brown eyes did not smile as she nodded an acknowledgement.

“Ah, the woman who brought to light much of what is known of the culture and civilization of Upper Egypt in the early dynasties,” Andrew said.

“So, you’ve read my work.”

“A pivotal piece in our understanding of that ancient people. I have had the opportunity to read it in recent research that I’ve done.”

The Sharon pointed to a man of Arabic descent. “This is Ahmad Scruggs, head of Near Eastern Archeology at the Messer School of Anthropology and Archeology in Chicago.” The slender build of the man belied the stories printed of the person who stood up to—and apparently backed down—the powerful Director of Antiquities in Egypt when it came to excavating recent finds in the Mediterranean Sea off of northern Egypt. He had developed new, untried methods of preservation that proved to work better than previous methods.

“Are you the man who brought up the latest finds in Alexandria Harbor?”

“Yes, I had a hand in that.”

“Don’t be modest, Ahmad,” Sharon woman said. “If not for you, half the find would have been ruined before ever leaving the water.”

“And this is Alisha Kay, lead archeologist at U.C. Berkeley’s Ancient History and Mediterranean Archeology School in the Near Eastern Studies department.”

The dusky-skinned woman swung her chair around, her enlarged belly pointing at Andrew, nodded her head and smiled. “I’ve read your work, Mr. Coulter. Impressive the way you weave the daily life of people into the myths and legends you describe in your books. Quite accurate on most accounts.”

“Thank you, Ms. Kay. What is your specialty?”

“I specialize in civilizations from Uruk through Babylonian time periods. The gods, tales, and stories from those eras have parallels in the Egyptian pantheon and myths. They are connected, although most people don’t think commerce and migration happened between those civilizations on the scale I believe they did. Evidence is coming to light that there was greater trade and interaction than is currently acknowledged.”

“Andrew, what is your specialty, outside of writing novels about ancient societies?” Ahmad asked.

Andrew hesitated. Really, why was he here?

“Andrew is here,” Sharon said, “because he has broad-based knowledge that spans all your specialties. And, he brings unique talents to this group.”

“What talents are those?” Alisha asked.

“Talents that, shall I say, enable him to perceive what most people miss,” Sharon said.

“Now, back to the matter at hand. Before you came in, Andrew, we were discussing what is known about the Emerald Tablet.”

Gina said, “I was saying that emeralds don’t grow big enough to form a tablet. The largest known emerald is less than five inches in diameter. Hardly a tablet.”

Ahmad said, “Egyptians used the word ‘emerald’ for not only emeralds, but green granites and green jasper, too. But, I’d never heard of the Emerald Tablet before today. What is it?”

“Is it something like a magic stone that conjures up the dead or stops the Earth from rotating?” Gina asked.

Sharon turned to Andrew. “Would you care to elaborate on what you know about the Tablet?”

“The *Tabula Smaragdina*. The Emerald Tablet. What is known about the Tablet is based on superstition or folklore that has changed as time went on through six or seven thousand years. The Egyptian god Thoth, or as the Greeks called him, Hermes Trismegistus, was said to have handed a Tablet of wisdom to humans.”

“Hermes Trismegistus,” Alisha said. “Hermes Thrice Great.”

“Exactly. The Tablet was alleged to contain the wisdom of the gods, magical formulas that ancient alchemists thought contained knowledge of how to turn base material, or metal, into gold. Over the centuries, alchemists were required to write down the words of the Tablet and come up with their own interpretations of what it said.”

“So, the ancient alchemists had the Tablet,” Gina said.

“No, as far as I know the Tablet hasn’t been seen in well over two thousand years, more likely three thousand. They used previous translations.”

“Then, how could they ever work with a translation of a translation of a translation?” Ahmad asked. “They would be compounding mistakes. They’d never be able to discern a baseline and work from that known quantity.”

“That was part of the problem the alchemists faced. There are three major translations that are accepted as being close to the actual words on the Tablet: the Beatro translation, the Newton translation, and the Arabic translation.”

“Okay, so what is on the Tablet?” Alisha asked. “Is it supposed to grant its holder unlimited power or something like that?”

“No one knows for sure,” Andrew replied. “Legend says that the Tablet would grant unlimited power, but what does that mean? The best you can hope for is to guess what any one of the translations is saying.”

“So, if the Tablet grants its holder unlimited power, how does it do that?” Sharon asked.

“I’m not convinced that the Tablet itself had the ability to grant power. There has never been a talisman, charm, or any other item documented that grants its holder power—magical or otherwise. Those are only in children’s stories to show that ‘magic’ is something outside of themselves.”

“Then, what is it? Does it really tell how to gain unlimited power?” Alisha asked.

“Unlimited power? I don’t know about that,” Andrew said. “I don’t even know what that means.”

“And, how would a person gain this power?” Ahmad asked.

“I don’t know,” Andrew said. “If the Tablet does say how, it’s probably through the old fashioned way—through actual effort or exertion, and practice.”

“And, what would that get us?” Ahmad asked.

“I don’t know. Maybe our own personal power, something like changing our consciousness, raising it well above the low level that is all around us to the extent that so-called miracles are performed with only thought.”

“Now that sounds like a children’s story,” Gina says. “Wish and it’ll come true.”

“No, wishing and praying are in the same category,” Andrew replied. “This is something much different. It is what praying used to be eons ago before it was corrupted by indifference and misperception. The ancients believed that it’s connecting to an energy source or Power that flows through the entire physical world, and through everybody. Not only that, humans could, with practice, control that power. Very similar to what the teacher Iesous did when he was a boy working with his father.”

“Iesous?” Alisha asked.

“Jesus,” Ahmad said. “Iesous is the Greek pronunciation. You’ll also see it sometimes as ‘Ioshua’.”

“Iesous’ father, Ioseph, was commissioned to build a bed. A board was cut to the wrong length and Ioseph was going to cut down another tree to make a board of the proper

length. Iesous, by connecting to this Power or Universal Energy, manifested growth in the board to the correct length.”

“That story is bullshit,” Gina said. “That’s not in the Bible. I *know* the Bible.”

“That’s right, it isn’t in the bible. It’s in a different text called the *Gospel of Thomas*, which has different information about Iesous not found in the ‘canonized’ religious texts found throughout the world.”

“Okay, so where is the Tablet?” Alisha asked.

“If we knew that,” Sharon said, “we wouldn’t be here having this discussion. That is what I want to talk to all of you about. Finding the Emerald Tablet before someone else does. And, there are others looking for it. If they get it and the power that it’s purported to have, God help humanity, because they won’t.”

“How do you know all this, Mrs. Messer?” Alisha asked.

“And, who are these other people you keep talking about?” Gina asked.

Sharon Messer pursed her lips and brought her hand up to her mouth. Andrew raised an eyebrow at her gesture.

She sighed. “I’m talking about an organization whose members are very prominent in banking and finance, government, oil and energy, military contractors and international conglomerates. They have the money, power and will to find the Tablet or take it from whoever does find it.”

“Who or what is this organization? And, if they are so knowledgeable and powerful, why haven’t they found it already?” asked Gina.

“There are some things that even they cannot find, and the Tablet is one of them. But, they are following someone who has a good chance of finding it. His name is Samuel Goldwyn.”

Andrew straightened in his chair and looked at Sharon with an intent gaze. He had forgotten his original reason for being here.

“I met him many years ago,” Alisha said. “It was at a dig in Uruk. Likeable guy. Very knowledgeable.”

“Yes,” Sharon said, “and at an archeological dig on the Sinai Peninsula earlier this year he found something that led him to believe that the Emerald Tablet is extant. Since that time he has been following up leads and it may be that he is close to finding it. However, he

may not know there are others interested in his quest, and that he's in danger. He needs help and we need to give it to him."

Andrew's eyebrows came together, creating a furrow above his nose. How could Sam be in danger? From who, or what?

Ahmad said, "Do you know where he is?"

Sharon replied, "Cairo, Egypt, last I knew. Is that where he is, Andrew?"

Andrew's head snapped up. "And, you're asking me this, why?"

"I was told that two days ago he sent you an email and that it originated from Cairo."

Andrew looked at her. "I feel like I was trapped, Sharon, like I was ambushed. I don't like it."

"Like it or not, if we are to find the Tablet, and save Sam, we all need to know everything, share all knowledge."

The muscles in Andrew's jaw bunched and jumped. "Yes, I got an email from him a couple of days ago. It was cryptic, and he said that he'd found evidence of what he had been looking for. He needed verification in a codex that had been found near Farshut in the mid-1940s."

"Where is Farshut?" Alisha asked.

"Near Nag Hammadi, in Egypt," Ahmad said. "He's talking about the *Nag Hammadi Library*. The Library, or NHL as it's called, was found by a peasant in the Nag Hammadi area of Nile River Valley. There were many documents found there..."

"Thirteen codices in fifty-two manuscripts," Andrew said.

"Yes, and many of them blasphemous and heretical."

"They were standard teachings of their day. The only reason those codices are deemed heretical is because they clashed with the teachings of four of the thirteen gospels in what became the bible of the so-called 'orthodox church' and the Qur'an of Islam. Leaders of both religions don't want this information in the public domain because in many ways these documents directly confront both religions' teachings and go far beyond what the editors of the bible and Qur'an want people to know."

"Look, Andrew," Ahmad said. "Muslims believe that the Qur'an is the literal word of God. What came before is fine for other religions, but don't disparage the Qur'an."

Alisha said, "And, the Church's teachings are the true teachings of Christ."

“According to the church and leaders of other religions, who have controlled and shaped the information in their literature over the past fourteen hundred, two thousand years of evolving ‘tradition.’ Look at it from the so-called ‘Gnostic’s’ viewpoint. Gnostic teachings were much more robust and encompassing than what ended up in the New Testament and the Qur’an. The origin of the Universe; the soul; the Mother-Father, Spirit, and son; how Man came about; Man’s divinity; the forgetfulness of Man; and much more. And, how Man can break loose from the shackles of ignorance and forgetfulness and return to the realm of the Divine.”

“Where do you come up with this stuff?” Alisha asked. “If not for the Church and Jesus Christ, heathen man would have gone down the path to hell.”

“If that’s what you want to believe,” Andrew replied.

“All right,” Sharon interjected. “Let’s get back on track here.”

Alisha wasn’t finished. “I believe it because that’s what the Bible says.”

“Hmmm. Which one of the twenty-three different versions of the Bible is that?” Andrew asked.

Alisha slammed her notebook down on the table. “It doesn’t matter! Pick one!”

“All right, I said!” Sharon’s raised voice rebounded off the hard walls. “Enough! You can continue this later. We are here to find the Emerald Tablet. We cannot start arguing amongst ourselves.” She looked around. Alisha was vigorously rubbing her enlarged belly, a scowl hard enough to cut glass aimed at Andrew. Andrew sat with a serene expression on his face.

“Now, we need to leave today to get to Egypt and find the Tablet first. Or, find Sam and help him find it.”

“I can’t travel by air for extended periods,” Alisha said. “Late third trimester.”

“I can go, sweetie,” Gina said. “Just keep your cell phone handy in case I need your help. Or, in case you need me.”

“You can count me out,” Andrew said. “I have a deadline of Friday for my next book, and am in the final stages of edits. Besides, I don’t know if Sam really is in danger, or if he’s even still in Cairo.”

“How can you just leave your friend hanging out in the air like that?” Sharon asked, incredulously.

"I only have your word for this alleged danger, and you have your own agenda."

"How can you say that?" Sharon asked.

"It's oozing out of you. I can smell it, I don't know what it is, and I don't care. I have work to do. Good luck on this quest of yours."

Andrew turned in his chair, and rose to leave. Roland stood by the door, arms crossed. Andrew looked at him, and he at Andrew, solid and as unmoving as a block of granite.

"Roland, please escort Mr. Coulter back to the museum entrance."

Roland nodded, and opened the door. As he left, Andrew heard the others get up from the table.

"Oof! She's kicking again," Alisha said as she pushed herself back from the table.

"*He's* kicking again, thank you," Gina said.

"You know it's going to be a girl, Gina," Alisha said.

"Not if I have any say in it."

"You don't. Now, help me up."

Chapter 2

In his apartment Andrew put a pot of water on the stove top to boil, and then powered up his computer. He opened up a browser and logged on to his email. An email from Sam was in his inbox. Clicking the link, he read:

ANDREW,

FOUND SOMETHING INTERESTING, COPTICALLY SPEAKING. REREAD THE NHL AND DISCOVERED NEW EVIDENCE OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT'S POSSIBLE CONNECTION TO THE ET. GOING TO CHASE IT DOWN—ALL THE WAY TO THE LIBYAN DESERT, IF NEED BE. CALL ME IF YOU GET THIS BEFORE 8PM CAIRO TIME (7 HRS DIFFERENCE, I BELIEVE). +20 12 667 8989.

~S

Andrew looked at the clock on the wall: 12:43 in the afternoon. He still might catch Sam.

The number rang several times; a breathless voice hoarsely squawked . "Yes?"

"Sam, it's me."

"Andrew, my boy, you got my message. Good! I was just leaving the hotel."

“Listen, Sam. I just had a meeting with Sharon Messer and several other people. They know you’re going after the Tablet.”

“Messer, eh? How would she know that? Not too surprised, though.”

“Sam, this is getting dangerous. She says that there are other people looking to get their hands on it—and they’ll do anything to get it. Give this up.”

“Yes, I know. I’ve been told about others looking for me. Andrew, my boy, you know I can’t let this go. Ever since our first discussion on this subject, you’ve known my thoughts.”

“Yes, that it real, that it was used by early Egyptians to create a path to everlasting life.”

“More than that, my boy. The way to enlightenment and the kind of power that the Christ evidenced. I found a piece of vellum at a dig on the Sinai that told of Alexander carrying away the Tablet from the Libyan Desert. In Codex XIII I found something interesting.”

“Sam, the contents of the *Nag Hammadi Library* are well known, and have been public since the mid-seventies. There’s nothing there that scholars have not already discovered—including the *Gospel of Thomas*.”

“Except for a faint notation in the lower margin of one page of the ‘*Trimorphic Protennoia*’ that has been bothering me. It looks like it might have been rubbed out, and must be a clue. I’m going back to read it again and then follow in Alexander’s footsteps.”

“Uh-oh.”

“What is it, Sam?” Andrew heard a loud noise and shouting in the background.

“Gotta go, my boy.”

“Sam! Wait! Sam? Sam!”

Andrew looked at the face of the mobile phone. CALL ENDED blinked on the glass face.

Andrew’s lips drew downward and his eyebrows did their best to meld into one brow, but only managed a deep furrow above the bridge of his nose.

Andrew went back over the conversation in his mind. *Going back to read the Nag Hammadi Library again.* There must be something on the actual pages that one wouldn’t find on-line. Following in Alexander’s footsteps. To where? The Libyan Desert? Alexander never went to Libya, as far as he knew.

His mobile phone rang. Andrew snatched it up. “Sam?”

“No, this is Erik. You know, Erik, your editor? The person you were supposed to get

your manuscript to by Friday?"

"Oh, uh, hi, Erik. I thought you were someone else."

"Uh-huh. You must have friends in high places. I just got a call from Hubert Radke. It looks like you have another month to get the manuscript done and sent in."

"What? What are you talking about?"

"Oh, come on, Andrew. Don't play coy with me. You somehow got one of your powerful friends to call Radke and get an extension on your deadline. I'm disappointed in you."

"What the hell are you babbling on about, Erik? I didn't call anyone."

"Uh-huh. The least you could've done is ask me. I would've gone to bat for you, talked to Radke about an extension. But, no, you had to go over my head."

Andrew brought his hand up to his head. "Messer. Shit."

"Who's that?"

"Sharon Messer. Damn it! She's the one who called. She wants me to go with her and consult on something."

"Well, it looks like you now have the time for it."

"I told her 'no,' Erik."

"So, you didn't go over my head?"

"Think, Erik. Have I done that before?"

"No, I guess not. Well you gotta admit that it's an effective strategy for extending the deadline. Maybe I can use her next time a client needs an extension."

"It's not worth the cost. Look, I have to go. A friend needs help. I'll talk with you later and let you know when the manuscript is completed."

Andrew put down the mobile phone and went to the freezer while mulling over the morning's events, and what to do next. He pulled out a bag of dumplings and put them in the pot of water that had come to a rolling boil. What happened at the end of the call with Sam there was little that he could do. He swore. He would have to go with Messer in order to be of any help to Sam. It seemed that events were drawing him on this quest. Huh. As the ancients would say, it's all part of the Grand Design.

As these thoughts formed, his mobile phone rang. The same number that displayed early in the morning showed on the small screen.

“Yes.”

“Andrew, we really need your expertise. You are the only one with the broad enough knowledge to pull all of this together.”

Andrew said nothing, waiting.

“I have talked to your publisher, and he’s given the okay to extend the deadline on your book. Won’t you reconsider?”

“If I go with you, we need to do things my way. No second-guessing, no overriding.”

“Okay, so you’ll be in charge.”

“I don’t want to be in charge, but there may be times when we’ll have to follow ancient, prescribed formulae that some people may not want to follow.”

“Like Gina.”

“Like Gina. And Ahmad. And, I’ll need to bring someone along to help.”

“Who?”

“My assistant. I’ll need his research skills, and he has other talents that we may need to call upon.”

“Really, Andrew. There are already enough people who know about this, and we need to keep the circle of knowledge small.”

“One more won’t make any difference. And, as I said, his talents will be needed.”

“How do you know?”

“Let’s just say I have a...*feeling*.”

“Okay, Andrew, have it your way. A car will pick you up at your place at seven P.M. Bring your passport.”

Chapter 3

Major Abeer Ali Mohammad stood at attention in front of the large, scarred wooden desk. General Tarek el-Shenawy sat down, his fleshy, florid face shined in the fluorescent lights of his office. Breathing heavily, el-Shenawy paused in his minutes-long berating of the Major. “What do you have to say for yourself?”

“That someone helped the Zionist escape. Otherwise, how could an old man slip through our net? He had just left by the time we arrived. The hotel manager said that at least two men were looking for the Zionist only moments before we arrived. It is unknown

if he left with these men. I think it unlikely.”

“Who is your best man?”

“Why, I am, general.”

El-Shenawy muttered, “Of course, you are. Who is your best man in the field?”

Major Mohammad paused for a moment. “That would be Sergeant Hossam Bahgat.”

The general drummed his fingers on the desk. “Hmmm. Isn’t he the one who caught that cell of Israeli spies last year?”

“Yes, that was him. And, he’s done other good work. He has risen quickly in rank because of it.”

“Put him on this. Give him the support that he needs.”

“Yes, general. I’ll guide him in this important case.”

“I’m sure.”

Chapter 4

De la Hoya sat in the back of a large black sedan thumbs tapping and swiping his smart phone when it rang. No calling number showed on the screen.

“Yes?”

“We have other players coming into the game, old boy.”

“What do you mean? Who?”

“Sharon Messer has put together a team and is heading to Cairo to help Goldwyn find the artifact.”

“*Maldita sea!*” de la Hoya blurted out. “How did she find out about the Tablet?”

“It doesn’t matter how, it just matters that she knows and she’s on her way to find it. Her searching for it means that it’s critical that we not fail. The League will not tolerate the artifact falling into her hands.”

“Do we know who she’s taking with her, what their expertise is?”

“Not yet. It’s likely that her dog, Scruggs, is with her. We’ll find out who else is going soon.”

“Scruggs has a lot of knowledge about Egyptian and Arabic history. Although you disdain him, you cannot discount his abilities. On the positive side, he’s a known quantity, and as such can be predictable. That may work in our favor. And, it is easier to track a

group than an individual.

“Let me make some inquiries. This may not be as bad as I first thought. In the mean time, if you can find out who else is with Messer and what expertise they possess, it will help paint a more complete picture.”

“I say again, old boy, the Tablet must not fall into Messer’s hands—no matter the cost, no matter who needs to die. Nor, for that matter, can it fall into the Egyptians’ hands.”

“Of course. We shall not fail. The Egyptians are the weak link, and caution must be used with them. They do not have the same discipline that we have. The Council should know about this risk.”

“I will determine what the Council hears about this operation. And when.”

“As you wish,” the Spaniard smiled as he tapped the End icon on his phone. You took the bait, “old boy.” Now, to set the hook and haul you out of the water to suffocate on your own condescending arrogance.

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