

THE TEMPORAL

A NOVEL, ONE of the Temporal Series

an eternal gift...
a temporal danger.

A NOVEL BY
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Prologue

Four Months Ago...

Bushehr, Iran

With his right hand, Fakhr al Din reached for a large chunk of white cheese. He had lost his little finger, but was blessed by Allah to still have retained the full function of the other three and his thumb. The explosion had been greater than anticipated. In the end, however, the mission was completed successfully. He allowed his hand to momentarily hover over the cheese, giving him a chance to admire its marred form—his small sacrifice for the cause.

The lighting in the room was dim and set primarily above the food on the table. His surroundings were completely in shadow, but that shadow was not void of eyes watching and fingers gripping weapons. There were two guards ready to give their lives to protect the great imam of the Bushehr Province in Southern Iran.

He took a generous bite of the cheese while enjoying the heavy aroma of garlic in the air. The garlic paired surprisingly well with the hint of fragrant mint and thyme flowing from a gift basket in front of him. I must have Hamim find more of this cheese, he thought. He had received many such gifts since an anonymous spokesman from his Warriors of the Sword had, through Al Jazeera, publicly taken credit for the latest bombing in Sderot, Israel. Of course, on CNN International and in English, Fakhr al

Din himself had categorically denied any involvement in the “atrocious and unfortunate event.”

Even with the satisfying thought of the local popular support and the current pleasant refreshments, the imam hated to be kept waiting. He tossed the remnants of a half-eaten chunk of cheese onto the table and gave his disorderly beard a tug. Hamim, his head of security, was due for a report on local threats. He was twenty minutes late.

Last week, at Hamim’s request, the imam had ordered the killing of an innocent boy to remind the locals of the holy mission with which they were all entrusted: to protect Fakhr al Din. The boy’s parents had been quite cooperative. It was amusing to him how quickly planted evidence persuaded the father to disown his son, the infidel. As the youth was dragged away to sentencing, his father led the frenzied chants of condemnation. The whole matter, of course, had not been the imam’s personal desire. But he had to periodically remind the neighborhood of their sacred duties.

Where is Hamim?

The Americans had taken an increased interest in him. He, however, felt sure his current safe house was secure. Two dozen loyal guards were on the grounds. The latest surveillance equipment continuously monitored every inch of the compound. A well-hidden tunnel that exited into the kitchen of a nearby house was an escape route of last resort. In addition to all this, he had a more traditional security system stationed at the three entrances and trained to discover explosives—his Belgian Malinois dogs, a breed popular for personal protection. These precautions would afford him the precious minutes needed to facilitate an escape should the enemy breach the front gates.

Fakhr al Din grabbed his pita filled with lamb *shawarma*, but before he could bite, the door flung open.

“Hamim, where have you been?”

But it wasn't Hamim.

Two strange men—Westerners wearing sunglasses and dark suits—stood in the doorway. He could see another shadowy figure in the distance beyond the men. *A woman?*

“Guards!”

Two of the imam's men, unseen and hidden by the shadows, stepped into the thin light. Brandishing their AK-47s, they let off a few rounds before they were silenced no more than two seconds after they began.

Fakhr al Din was left with his mouth agape and without comprehension of what just happened. He had heard the rat-tat-tat of the weapons to his left and right, but what he saw straight in front of him defied understanding. Instead of blood and flesh ripped by bullets, he saw, for the briefest of moments, the two dark men's hands go from their hips to level with the incoming bullets. The motion—if it could be called motion—was quicker than his brain could process. It was as if their arms were in one position and then in the next moment, up to meet the bullets.

He heard the sounds of a dozen rounds ripping into and ricocheting off of the walls, furniture, and glassware around the room—but not into flesh.

In the next instant, the cleric, still looking forward, saw only the figure that had been behind the two men. The two black suited men had vanished, leaving what he could now confirm to be a woman. Her fiery-red hair was free and

not held back by the traditional hijab head-covering. She was beautiful and terrifying.

Where are my men?

He turned left and then right to see the two dark strangers holding his men by the throat. His men were off the ground, struggling to breathe.

Fakhr al Din looked at the table. His SIG P226 was next to the cheese. With the quickest of motions, he jerked his hand out, slapping it on the hard wooden surface where the gun had been a second before. The woman had closed the two dozen feet within that timeframe and now held his weapon—its muzzle was directed to the tiny space between his eyes.

He heard the sound of bodies pounding onto the floor and again turned to his left and then right. His guards were now on the ground, facedown. Their necks were tightly held by the intruders who each had one knee digging into their prisoner's back. The dark men turned their heads toward the center of the room. Although the dark sunglasses concealed their eyes, they both were clearly looking to the woman, waiting for her command.

“What—what do you want?”

“A chat. A private chat,” she said with a smile, causing the Iranian to shudder. “Tell your men not to disturb us.”

The imam was at a loss. He felt her cold fingers breach the hairs of his beard and gently lift his chin. Her motion first closed his opened mouth and then raised his entire head to meet her eyes. With the other hand, she held

up his gun. Depressing the magazine release, she let the clip fall with a clunk onto the table.

“Tell them to go.”

Before he realized it, she had the gun lifted directly above her head. A single shot expended the remaining round, ejecting the spent casing and filling the small room with an explosive sound. It somehow seemed louder to the imam than had the bursts of the AKs. Bits of clay and plaster rained on Fakhr al Din, covering the table and cheese.

She was gone.

“Tell them to go—now.” The woman, having moved to his side away from the debris, startled him. He jerked his head in her direction. Her voice was soft, silky even. If it weren’t for those eyes—*eyes* that seemed to drill violently and deeply into his soul, she might appear peaceful and sublime, like an angel.

“D—don’t disturb us,” the imam said to the men, keeping his attention fixed on the woman’s face. As terrible as they were, he feared to wander too far from those dark, piercing eyes; they were captivating. “Tell the others to not disturb us!” he shouted louder, more confidently. Dirt and flakes of plaster dropped from his beard as he barked the order.

She flicked two fingers. Her two men immediately released their prisoners and returned to a standing position with their hands cupped in front like pall-bearers awaiting their duty. The guards on the floor rolled away from their captors, coughing.

“Go!” the woman shouted with a force beyond what seemed humanly possible.

The two men jumped to their feet and made for the door.

“Now,” she said as she casually walked to close the door, “I have a job for you; A job that I’m sure you will find to be most satisfying.”



The Present Day... Tokyo, Japan

“*Donata desu ka?*—Who are you?”

Her long-fingered hand darted up with grace, grabbing air as if she could touch the visage of the man standing in front of her in her dream.

She only required five or ten minutes of sleep daily and yet this dream had continued for over half an hour. She had already kicked off the top futon and her head was far from the pillow. Sweat dripped from her brow.

“Do you not see me?”

She always remembered her dreams which seemed to begin immediately with her loss of waking-consciousness and fade away when her body’s need for sleep was sated.

Particularly vivid were the dreams with him in it. His name was a mystery to her, but his face—she could recall it with exquisite detail and on command.

How familiar this all was and yet how... different.

Her eyes fluttered, then opened with the full realization that she was not awake. Her mind projected the dream world onto the wooden ceiling above.

“Who are you?” she repeated.

The man stood two dozen feet or more away and was enveloped by an obscuring cloud—a first for a dream with him in it. Even still, her keen vision discerned a panic within his eyes.

How different this dream was, she thought again. The man had always brought peace to her heart—not conflict and now... this horror. In previous dreams, the man recognized her. Always. Why am I invisible to you?

The man began to run. He was running from something and in her direction, but his position remained unchanged as if on a treadmill. He craned his neck over his shoulder in search of his pursuer.

She sharpened her vision and dared to peer beyond the man in search of the nightmare from which he was escaping. A moment later, he vanished. She was puzzled at first, but then she realized she had moved ahead of his position and was seeing what he saw. She was facing his nightmare directly.

As the scene gradually came into focus, she saw a street. It was in slow motion, but people were fleeing in terror. She squinted her dream eyes hard until she saw what they saw. A fireball.



Then it all disappeared. There was nothing but white.



“Sa—mu—el,” chanted a chorus of disembodied voices echoing from within the whiteness. It was a calm, sweet sound, a multitude of voices singing in unison like a well-trained choir. The echoes receded as the gentle whoosh of the ocean at eventide.

She answered, anticipating the meaning. “Samuel Williams, the one at the hospital.”

She understood and allowed it all to slip away. The white of the dream world gradually turned gray and then gave way to the dark brownish grain of the wood above her head.