

## Praise for the Empires of Armageddon

“This roller-coaster thrill ride will keep readers breathless all the way to a nail-biting cliff-hanger, while the geopolitical premise is plausible enough to make anyone thankful that a sovereign, loving God ultimately holds our safety in his hands, as Terry Brennan portrays so well.”

—JEANETTE WINDLE, award-winning author of *CrossFire*,  
*Veiled Freedom*, and *Freedom’s Stand*

“A simply riveting action/adventure suspense thriller of a novel by an author with an impressive flair for originality and the kind of deftly scripted narrative storytelling style that holds the reader’s attention from beginning to end. . . . Especially and unreservedly recommended.”

—MIDWEST BOOK REVIEW

“A fantastic combination of thriller, historical conspiracy, biblical prophecy, and Middle Eastern complexity—and you’re never sure where the line is drawn between fact and fiction.”

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—CHER GATTO, award-winning author of *Something I Am Not*

“Terry Brennan has done it again! This is an epic thriller. The stage is being set for the final parts of history.”

—GRANT BERRY, author of *Romans 911*

“Another great biblical prophecy/action novel from Terry Brennan. If you’ve wondered about the next big events in the Middle East, this book will give you a lot of food for thought. . . . Terry’s end-times work will pull you right in.”

—**NICK UVA**, Associate Pastor of Harvest Time Church, Greenwich, CT

“Amazing, awesome, powerful, anointed. . . . Will keep you turning pages and praying for the peace of Jerusalem.”

—**MARLENE BAGNULL**, director of Write His Answer Ministries

EMPIRES OF ARMAGEDDON

*Ishmael Covenant*

*Persian Betrayal*

*Ottoman Dominion*

THE JERUSALEM PROPHECIES

*The Sacred Cipher*

*The Brotherhood Conspiracy*

*The Aleppo Code*

# OTTOMAN DOMINION

EMPIRES OF ARMAGEDDON #3

TERRY  
BRENNAN



KREGEL  
PUBLICATIONS

*Ottoman Dominion*

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# CAST OF CHARACTERS

## *United States*

**Brian Mullaney**—Diplomatic Security Service (DSS) agent; regional security officer overseeing the Middle East; senior agent overseeing security for Joseph Atticus Cleveland, the US ambassador to Israel

**Abigail Mullaney**—Brian Mullaney’s wife; daughter of Atlanta-based financial giant Richard Rutherford

**Joseph Atticus Cleveland**—US ambassador to Israel

**Palmyra Athena Parker**—Ambassador Cleveland’s daughter

**Tommy Hernandez**—Former DSS chief for Ambassador Cleveland’s security detail in Israel; Mullaney’s best friend; killed in a gun battle with the Disciples in Amman, Jordan

**Lamont Boylan**—President of the United States

**Evan Townsend**—US secretary of state

**Noah Webster**—Deputy secretary of state for management and resources; oversees DSS

**Nora Carson**—Undersecretary for management; Noah Webster’s right hand

**George Morningstar**—Deputy assistant secretary for DSS; Mullaney’s former supervisor

**Ruth Hughes**—Political officer, US embassy, Tel Aviv

**Jeffrey Archer**—Cleveland’s secretary at the ambassador’s residence and the US embassy in Tel Aviv

**Pat McKeon**—DSS agent in Tel Aviv; interim head of Cleveland’s secretary detail after death of Tommy Hernandez

**Kathie Doorley**—DSS agent in Tel Aviv

**Senator Seneca Markham**—Former chair of Senate Foreign Relations Committee, now retired

**Richard Rutherford**—Billionaire Georgian banker and DC power broker

## *Israel*

**David Meir**—Prime minister of Israel

**Moshe Litzman**—Minister of the interior of Israel

**Benjamin Erdad**—Minister of internal security of Israel

**Meyer Levinson**—Director, Operations Division, Shin Bet—Israel’s internal security agency

**Rabbi Mordechai Herzog**—Former head of the Jewish Rabbinate Council in Jerusalem

**Father Stefanakis Poppodopolous**—Greek Orthodox monk; computer hacker; code breaker

*Turkey: Ottoman Empire*

**Emet Kashani**—President of Turkey

**Arslan Eroglu**—Prime minister of Turkey

**The Turk**—Otherworldly pursuer of the box and the prophecy

*Iraq and Iran: Persian Empire*

**Samir Al-Qahtani**—Deputy prime minister of Iraq; leader of the Badr Brigades; orchestrates military takeover of Iraqi government

*Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, and Palestine: Islamic Empire*

**King Abdullah Al-Saud**—King of Saudi Arabia

**Prince Faisal ibn Farouk Al-Saud**—Saudi defense minister; son of King Abdullah

**Sultan Abbaddi**—Commander of the Jordanian Royal Guard Brigade, personal bodyguards of the king and his family



# PROLOGUE

*Washington, DC*

*April 4, 1987*

Thin and straight like a Popsicle stick in a good suit, Noah Webster stood behind the sofa, a sentry on duty. His eyes never fell to Senator Markham, seated in front of him and in earnest conversation with the chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. No, Webster's eyes relentlessly swept the spacious but crowded room, looking for allies or victims. That was the breadth of his world . . . allies or victims. Not enemies. Senator Markham's enemies were inevitably victims . . . victims of Markham's power and influence. And Webster's ruthless wielding of that power.

Across the room, standing behind one of the columns that flanked the entryway, Joseph Atticus Cleveland took the measure of Webster and recognized a merciless man unwavering in his quest for even greater power. Cleveland broke his gaze away, pivoted through the arched entry, and headed in the direction he hoped would take him to the kitchen and that incredible aroma of mango and sizzling garlic that was causing convulsions in his stomach.



"Cleveland, isn't it?"

Turning toward the voice, Cleveland saw Noah Webster emerge from an overfilled dining room as the crowd parted like the Red Sea. His hand was held out, a handshake offering, expecting a response. "Noah Webster . . . Senator Markham's chief of staff."

*Trapped . . . make the best of it.*

"Joseph Cleveland. It's a pleasure, sir. And I believe most of Washington knows who you are, Mr. Webster. It's kind of you to introduce yourself. But my stomach is demanding I follow this magnificent aroma."

Webster moved closer, his strong hand still wrapped around Cleveland's fingers. The slippery sweetness of gardenia banished the mango and garlic back to the kitchen and nearly overwhelmed Cleveland's outer veneer of composure. Inwardly, every warning siren was wailing.

Great-grandson of a former slave, Cleveland was thirty years old with the

build of an NFL tight end, four years into his career with the State Department and well into the lengthy and demanding process of applying for assignment to the US Foreign Service, with aspirations to one day earn a senior consular post overseas. Perhaps Ambassador Cleveland?

“Thank you, Mr. Cleveland. The aroma is captivating, but my duty is to remain by the senator’s side should he need me,” said Webster, who glanced left, then right, before skewering Cleveland with a look of menacing power. “Joseph, are you aware that Senator Markham is about to open his investigation of Major Lee’s unlawful activities at the Defense Intelligence Agency?”

Noah Webster was thirty-one years old, the zen master of Washington politics, notorious within the Beltway. A striking black man—half Caribbean, half African-American, and self-consciously short—Webster was a formidable and forbidding force in the halls of DC political power.

Cleveland’s knees felt like the warm mud along the French Broad River that flowed through his homeland in the finger of western North Carolina—they were soft and sinking fast. The sting of acid reflux overwhelmed his hunger. *Steady . . . remain steady. No fear. Please, show no fear.*

“No, sir,” said Cleveland, his voice calm and his grip firm. “I wasn’t aware of that.”

“Yes . . . could be a nasty business.” Webster’s eyes narrowed, focused like laser-guided weapons. “You worked as liaison between State and the DIA, did you not? In Lee’s office?”

“For a short time.” Cleveland’s voice was steady, but his heart was racing.

For nine months of 1985, Cleveland was on loan to the Defense Intelligence Agency, the organization that provides boots-on-the-ground espionage across the wide spectrum of US military operations. Routinely, twenty-five percent of the president’s morning intelligence briefing came from DIA sources. Cleveland was assigned to a project run by Air Force Major Anderson Lee. His task was boring . . . insulting, almost. He was nothing more than an overqualified, highly paid messenger. Until November 26, when subpoenas were served. Lee and his boss, General Isaiah Zimmer, faced the possibility of indictments on illegally diverting Pentagon funding and obstruction of justice. Cleveland had been kept in the dark by Major Lee and was innocent of any wrongdoing. But scandal is a fickle mistress, often condemning the innocent and the guilty with the same brazen impunity.

Without releasing his grip, Webster moved closer and lowered his voice. “The senator knows you are innocent of any complicity in this crime, Joseph. But so often there is collateral damage, and others on the committee may not see, as clearly as we do, the distinction between being simply a messenger boy and a conspirator. I’m trying to convince the senator that you don’t even need to be called as a witness. We wouldn’t want to jeopardize your pending appointment to the Foreign Service, now would we?”

So there it was. The bait and the trap. Clearly Webster knew exactly what Cleveland’s responsibilities were and who he reported to at the DIA. True to his Washington legend, Webster was offering Cleveland a deal—a way out of possible trouble. But what did Webster want in return?

Cleveland tilted his bald head to the right, a question entering his eyes and his voice. “Is there some way I may be of assistance?”

Webster smiled, and Cleveland feared his knees would lose all control. If a smile could threaten annihilation, Webster’s smile was nuclear.

“Oh yes. You will be of assistance to me, Joseph.” Webster’s smile grew wider. “Or you will join Major Lee in a federal prison.”

Webster finally released Cleveland’s hand. He half turned back into the dining room but looked over his shoulder. “Enjoy your dinner, Joseph.” And with a nod of his head, Webster vanished into the crowd.

Cleveland placed his right fist in front of his lips, wrapped his left arm over his stomach and hurried off in search of a restroom. It was bad form to vomit in the midst of a reception for movers and shakers, for allies and enemies.

*US Embassy, Tel Aviv, Israel*

*July 22, 2014, 9:02 p.m.*

Brian Mullaney's world lurched sideways. The floors and walls of the fortress-like United States embassy in Tel Aviv undulated like a drunken jellyfish. What looked, felt, and sounded like an earthquake had Mullaney's internal threat monitors off the charts. Again.

In the last seventy-two hours, Brian Mullaney's world had raced like an avalanche from the rational to the inexplicable. And through each of those hours, a rising tide of violence had haunted Mullaney's every move—a pervading and relentless carnage that had claimed six American lives, including that of his best friend.

Now to his right, an eight-foot-tall armed angel hovered above the convulsing floor, and to his left, a terrified, bearded rabbi sat flat on the seat of his pants. But after what Mullaney had experienced the last few days, nothing came as a shock.

The angel, Bayard, pulled an immense, gleaming silver sword from the scabbard at his waist. The sword was suffused with light and thrummed like a chorus of heavenly voices; a stiletto sharpness was honed to its edge.

His wings flexing behind his heavily muscled frame, Bayard was prepared to go to war.

"We must hurry," he said, looking toward where the door to Mullaney's office had once stood. "Our enemies are here. They are pursuing the box of power."

It felt as if every molecule in the building had a mind of its own and each was heading off in different directions. Mullaney's office was twisted like a wet rag being wrung out . . . the corners of the room appeared to be melting . . . and the wall opposite was ripped apart.

Regional Security Officer for the Diplomatic Security Service, responsible for the security of all United States diplomatic personnel in the Middle East, Mullaney's six-two frame was still lean and muscled at forty-four. A nineteen-year veteran of DSS, he instinctively placed a hand over his earbud and turned slightly to the mic in his lapel to give orders to his DSS agents and the marines guarding the embassy. "Lock down the building . . . mobilize all security

. . . double the guard at each entry point and do a floor-by-floor, face-to-face accounting of all staff. Stay alert!”

Mullaney stumbled around his desk and grabbed the elderly rabbi, Mordechai Herzog, by the arm. “C’mon . . . you’re getting under the desk.”

“I don’t know if these old bones can squeeze in there,” said Herzog, the former chief rabbi of Israel’s Rabbinic Council, his eyes darting back and forth, watching the moving walls.

Mullaney pulled Herzog to his feet and emphatically moved him toward the desk.

From across the room, the armor-clad angel called through the groans of a building in torment. “Guardian . . . follow me when you can!” The air seemed to be shifting back and forth as much as the walls as Bayard’s form evolved from solid to amorphous to vapor. And he was gone.

*Guardian.* That was a new title Mullaney needed to absorb. Passed down through generations of rabbis for over two hundred years, the guardian’s responsibility was to protect and defend both the prophecy of the Vilna Gaon and the lethal box of power that contained it. Only minutes earlier, Rabbi Herzog had spoken the Aaronic blessing over Mullaney, transferring the mantle of guardian to the DSS agent.

Mullaney hadn’t fully grasped why *he* was ordained as the final guardian—Bayard had called him the last in the line of the Gaon’s appointed heirs. But after Bayard’s warning, he fully suspected that this earthquake was being used by the gang of Turkish terrorists who had relentlessly pursued the box from Istanbul, where it was brought out of hiding only seven days ago. Only the guardian, under the power of the anointing, could touch the box of power without incurring a horrible and instantaneous death. But Mullaney had no doubt that those same murderous thugs were now invading the embassy in order to raid the vault where the Gaon’s bronze box was currently secured.

Rabbi Mordechai Herzog was sprawled on the floor under Mullaney’s desk, desperately clinging to its legs, as the building continued to convulse in chaotic jolts.

“Follow him?” Mullaney squeezed out of his chest. “How can I follow him?”

Another violent eruption throttled the embassy, and a cascade of concrete crashed into the middle of the floor, missing Herzog and Mullaney by inches.

He looked at Herzog, who was still on the floor, squeezed under the desk, his frail legs pulled up underneath his body. “Stay here. You’re safe.”

“Where am I going? I can’t get up.”

“I’ll send help.”

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*Ambassador’s Residence, Tel Aviv*

*July 22, 9:02 p.m.*

Palmyra Parker felt as if her shoes were moving across the floor while she was standing still.

Daughter of US Ambassador to Israel, Joseph Atticus Cleveland, and his de facto chief of staff, Parker was in the security office in the north wing of the ambassador’s seaside residence in the Herzliya Pitch neighborhood of Tel Aviv, going over the street maps with DSS agent Pat McKeon and the ambassador’s driver. In the wake of Tommy Hernandez’s death, McKeon was the interim head of the ambassador’s personal security detail. In any one week, seldom did the ambassador’s vehicles take the same route to the embassy. Cleveland was planning to leave for the embassy early in the morning, so Parker was helping to sketch out a new route. She felt a tingling in her feet.

“Did you feel that?” asked the driver.

Parker had her mouth open to respond when the wall behind the driver appeared to morph into an S shape. Her knees buckled.

One hand grabbed the side of the desk and the other hand went for her phone but . . . everything stopped.

The intercom buzzed. “Did you feel that?” came the voice.

McKeon hit the intercom button that connected her to every phone and every mobile earbud in the residence. “Tremors,” she said. “Find the ambassador and let me know where he is.” McKeon paused for moment. “Let’s take it to code yellow. If there aren’t any more shakes in the next half hour, we’ll dial it down again.”

She released the intercom button and turned toward Parker.

“We used to get these all the time when I was stationed in New Zealand,” McKeon said. Turning back to the map, she said, “I can’t remember the last time Israel had—”

As if she were on the string end of a mad puppeteer, Parker felt like all the

joints in her body were out of her control. Everything was moving, but independently and haphazardly.

Instinctively, Parker reached for the stability of the desk. But her hand grasped only air. The desk was tilting to the left and sliding across the floor. Parker turned to the driver . . . as a piece of concrete fell from the ceiling and sliced away half of his head.

“My father!” screamed Parker. She would have been running for the door. Except she couldn’t get one foot in front of the other to run. And because the door to the office had disappeared.



*Ankara, Turkey*

*July 22, 9:02 p.m.*

In the red room of the house on Alitas Street, downhill from the Citadel in the old city of Ankara, cryptic golden designs on the crimson painted walls were pulsing with life, glowing brightly in a macabre and random frenzy. The stabbing strobes of light cast cavernous shadows across the face of Arslan Eroglu’s body, now occupied and manipulated by the Turk, relentless enemy and pursuer of the Gaon’s box, malevolent leader of the Disciples, and servant of evil incarnate—the One. Its eyes closed, the body twitched and jerked as if speeding along a winding road.

The Turk willed his otherworldly power roughly nine hundred kilometers beneath the Mediterranean Sea once more to erupt along fissures, through the bedrock and dirt, colliding with the foundations of both the US embassy and the ambassador’s residence in Tel Aviv, thirteen kilometers apart. They were the only buildings in Tel Aviv under assault by the Turk’s power to move the earth.

A massive wave of energy hit the two buildings simultaneously. And the Turk felt the collision.

The face contorted in pain, the body violently thrown back into the stone chair, Arslan Eroglu’s vocal cords emitted a desperate, keening wail that sounded as if it had risen from the gates of Hades.

“You . . . will . . . die.” The voice of the Turk emerged from Eroglu’s throat, ripped and raw. But a smile of evil intent bared its teeth.

And a sulfurous vapor hung heavily over the stone table of sacrifice on the far side of the room.

*US Embassy, Tel Aviv**July 22, 9:04 p.m.*

Two jagged fissures tore the rear wall of the US embassy building on Herbert Samuel Street. The new commander of the Disciples stood behind a seawall, the vivid blue water of the Mediterranean only a dark swath of black. The sweeping crescent beach was dimly washed by ambient light, but the commander ignored the beauty behind him. His focus lay on the fortified and heavily protected building across the street. His other teams at the ambassador's residence were well-trained, fervent believers. They had their assignment—swift, merciless slaughter. The commander's target was the embassy and the Gaon's bronze box, held in the embassy's vault.

Surrounded on this side by anti-tank barriers that blocked the only entrance to the rear parking garage, the US embassy to Israel was big, square, solid, and ugly. Situated in the middle of an eclectic downtown neighborhood with a mixture of hotels and restaurants, along with small, local shops topped with apartments on their upper floors, the sidewalks around the embassy building were studded with concrete-filled bollards—four-foot-high steel cylinders embedded into the sidewalks—linked together by a steel beam. The ground floor of the massive building was solid, windowless stone. But now ravaged by the ongoing earthquake, the defenses on the ground floor of the embassy were rent by two huge gashes running vertical to the ground, one to the north, near the corner of the building, another to the south, near the ramp to the underground garage.

Along Herbert Samuel Street, men in civilian clothes, ID lanyards slapping against their chests, raced to the jagged fractures in the embassy's walls. Locally hired security professionals, most of them former members of the Israeli armed forces, they formed the majority of the embassy's security force.

The commander, a young man with a livid pink scar rising from his right ear, along his hairline to the front of his forehead, glanced at the floor plan of the building in his hand. Elevated into his new role by the Turk only hours earlier, he was taking the place of his father—killed in a gun battle with the American agent Mullaney and his allies in Amman. Not only was the new commander determined to fulfill the orders of the Turk and secure the lethal box of power, he was also determined that Mullaney would lose his life in its defense.



With a wave of his hand, as another jolt quaked the ground under his feet, the six disciples to his left began working their way to the gash at the north-western corner of the building. “Keep them occupied.”

Then the commander, a finely honed weapon capable of extraordinary violence, turned his piercing black eyes on the growing fissure near the parking entrance. “Follow me,” he said, and a dozen black-clad disciples rose from their hiding places.

# 2

*US Embassy, Tel Aviv*

*July 22, 9:04 p.m.*

“Brian,” squawked his earpiece, “we have intruders. They used huge rips in the walls to pierce the building’s perimeter, north and south ends. Looks like we have security and agents down. Response is . . .”

The radio in Mullaney’s ear went silent. “Report.”

He heard nothing, except for the throbbing headache radiating from his day-old scalp wound and creaking moans as floors and walls continued to randomly shift.

Mullaney stumbled toward where a gash had been ripped in the wall to his office, speaking constantly into the mic pinned to his lapel, whether the comm system was working or not. “Keep the marines at the entrances . . . rally all DSS agents to the incursion sites . . . I’m on my way.”

Feeling like he was trying to run on water, Mullaney sloshed to the stairs. Holding on to the railing with one hand, grasping his Sig Sauer 9-millimeter in the other, he bounced down the rocking stairway, inadvertently thumping down two steps at a time. Coming up from below he could hear the sound of gunfire.

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*Ambassador’s Residence, Tel Aviv*

*July 22, 9:04 p.m.*

Palmyra Parker slipped in the gore and crashed to the undulating floor. Next to her, blood was pooling to the side of the ambassador’s driver, his body limp on the floor, half his head and a shard of concrete two feet away.

Somewhere behind Parker, Pat McKeon was shouting urgent messages through the microphone in the lapel of her jacket. “Code red . . . Code red! All agents report. Lock down the building and grounds. And find the ambassador!”

What was once the formidable, well-guarded official residence of the United States Ambassador to Israel had quickly dissolved into life-threatening Silly Putty. Another violent tremor shuddered the building from foundation to

roof as a rumble and rending filled the air of the north wing with choking dust and the groaning cries of the collapsing structure.

Parker was scrabbling along the floor, away from the bleeding body, but was tossed into the side of the wooden desk. Her determined focus overcoming her terror, Parker twisted to look back at McKeon. “Earthquake? Or something . . . somebody . . . else?”

Sounding like shoes in a spinning clothes dryer, thumping rumbles echoed through the halls of the residence and were joined in a riot of sound by heavy crashes and the shrieks of a building being pulled apart. Another violent rending of the earth knocked McKeon to her knees, but it also opened a jagged hole in the wall of the security office.

McKeon pushed herself to one knee, straining to stand. “Report . . . where’s Cleveland?” she shouted into her lapel mic as she staggered toward the opening in the wall. There was no answer. “Where’s the ambassador?”

“Unknown,” said a voice in her ear. “We’ve not been able to locate him. He’s not in his quarters and he’s not in his office. We don’t—”

Another voice drowned out the first. “We have a breach!”



*US Embassy, Tel Aviv*

*July 22, 9:06 p.m.*

The commander knew his time was short, even at the beginning of the engagement. This could not be a prolonged assault. He needed to get into and out of the embassy as quickly as possible, preferably with his two objectives successfully completed: the box of power desired by the Turk would be in his possession and the killer of his father would die by his hands. So even though the private security agents were brave and determined and bolstered by three US Marines, they were no match for the two Herstal MK 48 machine guns that opened up in a crossing pattern on the defenders near the southern breach into the underground garage.

The machine guns swept through the defenders like scythes through wheat, leaving behind a bloody and ravaged harvest. The commander and his nine remaining disciples—two still manned the machine guns to guard their escape—rushed past the wounded and dying and poured through the rip in

the embassy's defenses. Running down the ramp, they turned left at the first landing and raced toward a gray, metal door. The bullet-riddled bodies of two civilians, whose defense of the door was short-lived, lay on either side as the commander fixed a rope of plastic explosive around the electronic lock.

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*Ambassador's Residence, Tel Aviv*  
*July 22, 9:06 p.m.*

"Who's this on the line?"

"This is Connors. We—"

Like a rapid cadence on a snare drum, McKeon heard the familiar sound of automatic weapons in her ear.

"Connors?"

"Armed men at the front gate!" His voice was drowned out by a deafening volley of return fire.

"This is surveillance," came another, clearer voice. "We have a breach on the beach wall. Armed intruders are in the garden."

McKeon reached over and grabbed Palmyra Parker under her right arm and lifted her to her feet. "C'mon . . . you stay with me." She pushed herself through the jagged opening in the wall, tearing the shoulder of her suit jacket, and emerged into Brian Mullaney's office which was a labyrinth of tumbled furniture and fallen debris. McKeon looked over her shoulder at Parker. "Stay behind me . . . do what I do." She maneuvered her way into the deserted hallway of the north wing of the residence, stepping around huge chunks of plaster from the ceiling. Continuous gunfire came from both the front and the rear of the residence.

The surface of the earth rolled once again like a wave on the sea, driving both McKeon and Parker into the wall. There was the noise of crashing behind them . . . someone crying in an office to their right. McKeon looked down the hallway in both directions. *Which way to go?*

"We have the ambassador. We're in the kitchen," came a female voice in her ear. Kathie Doorley.

"Stay there, Kathie," snapped McKeon. "I've got Mrs. Parker. We are on our way to you."

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*US Embassy, Tel Aviv**July 22, 9:07 p.m.*

The rattling sound of automatic weapons and the steady staccato of the DSS standard issue Sig Sauer 9-millimeter created a stereo effect as Mullaney reached the ground floor. Off to his right, in the direction of the north side of the building and the main entrance, was one source of the fighting. But Mullaney snuck a quick look down the stairwell and into the basement where another battle was raging.

Two of his agents were crouched near the bottom of the stairs, returning fire into the underground space.

Mullaney started down the last flight of stairs just as a new earthquake tremor shook the building. He stumbled and tripped, a headlong fall staring him in the face. But something—an arm?—caught his waist and held him steady until his feet could once again find something solid upon which to stand. He looked over his shoulder but was not surprised that there was no one in sight.

“Behind you, Jack.” Mullaney called as he eased down the remaining steps. “Status?”

“Our men outside were slaughtered—machine guns,” he said. “Surveillance cameras picked up ten of the attackers when they raced into the hole in the wall by the garage entrance,” he said “I figure there are at least four of them, maybe six, down this corridor, minimum of two on each side, hiding behind debris. They were coming this way when we stopped them.” He nodded across the corridor toward the door to the armored vault. “Could they have been headed for the vault? I don’t know why else they would fight their way down here.”

An image of the embassy’s basement layout filled Mullaney’s mind. *Where could the others be?*

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*Ambassador’s Residence, Tel Aviv**July 22, 9:07 p.m.*

The kitchen was in the basement level of the residence, in the very middle of the building, a series of dumbwaiters serving into the formal dining room above

them on the east side of the building. The open reception area faced the west side, looking out over the gardens and the Mediterranean.

Gunfire came from the front of the building, at the main entrance on the east side, and also at the rear of the building, in the gardens on the west side. On both sides, the sound of the gunfire was getting louder . . . closer.

McKeon had a choice to make. Stairs led to the lower level and the kitchen at the four corners of the building. The northwest corner was the closest . . . toward the garden. *Gotta get her to safety!* Scrambling to the right, keeping Parker tucked in close behind, McKeon skirted some light fixtures that had fallen from the ceiling. As she reached the stairwell, she looked out a broken window into the garden, bathed in the silvery glow of emergency lighting.

At least six black-clad men in black hoods and body armor were deliberately advancing through the garden toward the rear of the residence, firing at targets as they moved. McKeon could see bodies strewn on the grass, some DSS agents in plain clothes, some marines.

McKeon hesitated for a moment. She wanted to engage with the enemy right there, but her primary responsibility was the ambassador's daughter. Get Mrs. Parker safely into the kitchen with the ambassador . . . then the fight. McKeon was about to turn down the stairs when she saw something that brought chills to her blood.

As they inched closer to the residence, despite the withering gunfire that poured forth from its defenders, McKeon could see that the invaders had earbuds and mics pinned to their body armor. One of the men pointed down at ground level with the building, where patio doors opened into the garden. The kitchen was not that far from those doors.

*They are monitoring the communications of the residence. They know where the ambassador is hiding!*

# 3

*US Embassy, Tel Aviv*

*July 22, 9:08 p.m.*

The commander and three of his disciples huddled in a darkened room across the basement corridor from where the American agents were firing down the passageway at his other men. His group, which had led the attackers, split off to the right after getting through the parking garage door and taken a service entrance to a narrow hallway on the east side of the building used primarily by the housekeeping crew and delivery people. After running halfway down the hallway and scrambling over huge pieces of tile floor thrust up into the air by the earthquake, the commander stopped at a door. Having studied the floor plan, he was confident this room had a door on the far side that opened to the corridor right next to the embassy's vault.

Instead of engaging with the enemy he could hear just outside, the commander waited, protected, behind the closed door. He knew what was coming.

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Jack's partner, his gun raised, edged himself around the corner and unleashed a burst of gunfire down the corridor. But just as suddenly, he threw himself back behind the wall, his eyes wide. "Grenade launcher!"

Before Mullaney could think of a way to counterattack what was coming, a violent explosion—louder than the rending of the earthquake—ripped through the basement. But the explosion didn't erupt from the impact of a rocket propelled grenade against the door of the vault across the way. The blast originated from down the corridor to their right—where the invaders, with the rocket launcher, were entrenched.

As a wave of smoke, dust, and debris flew past their position, Mullaney edged closer. He wanted to peek around the corner. But Jack's hand on his chest stopped him.

"We'll do this, boss."

Jack turned and stood tall at the corner of the wall to the stairwell, his partner crouched low, near the floor. His partner slid out into the corridor,

his gun leveled at the enemy. Jack took a breath, turned, and squared into the corridor.

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*Ambassador's Residence, Tel Aviv*

*July 22, 9:08 p.m.*

“Go silent,” McKeon instructed over the radio. “Invaders are monitoring our comm. And Kathie, get Atticus out of the kitchen. You’re spotted.”

She had decisions to make and not much time to make them. Fire on the invaders and try to stop their advance? Get Parker to safety? But now the kitchen wasn’t much safer than where they were hiding. McKeon looked over her shoulder, back toward where the weapons’ locker in the DSS Security Office was located. She pictured the Heckler & Koch MP5, 9-millimeter submachine gun hanging in the closet. The MP5 could empty a thirty-cartridge clip in three seconds. *I sure could use that H&K right now.* But there was no time.

Taking Parker by the arm, McKeon motioned to the opening of the stairwell. “Stay low. Get inside the stairwell, but stay where I can see you.”

As Parker scrambled to the right, McKeon turned back to the broken window overlooking the garden. Some defenders were engaging the invaders, but they continued to inch their way closer to the patio doors. They had to be stopped.

McKeon whacked the remaining broken glass with the butt end of her Sig Sauer. The lead invader looked up at the noise. Thrusting her arms against the windowsill, her gun pointed at the lead invader, McKeon pulled back on the trigger, going full automatic, emptying a clip as return fire shredded the metal casing around the window.

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*US Embassy, Tel Aviv*

*July 22, 9:09 p.m.*

The violence of the grenade’s explosion rattled his knees. But the commander knew something was wrong. The explosion came from his left, where the rest of his men were pinned down, and not from his right, where the door to the vault was located—the door that was the intended target for the grenade launcher.

He edged open the door a crack, dust and debris filling the corridor and



obscuring his vision. No noise carried from the passageway . . . no guns firing in either direction. On the far side of the hallway, twenty paces to his right, three shadows moved into the billowing dust. The commander shifted his weight toward the opening of the door before a hand on his arm arrested his movement.

“Commander,” a voice whispered. “There are no longer enough of us.”

Through the slight opening in the door, the commander felt his optimism escaping.

“We don’t know how many of them are left,” whispered the voice. “And we no longer have the grenade launcher.”

The commander was ready to give his life. But not for nothing. They were so close. But there was no way to reach the box. With an impatient swat, he pushed the hand away from his arm, spat on the floor, twisted on the balls of his feet, and led his remaining men in retreat, a burning boil erupting from his stomach and scorching his throat. He hadn’t even seen Mullaney.



Moving deliberately, his Glock held in two hands up by his right shoulder, his eyes piercing the doorways and shadowed corners down the corridor, Mullaney emerged from the dust cloud into a scene of carnage and nearly gagged on the smell of burning flesh.

“I don’t understand it,” said Jack, kicking a handgun away from a smoldering, disfigured body that had been blasted up against a wall.

Where the invaders had taken cover behind fallen slabs of concrete and mutilated walls, an explosion had blown a large cavity in the midst of the debris, gouging out sizable divots from the floor and both walls of the basement corridor. Even though their bodies were mangled and in pieces, it was pretty clear that none of the invaders in this group had escaped the blast.

Mullaney, his eyes continually sweeping the hallway, inched nearer what was left of the damaged grenade launcher lying in the dust and felt the heat coming from the seared metal.

“They must have fired the grenade launcher,” said Jack, “otherwise it wouldn’t have been armed and able to explode. But it didn’t go anywhere. How is that possible? They shot it, but it just blew up right here. Doesn’t make any . . .”

Mullaney was thinking of an eight-foot angel wearing a silver breastplate when the DSS station chief and a marine sergeant came running up. "Brian," said the station chief, "we got a call. The residence is also under attack by armed intruders."

Mullaney spun and faced the station chief as Jack and his partner continued inching down the corridor and the sergeant covered their backs. "What do we know?"

"Similar to us . . . invaders front and back pierced the perimeter through the damage from the earthquake."

"Cleveland?"

"Don't know, sir. The gun fight was still going on when we lost the connection."

Mullaney's heart sank. "What's the status here?"

The station chief gave Mullaney a hollow stare. His eyes were open but there was nothing in them. He was seeing something else. "We've been hit really hard . . . especially our local security contractors." His voice was leaden. "Eight to ten are down. Don't know their condition yet. But I do know there will be several DOA. And two marines. So far, none of the embassy staff were harmed."

"Attackers?"

"Two bodies out front, near the hole that was ripped in the corner of the building, another just inside the building, and however many this mess is here. We think we got all of the ones attacking the north side. But I don't feel as confident on this end. There were at least ten that penetrated the garage." He looked down at the body parts sprawled throughout the passage. "This doesn't look like . . ."

The sound of small arms fire ricocheted along the walls of the corridor, coming from the parking garage, followed by the heavy hacking thuds of machine guns.

Without a word the five defenders ran toward the sound of the guns.