



THE
TREE OF LIFE

*Second book of
the Cup of Christ and the Forgotten Disciple Trilogy*

A Mystery-Thriller

JACK HOLT

The Cup of Christ and the Forgotten Disciple
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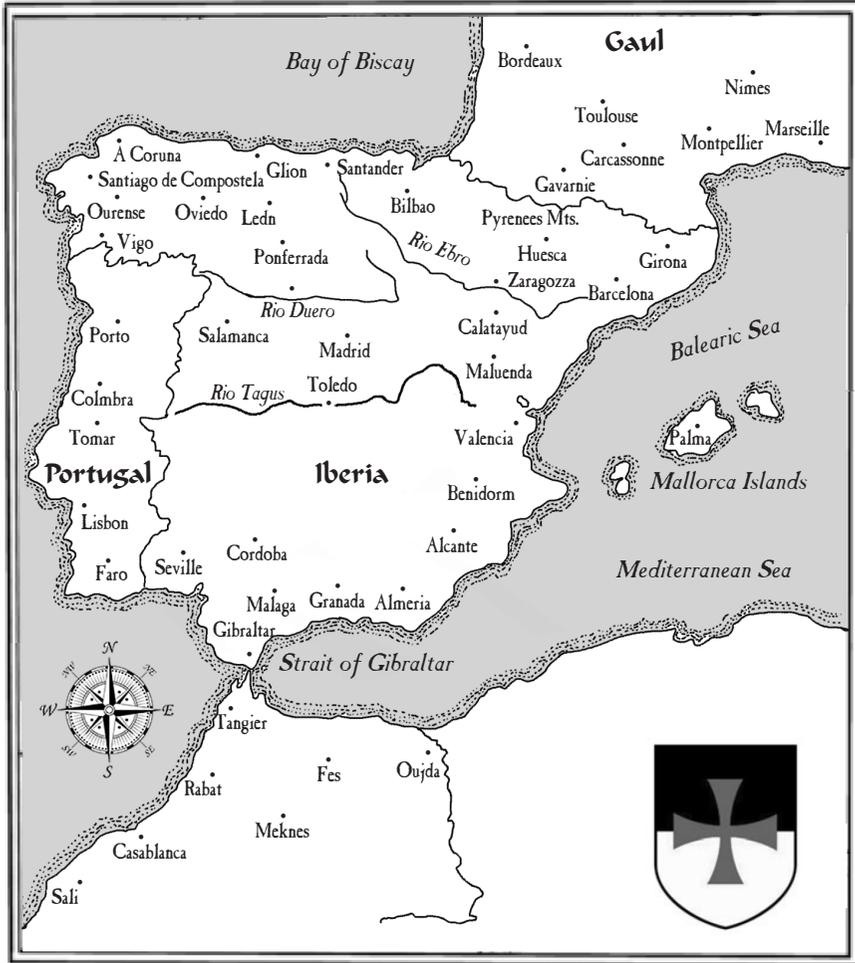
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Introduction

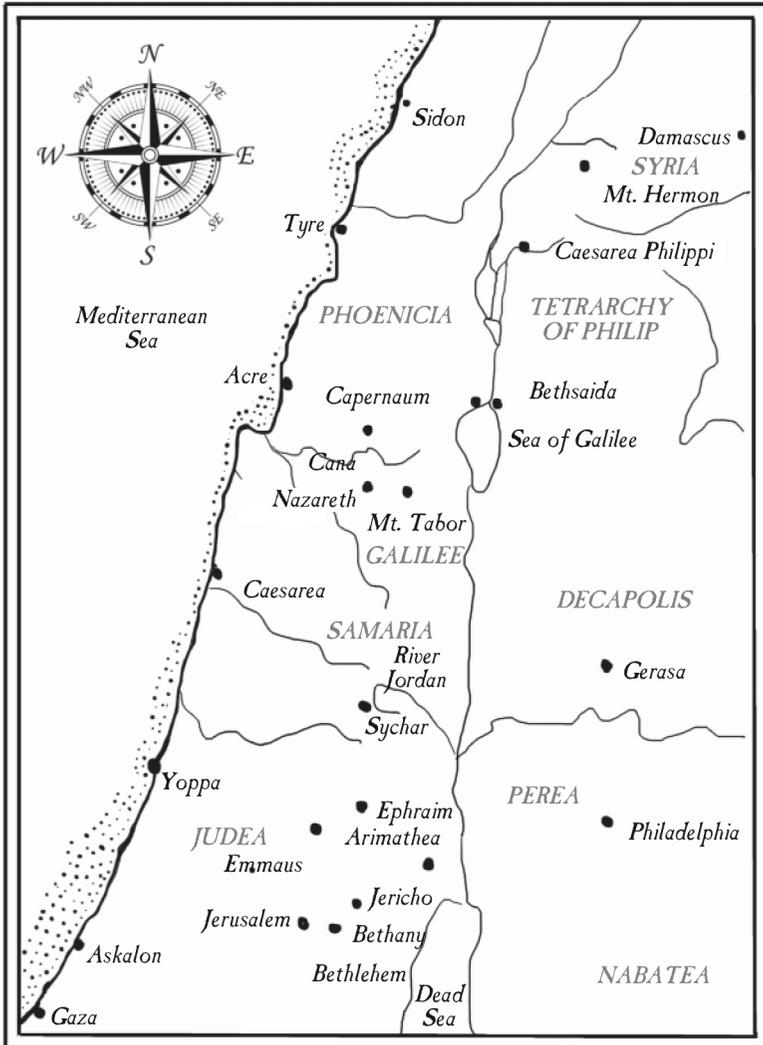
The high history of *le Sangraal* has never been told by any mortal man since Saint Joseph de Arimathea wrote these sacred words about our Lord and Savior. However, I declare to all men and women who wish to own this book, if God allows me to live in good health, it is certainly my intention to bring his story together. If God blesses my holy quest, these parchments will be found.

—Lord Robert de Borron
Anno Domini 1190

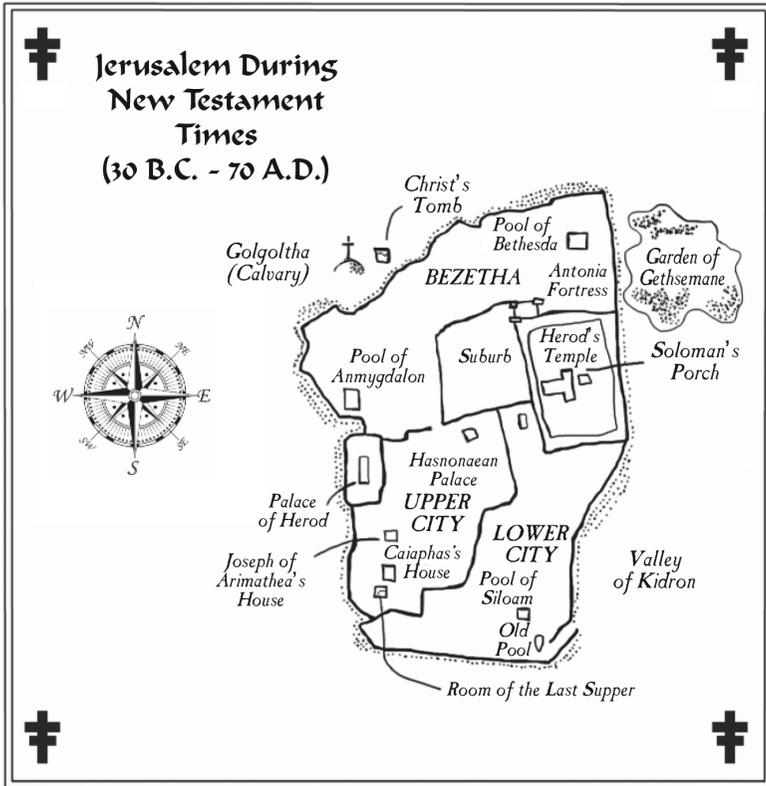
Anno Domini 1190



Jesus Christ Map of Life Events



Jerusalem in Roman Times



Tree of Life

Indeed, to them the books will be given,
and they will believe in them, and in them
all the righteous will rejoice and be glad,
to learn from them all the paths of truth.

1st Book of Enoch
Epistle 104:13

The High History
of *le Sangraal* and the Forgotten Disciple
is Dedicated to My Patron and
Brother-in-Law
Comte Gautiér de Montbéliard

—Lord Robert de Borron



Dedication

To my loving wife, Carol, who had patience for the last twelve years listening to me speak about my book. Also, to my late mother, Charlotte, who gave me the interest to write, and my late dad, Jack, who had a great thirst for history.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge author Stephen Lawhead, for inspiring me to write my first book in the Cup of Christ trilogy. His tireless research in Celtic lore and the legends of King Arthur motivated me to create my own ideas.

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My printing company IngramSpark that offered great advice about getting my book published for all those who love historical fiction and mystery thrillers.

Jack Holt



The Principal Characters of Frankish Gaul and the Levant

Anno Domini 1190

Baroness Marie de Borron—wife of Lord Robert de Borron; mother to Robert's sons, Brian and Henri; sister to Count Gautiér de Montbéliard

Cardinal Folquet de Marseille—archbishop of Toulouse, former troubadour, head of the Roman curia

Chevalier Marcel de Tournay—seneschal to Cardinal Folquet, archbishop of Toulouse

Commander Armound de Polignac—Templar leader at the commandery of Carcassonne, old friend of Grand Master Gilbert de Érail

Comte Gautiér de Montbéliard—former Crusader, writing benefactor to Lord Robert de Borron, brother-in-law to Robert de Borron

Grand Master Gilbert de Érail—Iberian grand master of the Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ (Knights Templar)

Hughes de Montbard—Templar squire, great-nephew to Saint Bernard de Clairvaux, under the command of Grand Master Gilbert de Érail

Muhammad Nur Adin—former emir from the Levant, constable of the Templar horses in Gaul, scout

Richard I, le coeur de lion—king of England; duke of Normandy, Aquitaine, and Gascony; lord of Cyprus; *comte* of Poitiers, Anjou, Maine, and Nantes; overlord of Brittany; reign 1189–1199

Robert de Borron—Lord of *Château* Borron, poet, writer, troubadour, swordsman, from Northern Burgundy

Robert de Sablé—grand master of the Templar's entire order, reign 1190–1193

Saladin (Salāh ad-Din Yūsuf ibn Ayyūb)—Muslim Kurdish Suni sultan of Egypt, Syria, and part of Palestine; led a great army against Christian crusaders; reigned from 1174–1193

Sergeant Guy de Béziers—Templar scout, former seaman, under the command of Grand Master Gilbért de Érail

Sergeant Jacque de Hoult—Templar scout, under the command of Grand Master Gilbért de Érail



The Principal Characters of Iberia (Spain)

Anno Domini 1190

Alfonso II (The Chaste)—king of Aragón; conde de Barcelona, Catalonia, Provence, Cerdanya, Y Roussillon; husband to Queen Sacha; brother-in-law to Princess Helena

Andreas—king of Iberian Romany (Gypsies); spouse of Queen Esmerelda

Benjamin and Esther—Jewish father and mother of Deborah, maternal grandparents of Chaplain Jeremiah Santiago de Compostela, son of Grand Master Gilbért de Érail

Commander Hugo de Joffre—Hospitaller monk commander of Zaragoza

Deborah—Jewish lover of Gilbért de Érail; mother of Jeremiah Santiago de Compostela

Diego—deceased infant son of Princess Helena of Aragón; lived just one day

Esmerelda—queen of the Iberia Romany (Gypsies) and seer

Esperanza—lady-in-waiting to Princess Helena of Aragón

Frère Chaplain Jeremiah Santiago de Compostela—Templar chaplain, scholar, and son to Grand Master Gilbért de Érail

Gerard de Ridefort—infamous tenth grand master of the entire Templar order (1184–1189) who lost the battle of the Horns of Hattin in Levant

Helena—princess de Aragón; marquésa de Barcelona, Castile, y Provence; widow of the martyred principe Pedro, late brother to King Alfonso II of Aragón

Holy Roman Emperor Fredrick Barbarossa—emperor of central Europe and commanding 150,000, army on the third crusade; drowned in a Turkish river on the way to the Levant. Lore says he dropped the spear that pierced the side of Christ and the emperor then drowned.

King Alfonso I (The Battler)—Iberian king who reconquered more than half of Moorish Iberia; great uncle to King Alfonso II (The Chaste)

Marshal Poncho Diaz de Vivar—Templar ancestor of El Cid and carried El Cid's sword, Tizona

Miguel—hermano, frère abbe, abad, abbot of San Pedro el Viejo in Huesca, Iberia; traveling companion of Lord Robert de Borron

Pedro Bernardo Ramón—principe de Aragón; marqués de Barcelona, Provence; martyr of the Battle of the Horns of Hattin in the Levant; late brother to Alfonso II (The Chaste); late husband to Princess Helena

Pope Clement III—papacy reign 1187–1191

Ramiro II—late monk, abbot, and king of Aragón (1134–1137); married Agnes of Aquitaine; sired the child Petronilla, future mother of King Alfonso II (The Chaste)

Reccared—Visigoth king of Southern Iberia, reign 586–601

Rodrigo de Balaguer—double agent working for Cardinal Folquet

Alfonso VII—king of Castile, late brother to Princess Helena

Sancha—reina de Aragón; Condesa de Barcelona, Catalonia, Provence, Cerdanya, y Roussillon; also spouse and queen of Alfonso II (The Chaste)

Shandar—son of Romany (Gypsy) King Andreas and Queen Esmerelda

Suleiman—one of the assassins



The Principal Characters of the City of Jerusalem and Palestine
Anno Domini 37

Alein Yosephe—son to Yoseph of Arimathea, partner in his father's business

Barabbas—the murderer set free by Jewish Sanhedrin, instead of Jesus the Christ, and released by Pontius Pilate

Cephus—fisherman, “the Rock,” disciple of Rabbi Yeshua ben Yoseph, brother to another disciple called Andrew

Clotho—Greek woman and early follower of Yoseph of Arimathea living in Palestine with new baby and wife to Georgeus

Eli of Yerushalayim (Jerusalem)—camel and cloth merchant; with two sons, Eliyah and Isaiah

Eliyah—son of Eli, the camel and cloth merchant

Enoch—infant son of Hebron and Enygeus; also name of Old Testament prophet who walked with God and didn't die

Enygeus—sister to Yoseph of Arimathea, husband to Hebron

Gaius Cassius Longinus—Roman Centurion guard, at the cross

Gaius Sertonius—centurion

Georgeus—Greek man and early follower of Yoseph of Arimathea living in Palestine with new baby and husband to Clotho

Hebron—brother-in-law to Yoseph of Arimathea, overseer to

Yoseph's merchant business, husband to Enygeus

Herod Antipas—tetrarch of Galilee-Perea; one of the sons of Herod the Great

Isaiah—Eli's son

King Arviragus—ruler of the Celtic Silures

Lazarus—resurrected from the dead by Yeshua ben Yoseph (Jesus the Christ), brother to Miriam and Martha, later follower of Yoseph of Arimathea

Martha from Bethany—sister to Lazarus; sister to Miriam

Miriam of Magdala—landowner, mystic, student of Rabbi Yeshua ben Yoseph, a new friend to Yoseph of Arimathea

Miriam of Nazareth—niece to Yoseph of Arimathea, mother to Rabbi Yeshua ben Yoseph, widow to the late mason and carpenter Yoseph of Nazareth

Nathaniel—friend to Philip; from Cana; early follower of Rabbi Yeshua ben Yoseph

Nicodemus—member of the Jewish Sanhedrin ruling council, scholar, lawyer, old friend of Yoseph of Arimathea

Philip—one of the twelve disciples chosen by Rabbi Yeshua ben Yoseph; also good friend to Yoseph of Arimathea

Pontius Pilate—Roman *procurator* of Yehudah (Judea)

Rabbi Yeshua ben Yoseph—itinerate preacher, mystic, biblical scholar, son of Miriam of Nazareth, rumored to be the foretold *Maishiach* (Messiah)

Saul of Tarsus—later called Paul, before Christian conversion was a tent merchant and member of the Jewish Sanhedrin and a persecutor of Christians

Shimon bar Yona—also known as Cephas or Peter; brother to Andrew, fishing merchant

Shimon the Zealot—half-brother of Rabbi Yeshua ben Yoseph and apostle; also later follower of Yoseph of Arimathea

Stephanos—first martyred Christian deacon in Jerusalem; later scholars say Saul of Tarsus (Paul) had Stephanos stoned to death

Thomas Didymus—apostle of Rabbi Yeshua ben Yoseph; also a later member who joined Yoseph of Arimathea

Yohanan bar Zebedee, the Writer—disciple of Rabbi Yeshua ben Yoseph, biographer, a close friend to Rabbi Yeshua

Yohanan Marcus—writer, student of Rabbi Yeshua, his two-story home used for the Seder (Passover meal)

Yohanan the Baptizer—cousin to Rabbi Yeshua ben Yoseph. He foretold Rabbi Yeshua as the Messiah and he would baptize his disciples with the Holy Spirit. Yohanan was possibly Essene trained. He had a son named Zechariah and, after Yohanan's beheading, his son was raised by Yoseph of Arimathea's family.

Yosa—daughter to Yoseph of Arimathea

Yoseph ben Caiaphas—high priest of the Jews; head of the Sanhedrin

Yoseph of Arimathea—richest merchant in the Mediterranean region, member of the Jewish Sanhedrin ruling council, uncle to Miriam of Nazareth, great uncle to Yeshua ben Yoseph of Nazareth

Yudas Iscariot—treasurer, disciple for Rabbi Yeshua ben Yoseph, rumored to be a member of the Sicarii (daggersmen), a group who assassinates Roman officials

Zechariah—orphan son of Yohanan the Baptizer, toddler second cousin to Rabbi Yeshua ben Yoseph



PART I

The Wolf



CHAPTER I

Anno Domini 1190

Late Fall

Pyrénées Mountains

The steep descent down the frozen mountain range, while following my fellow *frères* was circumspect, but uneventful. We encountered several thundering waterfalls along the winding rocky path toward the valley floor and decided to stop at one before nightfall and make camp. Marcel de Tournay and his men were now dead from the Pyrénées *montagne* snow avalanche and not pursuing us. This gave me some emotional relief along with my physical wounds, which now seemed healed. This gave me more strength to do strenuous chores. However, before dismounting, I sensed someone or something stalking us, forcing the hair on the back of my neck to tingle and the palms of my hand to sweat.

The pine-scented forest, on both sides of the trail, divulged nothing, other than a misty dark green color from the evergreen trees. None of the other four men seemed agitated, with both

sergeants' bobbing heads starting to drift with sleep. Once we stopped, Muhammad gathered some wood to start our campfire, and I thought it best to try to find something to eat for my companions. They were gaining their strength, but we had just a little food left. Drinking water wasn't a problem, for there was an abundance of melting snow scattered about the rocky cliffs, and the large waterfall nearby provided more than sufficient water for our needs.

"Commander de Érail, do you have any suggestions as to where I could forage for some food?" I queried, for I knew he was familiar with the terrain.

"Lord Robert, there is a large trout stream on the other side of these cliff rocks. Travel upstream about half a league. If my memory is correct, there's a small offshoot of the stream where the trout feed. Search for a large grove of white birch trees, which should mark the spot. I will tell Muhammad to fix you a fishing line with some down bait. Retrieve my battle-ax from my horse and use it to cut a pole for the line."

I felt quite reluctant to do this for two reasons. One, I didn't know how to fish, and the other, I thought I saw dark shadows of movement in the dense evergreen forest to my right.

"Commander de Érail, I must confess I have never fished before, and what if I become lost?"

"I would do it, but my strength hasn't returned from our battle at Gavarnie and my cabin surgery. Don't worry about that, Lord Robert de Borron, use my ax to mark the tree trunks, every third tree. Also, stay along the streambank, which will lead you there and back. As far as not being able to fish, Muhammad guarantees his bait of down always works. Just don't make a lot of noise when you wade out into the cove. Now hurry and leave. We are all starving for some hot grilled trout."

I proceeded to chop a young river birch sapling and used my boot dagger to remove the small limbs and leaves. By now, Muhammad had finished the lure and I attached the twine to the end of the pole. The bait color was a bright blue and resembled a small dragonfly. I was thankful he attached the bait lure first to the

twine; thus, I was reassured it wouldn't come off if the fish bit the hook. Before leaving, Muhammad placed several small drops of a liquid that made the lure shine. I examined the bait as I started on my fishing trip. At the far end of the bait was a sharp broken piece of chain mail made into a hook and secured with colored thread. The curved nose of the lure had some twine attached, well-knotted.

“Lord Robert de Borron.”

I heard my name as I started through the thick forest of trees. It sounded strange, and then I realized it was Muhammad trying to gain my attention. He motioned for me to come back. When I turned to him, he gave me a large cloth sack to carry any fish I might catch and grinned. He said something in his Saracen language and motioned for me to leave.

The day started to warm up after I had trudged a quarter of a league, yet I couldn't shake the sense of being followed. Before reaching a rocky stream, a low guttural growl came from the misty wood, just as I stopped and marked a tree with my shaky ax. My heart started beating louder. It sounded familiar, like the wolves that had attacked us at the *montagne* cabin, but a creepy deeper throaty sound.

After some time, I approached a large row of cliffs that enclosed both sides of the rushing stream, stopping only to rest before proceeding any farther. A cool breeze rose from the stream, which dried the sweat from my face as I sat down to reflect on how far I had come on my journey for *le Sangraal* parchments.

Momentarily, my thoughts went astray when a large brown eagle flew overhead and gave out a piercing cry for its circling mate. My thoughts drifted back to young Squire Hughes de Montbard and his heroic act of throwing his body in front of Marcel de Tournay's crossbow arrow to save his fellow *frère moines*. I so missed his aid and companionship, which left a dull ache in my stomach that wasn't hunger. It was a gnawing ache like losing a loved family member.

After gazing at the sky, my ears heard heavy footfalls running through the forest on the other side of the stream. Faintly, four

huge, gray-colored legs appeared, but not the animal's body or head. An enormous sounding howl erupted at once from the other bank, followed by a rapid crunching noise of forest debris. For just a brief moment, I caught sight of two large round-shaped orange eyes. Without thinking, my sword came out of its scabbard, after which I tightly brandished it with my right hand, while holding the battle-ax with my left. The undetermined animal or thing wasn't showing itself but seemed to gaze at me through the dense woods with its fiery, orange-colored eyes. The eyes didn't move but waited for me to react, which I did, by shouting at the beast, while striking the flat part of my ax against the blade of my sword. Immediately, the creature crept out of the woods.

To my horror, the wolf was gigantic in size, which I estimated to be the size of a small grown cow. It didn't seem mortal in nature, for its head and shoulders were twice the size of an average wolf. Especially, its large pointed canine teeth, which dripped with hungry saliva. Quickly, the beast raised its head toward the sky and gave out another blood-curdling howl, then afterward raced toward me. At once, I said a prayer to my Lord, Marie Magdalene, and the Almighty asking for protection from this devilish creature. Just as the enormous animal lunged toward my throat, a bright beam of light appeared between us.

"Lord Robert de Borron, fear not, for the beast is an apparition from Satan," came a familiar female voice. "You are now protected from his evil snare, have strength and faith, my *frère*, for you're safe from harm." Her golden-colored beam of light covered my entire body and warmed me like a blanket, making me experience a safe sensation from any adversary, imaginable or not. Once he collided with the yellow beam of light, the wolf's gigantic body dissolved into a thousand miniature sparkling stars.

The light beam drew me to two large cliffs with a talus that jutted out into the large stream. It seemed difficult to climb, but Marie Magdalene's soothing voice made it easy to reach the other side. There in front of me appeared a grove of snow white-colored birch tree trunks surrounding the perimeter of the cove. Suddenly,

the wind increased in speed and the white birch trees started swaying from the gusts, causing their small, yellow-colored leaves to issue forth an eerie rustling sound.

Once more, in the shadows of the birch grove, appeared a white radiating light, different from the yellow one radiating above me. It appeared similar to the one I had seen several months ago at the priory in Montpellier. At once, the white light turned a reddish-tinged color and began to form a human shape just as I reached the bank of the stream. The light's pinnacle radiated out several colors of yellow, red, and white, in what appeared to be a woman's head. Indeed, it was the Holy Marie Magdalene who appeared in front of me.

"Robert de Borron, I come again to give you my counsel," the now fully formed body said. "You have done quite well in our Lord's work. So far, what you have written, accurately tells of my friend Joseph and his trials. The search for the second set of *Sangraal* parchments will be fraught with intrigues, enigmas, and betrayal. However, Robert, beware of the third of these three, for Satan hides in many disguises. In addition, seek the truth in the building blocks of our God's universe; these will protect you from evil."

"But Holy Marie," I beseeched her on my knees. "Where and when will I know these things?"

"Some of these things will be revealed sooner than you might want, Robert de Borron. Remember my last words before I leave. We are all God's people no matter where we were born. Learn to be open in thought and have patience with others not similar to you. Now, I must leave, so you can continue to write about the forgotten disciple and our Lord's work."

She faded and with one last ray disappeared. By now, Holy Mary had given me a renewed sense of euphoria as I crossed myself and then reached for my fishing pole.

At once, I waded out into the cove of cool water and cast my line. After a short period, I felt a sharp tug on my line and a large iridescent fish leaped out of the water. He struggled for a

short time trying to hide under a rock in the cove, but it was to no avail. I gently grabbed hold of the trout and placed it in my sack. I pulled the drawstring to secure the fish and then put it into the water.

Some time had passed, for the sun hung high over my head and a large set of what seemed fish-shaped clouds drifted across my view. I estimated by now, I had caught enough fish to feed all my fellow disabled companions. The capture sack was writhing with activity as the trout fruitlessly tried to escape. My pride and confidence now surged, and I felt more essential to my *frère moines*.

The trail back to camp was easy to find, for I had marked the trees well. As I approached the campfire, I could see all of my fellow *frères* had large smiles of surprise as I held up a large sack of fish. *Frère* Jacque de Hoult insisted he wanted to count the number of fish I had caught. I gave him the sack followed by Muhammad storing my fishing pole for later use. I sat down near the fire and gazed into its flames. Everyone was in a jovial mood as our abundant evening meal was being prepared. I didn't say a word until Commander de Érail spoke to me.

“Was your fishing expedition uneventful, Lord de Borron?”

“Yes,” I replied, sensing a crooked smile on my face. “The fishing part was quiet and fruitful, but I had another encounter with a wolf. This time the creature appeared to be the size of a cow and not of this world. It attacked me, lunging for my throat, but a yellow beam of light slew the phantom demon.” The rest of my compatriots stopped what they were doing and stared at me.

“Quite frightening, indeed. Please, tell us more.” Commander Gilbert queried.

“Shortly thereafter, a human apparition appeared in the white birch grove that you mentioned. It was our Saint Marie Magdalene who appeared to me, and I know it was her intercession that saved my life. Holy Marie imparted several warnings to me. She said to remember three words: intrigues, enigmas, and betrayal. These were her pertinent didactic clues to what lies ahead for us. Saint Marie wouldn't say anymore, but her holy parting words were to

be patient of others not similar to ourselves and to be alert to the powers of darkness. Satan hides in many disguises, she said. Oh, and Commander, she mentioned a vexing sentence that maybe you can interpret. She said to seek the truth in the building blocks of God's universe. She spoke of this as being our protection from evil. Can any of you explain what she meant by the building blocks of the universe?"

"*Non*," both sergeants replied, but Sergeant Jacque de Hoult spoke with wide eyes.

"You were with Marie Magdalene? The beloved student of our Lord and Savior?" At once Sergeant Jacque crossed himself and said a silent prayer.

"*Oui*, but this wasn't my first visit. She spoke to me at the *iglesia* at Vézaley and then appeared to me at the fortress of Montpellier. Commander Gilbért knows of her appearances too. That is how he recognized me at your fortress."

Commander de Érail waited in silent thought before he gave me a reply.

"*Oui*, that is true, my fellow *frères*. I failed to mention it until our quest led us to more truths. I don't know what her cryptic message means, but my chaplain at our fortress at Zaragoza should know. *Frère* Jeremiah Santiago de Compostela is an antiquarian and a learned man of mathematics and philosophy. If anyone should know, he's the person who can answer our Holy Marie Magdalene's conundrum. Let's hope the weather stays pleasant, we should be at my home commandery in less than a fortnight. In addition, *Frère* Jeremiah is aiding me in our search for the second set of *Sangraal* parchments."

Sergeant de Hoult approached me with a broad smile on his face as Commander de Érail and I were finishing our conversation. His wound seemed to be healing fast, for his limp was just a small shuffle.

"Lord de Borron, you had seventeen fine fish in your capture sack, and you caught them in less than half a day. This should give you the confidence you need to return eight more times."

“Why eight more times, *mon bon frère*?” I asked.

“Our Saint Peter caught one hundred and fifty-three fish when our Lord told him to throw out his net on Lake Tiberias. I estimate this amount should feed us until we reach our home commandery. I have already started smoking nine of them. The remaining eight we will eat tonight.”

“I lost count of the number I caught. My mind was still pondering what our holy lady said. I am still amazed at the holy clues we are receiving. This is an affirmation that God is leading us in the right direction.”

The evening meal was quite tasty and gave each one of us the strength we needed. Furthermore, Muhammad and Sergeant de Béziers picked some winter berries to augment our fish dinner. Commander de Érail told us that we would now remain at this camp for several days before proceeding down the mountain. He said we would obtain some additional supplies when we reached the village of Huesca and the local commandery there. He estimated Huesca would be about twenty to twenty-five leagues from here. The commander further stated he would be pleased to see his old commandery at Zaragoza too.

Then Commander Gilbert revealed the *abbé* at Huesca, who was a *bon ami* and confidant, would meet us there.

I must have dozed off after completing our evening meal, for the next thing I remembered was the nickering of our horses as dawn broke through the evergreen trees.

The remaining few days kept me busy with fishing trips, after which Sergeant de Hoult meticulously counted my fish after each trip. When I had reached one hundred and fifty-three, he said it was time for us to leave the mountainside. The next day we broke camp after the fish were smoked.

I could see that my companions were gaining strength each day, for they started riding their horses on the remaining descent down into the valley floor.

On the final part of the steep rocky trail down the Monte

Perdido pass, our horses' hooves *clicked* and *clacked* on the moist rocks, but not one of them stumbled. Sometimes, we would see large venues of winged bearded vultures gliding on the warm air currents. We made our night camp next to a fen at the base of the canyon pass. Nearby beside a swampy lake, I viewed several families of geese who were conversing with one another over their evening meals. This serene scene melted some of my trepidations and the beautiful snow-capped *montagne* landscape gave me a sense of peace and confidence in what unknown we might face.