



# OPERATION JOKTAN

A THRILLER

AMIR TSARFATI  
AND STEVE YOHN

*"Lorem ipsum vero eos et accusamus et iusto."* —ENDORSER NAME

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## **AMIR DEDICATES THIS BOOK TO...**

God, the Creator and Sustainer of all things. May Your will be carried out in my life, my ministry, and the world.

My wife and children. It is your love and support that carry me through the days of separation and sacrifice.

The hundreds of thousands of followers and supporters of Behold Israel. Some of you are like angels sent from the Lord to encourage us, come alongside us, and pray for us. Thank you for letting God use you to be His blessing.

## **STEVE DEDICATES THIS BOOK TO...**

My God, the Sustainer of my life. I lay Your gift back down at Your feet for You to do with it what You will.

Rick, your face was the first I remember seeing when I woke up, and that's when I knew it would be all right.

Wes, it is an honor to once again be your huckleberry.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Amir thanks his wife, Miriam, his four children, and his new daughter-in-law. Steve thanks his wife, Nancy, and his daughter. Although God is our foundation, family is the framework that holds us up and keeps us strong. Thank you so much for all your sacrifices over the years.

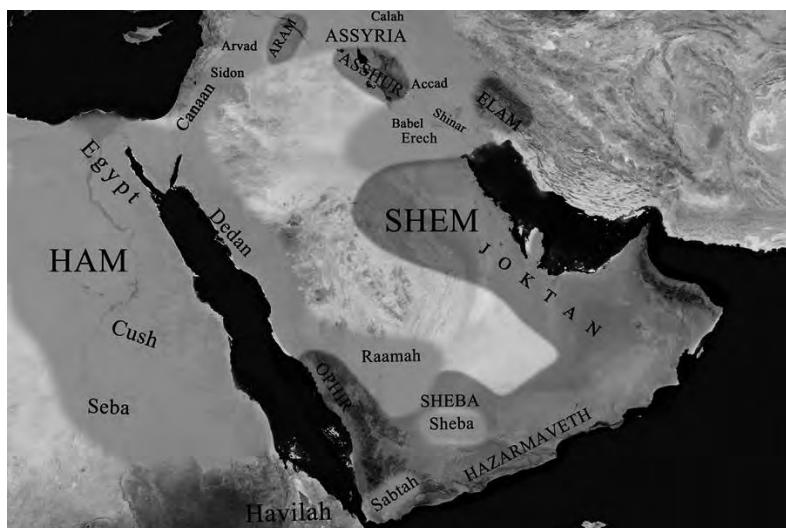
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וילְעֶבֶר יָלַד שְׁנֵי בָנִים יֶשֶׁם הָאֶחָד פֶּלֶג כִּי בְיָמָיו נִפְלְגָה הָאָרֶץ”  
 וְשֵׁם אֶחָיו יֹקְטָן: וַיִּקְטֹן יָלַד אֶת־אֶלְמוֹדָד וְאֶת־שֶׁלֶף וְאֶת־  
 הַצַּרְמָוֹת וְאֶת־יֶרַח: וְאֶת־הַדּוֹנָרִם וְאֶת־אוּזָל וְאֶת־דִּקְלָה: וְאֶת־  
 עוֹבָל וְאֶת־אַבִּימָאֵל וְאֶת־שָׁבָא: וְאֶת־אוֹפִר וְאֶת־חַוִּילָה וְאֶת־יֹבָב  
 “כֹּל־אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי יֹקְטָן: וַיְהִי מוֹשְׁבָם מִמִּשְׁעָא בְּאַכָּה סְפָרָה יַרְ הַקָּדָם:

To Eber were born two sons: the name of the one was Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided, and his brother's name was Joktan [pronounced “Yok-tan”]. Joktan fathered Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, Obal, Abimael, Sheba, Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab; all these were the sons of Joktan. The territory in which they lived extended from Mesha in the direction of Sephar to the hill country of the east.

GENESIS 10:25-30



# CHARACTER LIST

## ISRAELIS

**Dima Aronov** – Kidon ops team

**Avi Carmeli** – Kidon ops team

**Efraim Cohen** – assistant deputy director of Caesarea

**Alex Eichler** – director of Caesarea

**Yaron Eisenbach** – Kidon ops team

**Karin Friedman** – assistant deputy director of Mossad

**Yossi Hirschfield** – Caesarea analyst team

**Ira Katz** – ramsad (head of Mossad)

**Doron Mizrahi** – Kidon ops team

**Asher Porush** – deputy director of Mossad

**Liora Regev** – Caesarea analyst team

**Dafna Ronen** – Caesarea analyst team

**Lahav Tabib** – Caesarea analyst team

**Nir Tavor** – Caesarea/Kidon team leader

**Gideon Zamir** – South Africa ops supervisor for State Security

## SOUTH AFRICANS

**Christiaan le Roux** – brother of Nicole

**Nicole le Roux** – Caesarea analyst and computer specialist

## EMIRATIS

**Isa Al Maktum** – agent with the Signals Intelligence Agency (SIA)

**Abdullah Al Rashidi** – director of the SIA

**Lieutenant General Dhahi Khalfan Tamim** – UAE deputy chief of police and general security, formerly Dubai chief of police

## IRANIANIS

**Ahmad al-Qasimi (aka Mehdi Zahiri)** – leader of a Dubai-based Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) cell

**General Esmail Qaani** – commander of the Quds Force of the IRGC

**General Farrokh Soltani** – deputy commander of the Quds Force of the IRGC

**Jamshid Taheri** – member of Dubai-based IRGC cell

## IRAQIS

**Seif Abdel Abbas** – deputy commander of Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada (KSS) and head of mission

**Muzahim al-Aiyubi** – leader of KSS first team

**Abu Mustafa al-Sheibani** – commander of KSS and head of the Sheibani weapons network

**Omar Ali** – KSS militia soldier

**Mohamed Hassan** – KSS militia soldier

**Falih Kazali** – secretary general of KSS

**Fuad Razzak** – leader of KSS second team

## KURDS

**Lieutenant Murat Erdal** – deputy commander in People's Protection Unit

**Major Mustafa Nurettin** – commander in People's Protection Unit

## PALESTINIANS

**Mahmoud al-Mabhouh** – Hamas military commander and weapons buyer

**Muhammad Nasr** – Hamas soldier

## ROMANIAN

**Nicolae Filipescu** – Dubai-based tech smuggler

## CANADIANS

**Bruce Hatcher** – Wasaku Katagi's coach

**Wasaku Katagi** – MMA fighter

**Brett Terrell** – Wasaku Katagi's trainer

## AMERICANS

**Elliot Musser** – twin

**Katie Musser** – mother

**Nevin Musser** – oldest son

**Rick Musser** – father

**Zabe Musser** – twin

# CHAPTER 1

12 YEARS EARLIER—CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA  
JANUARY 20, 2008—13:30 / 1:30 P.M. SAST

Even with a trained ear, it's difficult to place the origin of a single gunshot. For that reason, Nir Tavor didn't know which way to point his gun until dozens of shots joined that first volley. A glance to his left confirmed what he expected to see—Gideon Zamir, his ops supervisor, using his body as a shield over their charge.

Zamir had been a battalion commander in the 1982 Lebanon War and the First Intifada, so he had plenty of experience with bullets whizzing overhead. Nir was only 24, still fresh in public service, and he'd never fired a bullet in battle.

That was about to change.

His journey to this point flew through his mind. Only three months ago, he'd been finishing his training with the State Security System of Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. One of the reasons he'd joined the MFA was to see the world, and the available postings—London, Washington, Tokyo, Paris—all seemed so glamorous. Yet as he considered those cities, they also seemed...predictable.

Then two words on the list caught Nir's eye, and the sense of adventure was back. South Africa sounded exotic with a little hint of danger. It certainly wouldn't be a sleepy posting. Many in South Africa felt



a kindred relationship with the Palestinians because of their perception of the refugee situation, and this had led to governmental sanctions, popular protests, and even some acts of violence. But Israel and the post-apartheid South African government under President Thabo Mbeki were just starting to thaw their frosty relationship, and despite objections, ties between the two nations continued to progress. Israel had even reopened their embassy, sending Ilan Baruch—the man Nir was here to protect—as not quite an ambassador but someone who would hopefully transition into a full-fledged holder of that position one day.

Today they were at an enormous Cape Town mansion that screamed of old apartheid money—Doric columns, a vast outdoor pool, marble everywhere, all set on a massive, lush property. Nir had even seen peacocks wandering around the garden area. Baruch was here at the invitation of the South African minister of home affairs, Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula, whom he met at a diplomatic function in Johannesburg several months back. In response to her inquiry about his eye patch, he'd told her about being severely wounded in 1970 during the War of Attrition with Egypt. This event had transformed him, he told her, and he was now very much a man of peace. His views on the Palestinian situation and his criticism of his own government's policies intrigued her, and she invited him to visit the city of her birth.

Now Nir was here on the last day of a weekend excursion that had been everything he'd hoped for when he'd written *South Africa* on that assignment request form. The previous two days had seen them sailing in the Atlantic, touring the Iziko Slave Lodge, and jaunting down to the Cape of Good Hope to see the penguins. Today they were wrapping up the trip with a luncheon followed by an outdoor fashion show at what was truly one of the most beautiful properties he'd ever stepped foot on.

Blue skies, a gorgeous mansion, stunningly attractive models... It was the perfect day.

Until the gunfire.

Without seeing them, Nir couldn't be sure who the attackers were. But it was likely one of two groups—a Palestinian militia that had somehow found its way to Cape Town, or more probably, a local,

Palestinian-sympathizing Xhosa militia that wanted to punish Israel by killing Ilan Baruch.

The assassination of Israeli diplomats wasn't unheard of. In 1982, three members of the Palestinian organization Fatah attempted to assassinate the Israeli ambassador to the UK, Shlomo Argov, by shooting him down on the streets of London. Argov survived a bullet in the head but remained paralyzed and under constant medical care for the rest of his life. The fallout from that incident led to the 1982 Lebanon War, which left dead hundreds of Israeli soldiers and thousands of Palestinian militia and Syrian military. It also cost the lives of tens of thousands of Lebanese civilians. Nir knew his history and the potential ramifications of this attack. He would not let anything happen to Baruch.

A half-dozen members of Mapisa-Nqakula's military escort immediately opened fire, their aim the entrance of the 12-foot cement wall surrounding the property. Knowing that their Vektor R4 assault rifles would cause a lot more damage than he could pull off with his Jericho 941 9mm, Nir saved his ammunition and took stock of the situation. From where he stood at one front corner of the seating area, he could see that the hundred or so guests had all dropped to the ground, including Baruch, who'd been sitting in the row of seats next to the stage-right side of the fashion show runway. Mapisa-Nqakula was on the ground next to him, and Zamir now hovered over them both.

Nir scanned the scene looking for more hostiles. Then his gaze reached the runway and stopped short. With a fear-filled yet inquisitive stare, two ice-blue eyes held him captive. Nir sucked in a breath. The woman lying on the stage was remarkable. Beyond remarkable. Full dark brows crowned her captivating eyes. The skin on her narrow face was bronze, and her thick, pouty lips were colored a rich red. As he gawked, those lips formed two words—"Do something!"

"Stay down!" he called to her, angry that he'd allowed himself to be distracted.

The gunfire stopped. Nir turned toward the security wall figuring the South African soldiers had dealt with the shooters; all he could see was camouflage-dressed military.

A groan sounded to his left. He spotted a woman in a brightly

patterned dress lying faceup near the stage, a matching traditional *iqhiya* wrapped around her head. Blood was rapidly staining the yellow fabric on her shoulder red.

He turned back to the model and reversed his instruction. "You! Come here!" He thought she might be too stunned or afraid to obey, but as he pulled off his suit coat, he was gratified to see her sliding off the raised platform, leaving her ridiculously high heels behind. Her knee-length dress looked unbearably tight, but before she ran, she tore apart the lower seam, giving her legs more freedom to move.

When he reached the injured woman, he knelt and pressed his jacket to her wound. The model's eyes revealed terror as she dropped beside him, but the rest of her expression showed resolve.

"I'm Nir."

"Nicole."

"Great. Nicole, keep pressure on this. As soon as we're clear, I'll get you, my ambassador, and the home minister into the house. Good?"

"Good." She had the type of voice he'd once heard described as smoky. Between that and her South African accent, he could spend the day listening to her read the Talmudic laws on skin diseases and be a happy man.

*The things that go through your head when you're under fire.*

He stood, and catching Zamir's eye, he pointed at him and gave a thumbs-up. Zamir responded with a thumbs-up of his own.

Shouting erupted from the wall, and the military soldiers began firing their weapons on full-automatic toward the gate. A SAMIL 20 military transport truck burst through the iron gateway and onto the lawn 50 meters from where Nir stood. At least a dozen poorly uniformed guerilla fighters jumped out of the back of the truck and began firing AK-47s at the military guard. It was a blood bath as both soldiers and guerillas crumpled to the ground.

Nir ran toward the truck, firing as he went. A scream sounded behind him, then he heard new gunfire erupt. Spinning around, he spotted three assailants who must have come up from the rocks leading to the ocean while everyone was distracted by the new assault. They were firing directly into the crowd of people prone on the ground, and

9mm shots sounded from Nir's right as Zamir emptied his magazine at the gunmen. One of them dropped, and the other two took cover behind a large stone planter.

"Get them inside," Nir yelled at his commander. Zamir nodded, then pulled Baruch to his feet, followed by the home affairs minister. "You too," Nir shouted to Nicole. She'd already helped the injured woman up.

Ahead, one of the gunmen stepped around the planter. Nir fired seven quick shots, causing him to retreat. Quickly changing his mag, Nir dropped to one knee and scanned his surroundings. At least six people were undoubtedly dead, and several others were bleeding. While Baruch was his primary charge, there was no way he could leave these people here as sitting ducks. But if he stayed where he was, he would likely be one of those sitting ducks too.

*If I've got no possibility for a solid defense, I better go on offense. And I better do it fast.*

Not giving himself time for doubt, Nir sprinted toward the gunmen's cover. His only chance was to surprise them in the next five seconds, before they recognized their two-to-one advantage and came out firing.

Ten meters...five meters...two meters...

Both camouflage-wearing Xhosas stepped from behind the planter. Nir fired three shots, which all struck one of them, and the hostile dropped to the ground. The surprise at seeing his foe so close to him stunned the second gunman long enough for Nir to launch himself full speed into his body. They both tumbled to the lawn, and Nir landed heavily on his left shoulder.

The pain caused him to lose his breath.

Rolling to his right side, he saw his opponent flying toward him. The man's full body weight landed on Nir's hurt shoulder, causing him to momentarily gray out. A hard punch to the side of his head snapped him back into full awareness. The first punch was followed by another, then another. Nir bucked his body and tried to twist, but the man just rode him out and brought his fist down on Nir's nose. He felt a sickening crunch, and his mouth filled with blood.

Hands now clenched around his neck, sealing off his windpipe. Nir gasped for air, instead getting a throat full of blood pouring from his sinuses.

Time was ticking. He bucked his legs up once, twice, and on the third time he was able to take hold of what he was grasping for. He slipped his DUSTAR Arad 7-inch blade from its ankle sheath and plunged it up under his attacker's ribs. The hands released Nir's neck as the man fumbled for the blade in his back. Nir pulled it out, then drove it in again, then one more time just to make sure.

The gunman dropped to his side as Nir sucked in a lungful of bloody air, choking and coughing as he tried to force it back out.

As he sat up, two South African police officers ran toward him. In the midst of his fight, he'd missed their arrival. Now he could see several cars with flashing lights parked on the lawn and a steady stream of them pouring through the gap in the gate.

"See if they're dead," Nir said to the men, nodding toward the three Xhosa bodies.

He'd never killed anyone before. Shooting the first guy was enough to shake him up a bit, but as he sat there, the second kill played over and over in his mind. The sound of the tearing fabric, the feel of the puncturing flesh...

A new picture invaded his thoughts. He had to be in shock, because what he saw in his mind's eye were the last things that should have his attention. But still, there they were.

He dropped his face into his hands, and those two inquisitive, ice-blue eyes pinned him in the darkness. Maybe he needed to find them again just so he could answer the questions behind their stare.