

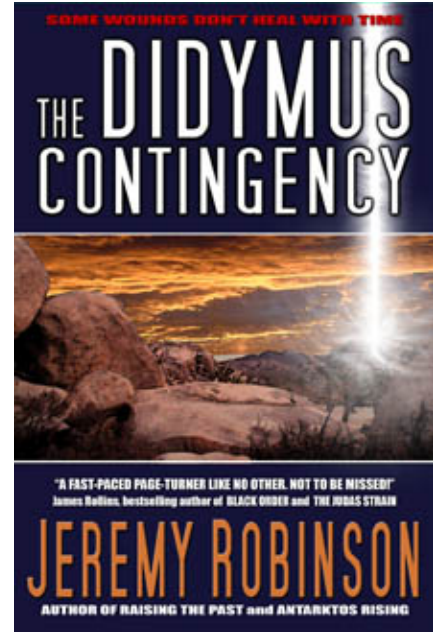
The Didymus Contingency

By Jeremy Robinson

“Jeremy Robinson’s novel, *The Didymus Contingency*, blends the cutting-edge science of Crichton with the religious mystery of the *Left Behind* series to create his own unique and bold thriller. It’s a fast paced page turner like no other. Not to be missed!” – **James Rollins, international bestselling author of *Black Order* and *The Judas Strain***

“[A] thrilling and fast-paced "what if?" scenario.” – **MidWest Book Review**

“What surprised me, with [Robinson’s] take on the possibility of two 21st century men meeting Jesus, was the utter lack of predictability... He offers a new perspective on ripping apart the time-space continuum I am shocked no one has ever considered before now.” – **Round Table Reviews**



—ONE—

B.C.

1985
2:35 P.M.
Zambia, Africa

Tom Greenbaum was captivated. Herds of blue wildebeest and zebra scattered in all directions as Mpundu, the dirty, mild tempered pilot of the small Cessna rental, took Tom down for a closer look at the flora and fauna of the Zambian plains. It would have been easy for most people to lose track

of time, staring at the creatures, whose lives and deaths played out on the brown tinged grass below. But Tom wasn't most people. As a quantum physicist with an IQ of 167, the calculations needed to time a quick jaunt over the African plains were as easy as clipping fingernails.

Tom had planned this distraction well. His international flight from Israel to Zambia's capitol, Lusaka, touched down at ten fifty three, ten minutes early. Megan expected his arrival at four o'clock and the flight to her mission took two hours. Tom scheduled his flight with Mpundu for twelve, giving himself an extra two hours time in the air. He was glad to be seeing his wife again, but experiencing this wild, untouched world from a bird's eye view was too much to pass up. Besides, she would never know.

Hours flew past and they were soon cruising over a lush, green canopy of jungle trees, waterfalls and rivers. The peaceful surroundings and white hum of the Cessna's engine propelled Tom to sleep, much to the relief of Mpundu, who had grown tired of Tom's wonderment. Not until they were making their final approach did Mpundu break the silence.

"Mr. Greenbaum...Mr. Greenbaum, we're almost there."

Tom sat up and wiped the drool from his cheek. As he squinted against the lowering sun he asked, "What time is it?"

"Three forty-five...Tell me, why do you come to Zambia? You have seen the animals, but where you are going now has no animals."

"Visiting my wife," Tom explained, his voice softening with the thought of her face and smile. "She's been here two weeks, but she'll be staying another two after I leave."

Mpundu's face became visibly confused. "You say your wife? Here in Zambia for two weeks without her husband?"

Tom nodded. "It's the longest we've been apart."

"And you let her come here?"

“I would have stopped her if I could,” added Tom, “Trust me. Since she found religion it’s been impossible for me to get through to her. I swear the whole lot of them has a death wish.”

Mpundu’s smile faded. “This is the worst place to come with a death wish.”

Tom’s forehead wrinkled with concern. “Why’s that?”

“Because, Mr. Greenbaum, it usually comes true.”

Tom’s smile shrunk away.

“We’re almost there,” Mpundu assured, “try not to worry.”

3:50 P.M.

Megan wasn’t the type of woman to run from a fight, but this was slaughter and she knew Tom was flying into a deathtrap. She had to warn him. Megan peeked around the corner of a grass roofed hut, which served as the chapel. She knew the thatched wall of the hut was thick enough to hide her, but would do little to slow a bullet. She saw her brave co-workers, lined up, arms behind their backs. The men holding them prisoner remained out of eyeshot, but she could hear their voices, strange, demanding, broken.

“Spet on his face! You do id nah!” a man shouted.

She knew all of her new friends would never give in. She knew they would all die. Just like Charles. He had been the first to refuse; he’d been dead for ten minutes now.

Megan could see Jennifer’s legs shaking. It was her turn now. She was eighteen, an eager intern from small town Kansas. She’d been on the job for two days, yet her convictions ran the deepest. She managed to say, “Forgive them, Lord,” before a bullet cut her down as well.

Jennifer’s body slumped to the dirt. Megan covered her mouth, terrified she would scream and alert the butchers to her presence. But she couldn’t let that happen. Not while Tom was coming. This wasn’t his fight. This wasn’t his place to die.

Eyes wet and unblinking, Megan turned and ducked into the woods as another gunshot echoed through the forest. Branches stretched out for her, scratching at her, clawing at her. They wanted to slow her down. They wanted to kill her too. But her legs were strong from years of running and the thickets that blocked her path exploded away from her, tearing open her flesh and exposing an open path. Megan turned right and ran, ignoring the streaks of blood slipping down her legs.

Movement in her periphery caught Megan's attention as she rounded a tree. She slowed and focused her vision. Four men were beating a fifth...but she didn't know him. She took in the assailants. They had rifles slung over their shoulders. Each man was dressed in half military fatigues, half tribal garb, the kind of people you'd expect to see in a National Geographic full page spread. The angriest, most savage and most passionate man wore a New York Yankees baseball cap.

Megan wasn't sure how long she had been staring at the sight, but it was long enough for her to be noticed.

"A woman escapes!" one of the men yelled, blood dripping from his knuckles.

Megan's gaze was frozen on the man who lied on the ground, covered in blood and beaten to a pulp. He looked up into Megan's eyes using only his right eye—the left was swollen shut. Oddly, she noticed his clothing. Blue, button down shirt. Polished shoes... polished shoes in the Zambian jungle? His un-swollen eye grew wide and he yelled desperately to her, "Megan! Run!"

As Megan's eyes snapped away from the man she saw that the four locals were almost upon her. She launched into the forest, praying her feet would carry her fast enough, praying for the poor man she left behind. How did he know her name? Was he a friend of Tom's?

Boom! Birds launched into the air behind her. She knew the stranger was dead. It made her run even faster.

The path was thin and winding, but Megan had run it every morning for the past two weeks. She knew every depression, every curve, every fallen tree. They would never catch her here. But the path

would soon end and she would be running through an open field. She was fast, but she was no Superwoman. She couldn't out-run a bullet.

Mud splashed across her legs, mixing with blood, as she hurdled a moss covered, rotten tree. She could see the sky through the branches in front of her. The clearing and Tom lay just ahead.

3:57 P.M.

The Cessna pulled up and over a line of tall trees, emerging over a clearing where a crude runway was chiseled into the earth.

Once the Cessna had come to a stop, Tom and Mpundu began unpacking the luggage and the supplies Megan had asked him to bring. Grunting with exertion, Tom heaved a wooden crate onto the ground. After straightening back up he removed a bandana from his back pocket and dabbed away the stinging sweat that trickled into his eyes. Tom had expected help; workers from the mission, locals, whatever, at least Megan should have been there by now. It wasn't like her to be late.

"Tom!" It was Megan's voice, but from where?

Scanning the field of tall, sun tanned grass, Tom found what he was looking for. His face lit up as he saw Megan running toward him. She was yelling, but Tom couldn't make out the words. He started forward. As Megan grew nearer it wasn't her words Tom finally understood, but the tone of her voice. She was afraid.

Before Tom could launch toward Megan, Mpundu's firm grasp on Tom's shoulder held him in place. "Do not enter the grass, Mr. Greenbaum. There are predators."

Tom looked back at Mpundu, whose eyes were locked on a flock of birds bursting from the jungle on the opposite side of the field.

"Lions?" Tom asked quickly.

"Worse."

Pulling away from Mpundu, Tom plowed into the field, determined to reach his wife. “Megan! MEGAN!”

“Mr. Greenbaum! Come back! We must leave now!”

Tom ignored Mpundu’s call and continued forward. Mpundu ran back to the Cessna and started the engine.

Megan grew closer and her words became distinguishable, “Get away! Go back to the plane!”

Tom ran more quickly.

Boom! A gunshot pierced the air and Tom instinctively ducked down. His chest burned with each panicked breath. What should he do? Who fired the gun and at whom? When he picked his head up again, Megan was gone. Tom’s eyes grew wide. “Megan?”

Ignoring the danger, Tom ran forward. “Megan! Where are you? Megan!”

Fifty feet away, Megan stood up and looked at Tom. “Run!” she yelled as her feet carried her toward Tom.

Tom surged forward, shrinking the distance between them. As they grew closer, Tom could see Megan’s normally smooth face twisting with fear and pain. His eyes darted to her blood red shoulder. She’d been shot!

Boom! A second shot pierced the air as Tom and Megan came within ten feet of each other. Megan’s body arched back. Blood exploded from her chest, covering Tom’s body and face. Tom stopped in his tracks and the world around him moved in slow motion, as though the entire scene were happening under water. The thick ruddy liquid felt warm on his face. Roaring blood rushed through the veins in his head, making it hard to hear. Dizziness swept through Tom with each pounding heartbeat. He felt himself falling, but his feet were firmly rooted to the ground.

Megan stumbled forward, her eyes locked with Tom’s. He could see her: brimming with enthusiasm over a new job, snuggled up by the fireplace with a new book, glossy with sweat after a

long run. And then she was gone. Her eyes hardened and her muscles fell limp. She fell forward and landed at Tom's feet, flattening a section of grass with her body.

Tom looked down. His wife was dead.

Breath raspy and full of anguish, Tom fell to his knees and rolled his wife over as tears condensed on his lower eyelids. He pushed his hand against the flow of blood pumping from her body like a ruptured gallon of milk. "Megan? Megan, please..."

Had Tom been more resilient he might have noticed Mpundu streaking down the runway in the Cessna. He might have noticed the crunch of moving brush and the smell of gunpowder. He sat in the grass; cradling Megan and rocking back and forth like a caged animal.

It wasn't until Tom felt warm metal against the back of his neck and heard the click of weaponry that his attention was thrust back into reality. He could see four sets of bare feet standing around him. His head was too heavy to look up.

Standing above Tom were Megan's four pursuers, led by the Yankee fan.

"Do you believe ahs dis wuman deed?" asked the Yankee fan as he pressed the barrel of his rifle into Tom's temple. "Ansah me now."

Tom looked up toward the voice. The Yankee fan's face was silhouetted by the bright sun behind him. "W—What?" Tom asked.

The Yankee fan walked to the side. The sun cleared and Tom could see the man's dark face, painted brightly with dry, red ink. What was most striking about his face were the expressions—twisting and contorting with confusion. The Yankee fan looked at Tom from all angles. Then he smiled and stood up straight.

"Do you balieve as dis wuman deed? Do you balieve en her God?" The man's voice seemed deeper, more demanding. "Ah you not a disciple?"

Tom's lip began to bleed as he bit down.

“Tell us! We want to know!” the man screamed.

“No, damnit! I don’t believe what she did! I never will!”

The four men instantly lowered their rifles. The Yankee fan squinted his eyes skeptically, then relaxed and smiled a rotting grin, “Thun tuday es your lucky day.”

The other men laughed and patted each other on the back for a job well done. Satisfied, all four turned and walked away, disappearing back into the tall grass.

Tom was left on his knees with Megan in his arms. His muscles began to shake. His eyes twitched to a maddening rhythm and blood pumped adrenaline through his veins. He let his wife, who he clutched to his chest so fondly moments ago, fall to the ground. Tom stood to his feet and cut into the tall grass.

The four men walked away slowly. Tom caught them quickly. He pounded his fist into the head of the first man before they heard a sound. The man toppled over and dropped his rifle, which fired upon impact with the ground. The bullet split several shoots of grass and then shattered the ankle of another man who fell backwards into the grass.

The third man swung around and raised his rifle, but he was too slow. Tom was upon him. Tom’s left hand held the rifle at bay while his right hand smashed the man’s throat. The man fell to the ground gasping for air, leaving his rifle in Tom’s shaking hand.

Tom raised the rifle toward the Yankee fan, whom had already taken aim at Tom. They paused. Breathing. Staring. Listening. A dragonfly flew between them and both men fired.

Tom was clipped in the shoulder and screamed in pain. The Yankee fan stood unmoving with a hand held to his chest. Tom quickly regained his composure and raised his rifle a second time. But the Yankee fan stood still with a look of shock frozen on his face.

“So it’s true,” the Yankee fan said with a smile, “You ah not a disciple.”

The Yankee fan's hand slipped from his chest, revealing an open wound. He fell to his knees and slumped over dead.

Moans from the other three men writhing in the grass regained Tom's attention. He aimed the rifle. One man raised his hands over his head and begged in his native tongue. Tom looked away from the men, toward the area of crushed grass where Megan's body still lay. Tom took aim again and asked, "Do you believe as she did?"

"W—What?"

Tom pressed the rifle into one man's head. "Do you believe as she did?"

"No! No! We do not!"

"Then, maybe I'll see you in Hell."

The guns shots could be heard for miles away, three and then three more.

That was all twenty years ago...today.

Brief synopsis leading up to Chapter 10:

Tom Greenbaum, whose wife was murdered for her faith in chapter 1, along with his colleague and closest friend, David Goodman, has created several time travel devices in the form of small wrist watches. In a moment of drunken rage, Tom steals a watch from their research facility and transports himself back in time, to ancient Israel, where he intends to witness Jesus die...and not rise from the grave. David pursues and the two end up not only staying in ancient Israel, but Tom is appointed, by Jesus, to be one of the twelve disciples—potentially altering 2000 years of history in the process.

And now, at the start of Chapter 10, two years have gone by, with Tom and David remaining in the past—Tom, the atheist working hard to prove Jesus is nothing more than the original Houdini, and David, the believer trying to cope with Jesus's blatant humanity while working to keep Tom (who refuses to give up his quest) from altering human history. They have witnessed many "miracles" which stun all but Tom, including Jesus's calming of the storm on the Sea of Galilee. Along with Jesus and the other eleven disciples, having just survived the sudden storm, Tom and

David are about to land on the shores of Gergesa, in Israel, where a demon possessed man, chained to a valley wall, awaits . . .

—TEN—

Pitfall

29 A.D.

5:32 P.M.

Gergesa, on the Sea of Galilee, Israel

A mile from the extravagant city of Gergesa was a dark valley, hewn into the earth by years of wind and water. The walls of the two hundred foot chasm were lined with tombs dug into the cliff faces. The air was cool, wet and reeked of stale decay. Some called it The Valley of the Dead, some simply called it The Valley, but for the past week no one called it anything at all. No one dared to even think about the valley, as though Samuel, the man now shackled to a cliff face, might hunt them down and devour their children.

Samuel, once a fisherman and friend to many, had been overtaken by an evil force. Some speculated that the tempter himself possessed Samuel. Those who knew the man tried to give him time. Perhaps the evil would pass? But after a month, the evil had not fled, in fact, it had grown stronger, deepening its hold on Samuel's body, twisting him to the core. He was found sleeping in the entrails of ten sheep, slaughtered by his bare hands. Quickly beckoned, the Roman Guard took

action. Ten heavily armed and expertly trained guards had subdued the man, two of them nearly losing their lives for the effort.

Chained to a cliff face in the Valley of the Dead for five days, Samuel awaited his sentence, which all knew would be death by stoning. Clothed in fouled rags, Samuel spoke in strange languages, frothed at the mouth and at times mimicked the beasts of the forest. He was truly mad. But for the past five hours he just sat there, cross-legged with his back to the four Roman soldiers standing guard. The soldiers, fully armored with iron helmets, hard leather chest plates, shoulder pads and boots, wielded shields, swords and spears. They maintained a healthy distance and a watchful eye at all times.

Greagor, the captain of the group, stroked his favorite sword against a whetstone, sharpening its blade to a razor's edge. With its double-edged iron blade, U-shaped, brass hilt and ornate sheath, it was a spectacular weapon; one that Greagor had used to kill several enemies of Rome. With every swipe of the blade, Greagor kept his eyes glued on Samuel. His lip raised in a sneer, revealing clenched teeth. Not only was this man a Jew, a conquered people with phony freedoms, but he was evil, and Greagor wanted him dead. "We ought to slit his throat now and be done with it," Greagor said.

The other men laughed and agreed, but none took action. They were all too terrified to personally carry out a death sentence. Greagor, pleased that he had made the men laugh, thought it appropriate to further taunt the chained beast. Greagor picked up a sharp stone, the size of a fist, and heaved it at Samuel. The rock sailed through the air, sure to strike a painful blow. The soldiers' eyes grew broad with anticipation. *Whack!* Stone slapped against flesh..

Greagor stood up. He thought his vision must be playing tricks. But the other men, with petrified visages, saw it too. Samuel's hand had a firm grip on the stone, inches from his head. He caught the

stone...with his back turned! Greagor sat down and looked at his comrades. All were too timorous to say a word, lest they entice the beast to retaliate.

Samuel looked at the stone through glazed eyes. He smiled and began to rock back and forth, muttering to himself, “Dimito desrafat fier tarsadun,” over and over again. Each time he finished the words he cut a bloody gouge into his arm using the stone. Froth dripped from his mouth and mixed with the blood oozing from his arm. The sight only enticed him further and his rocking grew more fervent. His legs bounced at the kneecaps and his eyelids twitched as though in violent REM sleep.

As Greagor watched with a new respect, he thought he saw something different about Samuel. He was growing more excited...or was it nervous?



The sea had been calm since the storm magically dissipated and no one had said much of anything. David had bound Tom’s wound as best he could, but it didn’t stop Tom’s head from swelling. The pain was intense at first, but had dulled slightly when Tom sat still, which wasn’t easy to do in a rocking boat.

If only he were alone, Tom thought. He could make a quick jaunt to the future for some Ibuprofen and ice, but it was impossible here in the boat and would be even more unlikely as soon as they landed in Gergesa, which was now only one hundred yards away.

From this distance the city could be seen in its entire luster. Tall, white arches attached several columned buildings to one another. A grand theater bustled with activity to the south and a temple of Zeus stood tall and proud atop a hill to the north. This was the pinnacle of how Tom had envisioned the Roman Empire, its influence smearing even into the most distant territories. He enjoyed the view despite the drumbeat of pain pounding within his skull.

Matthew, who had been resting on the side of the boat, craned his head up as though he'd been rudely awakened. "Disgusting. Look at all those pigs. Who would tend such beasts so close to the city?" he said to Tom.

Previously, Tom would have thought such a comment to be peculiar, but having learned Jewish culture, Tom knew that pigs were unfit to eat and were looked down upon severely. The fact that such a large herd was roaming on the hill just outside the city must have enraged every good Jew for miles. But Tom wasn't inclined to have yet another conversation about the foulness of pigs. He responded with a simple smile and the subject died out.

Within five minutes they reached the shore. "Someone else can get their feet wet this time!" Matthew yelled, "I've spent my time in the water!"

Peter stood and said, "You got more than your feet wet," as he climbed over the side of the boat, into the water. "Judas, give me a hand."

Judas rather reluctantly got to his feet and threw one leg over the side. As Judas put his other leg into the water, he lost his footing and fell backwards with a yelp, catching his robe on the oar and ripping it lengthwise. Peter thrust his long arm into the water and pulled the flailing Judas to his feet. Judas was panicked and coughed a large amount of water up after taking a breath. Tom wondered if Judas had ever been submerged in water. The poor man must have sucked in a mouthful.

Judas attempted to collect himself but was clearly distraught. His hands shook as he clutched the side of the boat, knuckles white. Tom felt a deep compassion for the man. "Go ahead to shore, Judas," Tom said as he patted Judas's hand, "I'll help Peter."

Judas trudged to the shore and sat down with his head between his knees. Tom and Peter dragged the boat full of men to the shore, where they began to unload.

Tom walked to Judas, who looked up with the sad eyes of a child whose new Christmas present had been broken only minutes after being unwrapped. “Look at this,” said Judas as he held up his torn robe, “I look like a beggar.”

“Can’t you just buy a new one?” Tom asked.

“It’s not up to me, the tax collector has the money,” Judas whined.

“Tax collector?”

“Matthew, he used to be a tax collector,” Judas explained, “Honestly, I think I could do better with the money, but Matthew insisted he had the most experience.”

“Why don’t you just ask for some?” Tom asked.

“I don’t...I couldn’t...”

“Then I will.”

Judas attempted to stop Tom with an outreached arm, but he was too late, Tom was already approaching Jesus, who was still in the boat.

“Your compassion is growing,” Jesus said as Tom stopped at the boat.

Tom paused. Jesus turned to him. “Helping those in need... aiding Judas. You’re learning my ways.”

“I haven’t changed since the day we met,” Tom said, knowing full well it was a lie.

Jesus smiled. “So you say. Ask your question.”

Tom felt the urge to argue the point, but could see Jesus already had him against the ropes. “Judas ripped his robe when he fell out of the boat. I was...he was wondering if we could give him some money to buy a new robe?”

“Of course,” Jesus said.

That was easy, Tom thought, and then went a step further. “Actually, Judas wanted to know if you could put him in charge of the money? Matthew is great with money and has experience as a tax

collector, but Judas...he's just not growing and I think he's up to the challenge of handling our financing." Tom smiled, attempting to hide his sarcasm over his, "Judas not growing," statement. He felt ridiculous saying it, but it seemed Jesus was taking his request seriously.

Jesus mulled over the proposal. He called Matthew over and said, "Matthew, could I have the money purse?"

Matthew handed a leather sack full of coins to Jesus.

"Judas will be handling the money from now on," Jesus said, "It will be good experience for him."

"Are you sure?" Matthew said.

Jesus nodded.

Matthew smiled and rejoined the other disciples who were mingling with a crowd of people who had rounded the outskirts of the sea in the same time the fourteen had sailed across it. Jesus turned to Tom and said, "If you have not become more compassionate, what are you getting for your good deeds today?"

Tom looked over at Judas, still sitting on the sand with his head down and said, "A friend."

"Indeed..." said Jesus as he handed the coin purse to Tom. "Go, tell Judas the good news."

Tom smiled and said, "Thank you."

Jesus watched Tom walk away, then balanced himself, threw his leg over the side of the boat and pressed his foot into the wet sand.



Greagor's muscles twitched as Samuel's head jerked back and almost snapped his neck from the force. Samuel's eyes ballooned, as if they'd burst and he immediately stopped shaking. Slowly, mechanically, Samuel cranked his head toward the East, toward Gergesa.

Greagor gripped his sword and slowly drew it as Samuel stood to his feet. What in the name of Neptune was this man up to now? Perhaps a lion was prowling the valley? Greagor wished it to be true. Let the savages kill each other.

Samuel's body became rigid, silent, listening. Greagor looked to the East and saw nothing. Believing confrontation was inevitable; Greagor snapped his fingers once, gaining the full attention of his men. He motioned toward Samuel with his head. All four men slowly drew their weapons.

Samuel took a step forward but was instantly stopped as the chains shackled to his arms and legs grew taut. Samuel looked down at the chains with disgust and growled. He slowly moved his right arm back, letting the chain go slack, and then surged it forward. *Clink!* The chain snapped like macaroni.

Stepping forward, Greagor moved slowly, shield at the ready with his men close behind. "Sit back down!" Greagor commanded.

Samuel twisted his body toward Greagor and gritted his teeth together, hissing, "WE WILL NOT!"

Clink! Samuel shattered the shackle attached to his left arm. Only his feet were still bound. Greagor knew that once Samuel's feet were undone, he and his men would lose their advantage. "Attack!" Greagor screamed as he raised his sword toward the blue sky. The four soldiers charged, ready to spill blood.

Samuel turned towards his attackers and smiled.



Tom and Judas strolled through the crowded streets of Gergesa. Judas was all smiles, clothed in a new robe and proudly clutching the money purse. They had been perusing the many shops for almost two hours and Tom knew it was time to head back. After the ten minute argument Tom had with David about going into the city alone with Judas, Tom knew that David would send out a

search party if they weren't back on time. And Tom also knew that he and David were the only two people in the world wearing watches right now, so David would know exactly what time it was and how late they were.

"We should head back to the beach now. The others are probably wondering where we are," Tom said.

"Just a few moments more. These dates look delicious," Judas replied as he eyed a basket of dates being sold by a thick shop-keep.

Tom looked at his watch casually, pretending to itch his wrist. They still had ten minutes. Tom decided to use the time to get to know Judas a little better. "What happened to you in the water today?"

"What do you mean?" Judas asked, looking down at the ground.

"After you fell in. The water was only knee deep, you could have stood up."

"I...I don't know. It happens sometimes. I—I get afraid. I panic. I don't know why. Water, spiders, snakes, even goats...there are so many things. Sometimes it even happens before I know the danger exists."

"Extra Sensory Perception," Tom said without thinking.

"What?" Judas asked

"Nothing...nothing. Hey, try not to worry too much. You're with friends now, thirteen friends. One of us will always be there to pull you out of the water," Tom said in earnest.

Judas smiled. "Thank you."

"Now lets get going. David's going to be irate if we're late."

"David doesn't like me much, does h—" Judas froze mid-sentence and his eyes darted around like a scared animal.

"What is it?" Tom asked.

“It’s happening,” Judas said, arms shivering.

Tom saw Judas’s hand shaking, his wary eyes and bit lip. Judas was panicking. This was what he was talking about, but where was the danger?

“Aiiiiiiii!” a woman screamed in the distance.

Suspicious of the encroaching racket, Tom and Judas looked down the long street filled with people. A wave of screaming grew from the crowd and headed toward them. People ran in every direction and the crowd parted like Moses at the sea. Tom squinted as a figure ran toward them. All these people were running from one man?

Tom turned to speak to Judas, but Judas was gone, ten feet away hiding with other frightened shoppers. Tom surveyed his surroundings. He was alone in the street. What did these people know? As the man approached Tom could see that he was hobbling strangely and carried a sword. He decided it was best to follow the crowd’s lead and joined Judas on the side of the road.

“What’s going on?” Tom asked a woman hiding with them.

“It’s Samuel! The possessed man!” the woman whispered.

“Possessed? You mean by a demon?”

“Quiet!” the woman whispered, “His guards are surely dead. If it hears you, you may be next!” With that the woman ducked down an alley and ran away.

Tom didn’t believe in demons as much as he didn’t believe in Jesus, Heaven or Hell. This was all superstitious nonsense. Tom was tempted to confront the man and prove to these ignorant people that he was not possessed, but erred on the side of safety. The man *was* armed, after all.

A hush fell over the frightened crowd as Samuel drew near; Tom could hear the man ranting. Against the tugging urges of Judas to stay down, Tom stepped out from hiding to get a look at Samuel, and then quickly took a large step back as Samuel passed, nearly tripping over himself and the others behind him.

Samuel was covered in blood from head to toe, frothing at the mouth like a rabid dog and had open gashes up and down his arms. Shackles and chains still hung from his arms and legs and clanked along the road. Tom focused on the sword and saw that it was Roman. That woman mentioned guards...could this man have really killed Roman guards with his bare hands, while shackled to a wall? From the amount of blood covering Samuel's body, Tom was convinced it was true.

As Samuel passed by, muttering loudly, Tom became aware of what he was saying. "Jesus...Jesus...We will kill him. Yes, yes. Yes we will," Samuel said, oozing hatred.

Tom stood up straight and watched Samuel head down the street . . . toward the beach . . .saying . . . Tom turned to Judas. "Jesus!"

"Is he gone?" Judas asked, arms still shaking.

"He's going after Jesus!" Tom said as he headed into the street, "C'mon!"

Tom began running toward the beach and turned back toward Judas, "If we're going to be there for you Judas, you need to be there for us! Let's go!"

Judas shook with confusion. He was paralyzed with fear, but Tom was right. Perhaps they could beat the man to the beach and simply warn Jesus of the impending danger. They would have to move fast, but after a lifetime of running from his fears, Judas knew he was fast. Judas leapt from his hiding place and tore off down the street after Tom. They were going to save Jesus!



David didn't have many opportunities to speak with Jesus alone since their adventure began. So he was thankful when Jesus asked him to take a walk while the disciples handled the crowd that had gathered on the beach. During their walk, Jesus spoke to David of things to come, things already gone by, and the weather. Jesus never gave any indication that he knew David was from the future.

And it seemed as though Jesus was more comfortable with David than he was with the twelve disciples. They understood each other. David imagined it must be a relief for Jesus to have someone who understood, like two quantum physicists in the middle of the desert, like David and Tom.

The walk was almost over and David could see the crowd, now much larger, gathered in front of the disciples. There must be three thousand people, thought David. “Looks like another long day,” Jesus said.

“Indeed,” agreed David, but then was struck funny. Another long day? In all his life David never thought that Jesus got worn out, tired of people, or stressed by life. But David was beginning to see things differently. Jesus was not only human, he was as human as he, Tom or anyone else and all this activity, all these people, wore him out.

David scanned the beach and glanced at his watch. Tom was late, but then again, so was he. It wasn't that David didn't trust Tom alone in the city. They had both blended into the society and could manage fine on their own. But he didn't want Tom and Judas having an influence on one another. David was relatively sure how things would turn out, but there were so many unknowns about this past that were not recorded in the Bible. He wondered if his and Tom's friendship would survive the years of living the very subject that divided them most strongly? Over the past few months David had sensed Tom drifting away, becoming obsessed with debunking Jesus, but now, now Tom was becoming friends with Judas...What good could come of that?

“Jesus!” Judas yelled from a street running parallel to the beach, “Take cover! A possessed man wielding a sword is coming for you!”

Jesus and David quickly hurried to Judas.

“From where does this man come?” Jesus asked.

Judas was out of breath, but managed to point to a street, which led up a hill.

“Where's Tom?” David asked, suddenly concerned.

“He’s coming...I...passed him on the way...he’s a slow...run-ner,” said Judas.

A howl from the top of the hill pulled their attention away from Judas. Samuel was at the crest, wielding his sword high in the air.

David had never seen this man before, but the location and circumstances filled David’s memory, “Legion...”

Jesus shot David a look. He heard. He heard David say the name before it was known. David slunk back and pursed his lips tight as the disciples arrived with the crowd in tow, hoping his foolish blabbering would be forgotten.

Samuel screeched and lunged down the hill toward the beach, toward Jesus. Many in the crowd turn and ran, the rest, including the disciples and David, simply backed away. “Stand behind me and do not fear this man,” said Jesus, standing his ground.

Samuel was like a freight train with a sword. He seemed immeasurably dense, like he could crash through a cement wall. And still, Jesus held his ground. Legion was only ten feet from Jesus when, “Jesus! Look out!”

Whump! Tom tackled Samuel from the side sending both men to the ground. The crowd collectively gasped. The sword fell from Samuel’s hand, but he was not deterred from his goal. Samuel got to his feet and pounded toward Jesus. Tom was on his feet too, and preparing to make a second attempt.

“Tom, don’t!” David shouted, but it was too late.

Tom dove onto Samuel’s back and clung on like a baby monkey to its mother. Samuel growled and thrashed about wildly. Tom had wrestled during his high school years and for a short time considered trying out for the Israeli Olympic team. He knew the headlock he had wrapped around

Samuel's throat was unbreakable and should put the man in a deep sleep within a minute. If only Tom could hold on.

Samuel ran backwards and slammed into the wall of a fishery. Tom grunted in pain as his backside indented the wall. Tom gritted his teeth and squeezed tighter still. He was not going to let this man go.

Samuel swung his body from side to side, flailing Tom's legs in the air. It had been a full minute since Tom locked his arms around Samuel and he had increased the pressure with every resistance Samuel offered up. But the man wasn't slowing down, and Tom's arms were growing sore. Tom tightened his grip with all his reserves, hoping it would do the man in—finally.

And it seemed to be working. Samuel staggered slowly and then stopped moving all together. Tom never loosened his grip. Tom felt a hand on his wrist and then a crushing force. Tom grunted in pain and looked forward. Samuel was slowly, methodically pulling Tom's arm away, like he had all the time in the world and no use for oxygen. Within seconds, Tom's arms were pulled away from Samuel's neck.

Samuel snapped his head toward Tom and took him by his robe. "We will remember you," Samuel said as his penetrating eyes borrowed into Tom's memory.

Second's later, Tom was airborne as Samuel tossed him like a football. Tom sailed over the crowd and splashed down in the water. Jesus watched Tom land and then turned his head back to Samuel the fisherman, staring him straight in the eyes. Samuel froze in his tracks, his fingers only inches from Jesus's neck.

"Come out of him," said Jesus in a calm voice.

Samuel began to twitch from head to toe as though a thousand needles were pricking him. He fell to his knees and was no longer a powerful beast. He was instantly reduced to a pitiful horde of

personalities. “What do you want with us, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Please! Do not torture us!”

“What is your name?” Jesus asked as though talking to an insignificant and inferior creature.

“We are Legion. Please do not send us into the abyss! Mercy! Yes, Mercy! Have mercy on us as you did during the rebellion! MERCY, mercy! There! Send us into them!” Samuel shouted as he pointed to the heard of pigs foraging on the nearby hillside.

“The swine! Yes! YES! Send us into them! Mercy! MERCY!”

“Go,” Jesus said.

Samuel’s head arched toward the sky and his mouth gaped open as the sound of fifty wailing voices escaped his lungs. As soon as the last voice was silenced, Samuel fell and was caught by Jesus.

Tom pulled himself to his feet by clinging to the side of the boat. He had heard the screaming voices asking Jesus to have mercy, but couldn’t understand what was happening or how that man had throw him so far. He was sure his ribs were bruised and his head pounded harder then ever. It had been years since Tom ran that fast, that far, and then into a fight. He was getting old.

The wall of people blocking Tom’s view had fallen silent so he assumed that whatever happened was over and his assistance wasn’t needed. Not that he’d be any help. But what was that? A noise in the distance growing louder...Like people screaming...but worse.

The crowd of people standing in front of Tom began to scatter in either direction. What now? Tom remained in the water six feet from the shore, assuming that whatever was going to happen next, he’d be safe there. No one in this time period could manage more than a frantic dogpaddle, anyway.

As the last of the crowd blocking his view moved, Tom saw something he only thought could happen in frightening fairy tales. A herd of fat, wailing pigs barreled down the street and onto the

beach. There was no running, no hiding. Tom was in the herd's path and had nowhere to go. Tom leapt from the water into the boat they had used to cross the sea and held on tight.

Tom heard the pigs plow into the water. He heard them screech and then choke and die. Tom raised his head slightly to see what was happening. *Scream!* One of the pigs leapt into the boat, its mouth full of foam, its eyes wide and wild, and then just as quickly bounded over Tom's head. It splashed into the water on the other side of the boat. Tom screamed and jumped to his feet. He stood like a statue, watching the sickly pig twitch as it sank beneath the waves.

A heavy quiet descended as Tom looked up and scanned the open water. The entire herd of pigs was floating, dead in the water. Their bodies rolled and bounced against one another, bobbing up and down. Tom covered his mouth. As the pigs floated further away, Tom saw a clearing through the water to the beach and took it. David met him on the shore.

"What the hell was that?" Tom demanded to know in English.

"Tom, watch your language!" David whispered.

"What, I can't say hell now, either?"

"You're speaking in English!"

Tom fell silent and then collected himself. He continued in Aramaic, "So, what happened?"

"That man you tried to tackle was possessed by a legion of demons. Jesus sent them into the herd of pigs," David explained, "Are you okay?"

"Is that supposed to be funny, haha, or just plain ridiculous?" Tom asked.

"They don't think it's very funny," David said as he pointed to the crowd standing on the street, away from Jesus, who was still holding Samuel. Tom lowered his eyebrows when he saw the faces of the crowd and walked closer to hear what was happening.

Samuel was awake and standing on his own, but still leaning on Jesus for support. A hefty man in the crowd stepped forward and said, "Please, leave us. We...don't want you here."

Many in the crowd began to run away, afraid of Jesus, just as they were afraid of Samuel. Tom knew it was human nature to fear the unknown and right now, Jesus was the epitome of the unknown. But Samuel did not fear him. "Please Master, let me come with you," Samuel said.

"It is not for you. Return home and tell how much God has done for you," Jesus replied as he gently stood Samuel on his feet.

"Yes, my Lord," Samuel said, and with that he headed away from the beach.

The remaining members of the crowd ran away as Samuel approached, leaving fourteen alone on the beach.

Jesus turned toward the sea and watched as the sun began to set. David and Tom stood next to him. "Maybe tomorrow won't be so long?" David said with just a hint of a smile.

Jesus nodded and they watched the herd of dead pigs float off into the sunset.