

THE NIR TAVOR TRIBULATION SERIES

THE NEXT WAR

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

AMIR TSARFATI
AND STEVE YOHN

NATIONAL BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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AMIR DEDICATES THIS BOOK TO...

The one true God who is the Creator and Sustainer of all things, including those He has called to be His own.

My mother, Hava, and my mother-in-law, Vibeke—two women possessing the strength and character of lionesses. Both of you have been through immense trials, yet have shown your endurance, power, and fortitude through them all. Thank you for the amazing examples you have set for me, our family, and so many others who are witnesses of your lives.

STEVE DEDICATES THIS BOOK TO...

God, the creator of beauty, music, story, and humor.

Jason Elam, Matt Yates, and Karen Watson, who each took a chance on an unknown commodity. It is because of your risks that I am doing what I do today.

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God, our number one goal in writing these books is to glorify You. And, as we write, we do so recognizing that You are the source of our ideas, our plots, our characters, and our very words. Our prayer is that by the time readers finish the wild ride of this book, they, too, will recognize that “You are the Lord.”

Amir thanks his wife, Miriam, his four children, and his daughter-in-law. Steve thanks his wife, Nancy, and his daughter. It is your love, care, and understanding that allows us to serve God in this way.

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“Thus says the Lord GOD: ‘Behold, I am against you, O Gog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal. I will turn you around, put hooks into your jaws, and lead you out, with all your army, horses, and horsemen, all splendidly clothed, a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords. Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya are with them, all of them with shield and helmet; Gomer and all its troops; the house of Togarmah from the far north and all its troops—many people are with you. . . . On that day it shall come to pass that thoughts will arise in your mind, and you will make an evil plan: You will say, “I will go up against a land of unwalled villages; I will go to a peaceful people, who dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates”—to take plunder and to take booty, to stretch out your hand against the waste places that are again inhabited, and against a people gathered from the nations, who have acquired livestock and goods, who dwell in the midst of the land.”

EZEKIEL 38:3-6, 10-12

“In Israel, in order to be a realist, you must believe in miracles.”

DAVID BEN-GURION,
ATHEIST, FIRST PRIME MINISTER OF ISRAEL (1886–1973)

GLOSSARY

HEBREW

abba – “father”

achi – “friend, bro”

ahabal – “idiot, moron”

al hapanim – lit.: “on the face”; “awful, terrible”

ani me’ahel lekha behatslaba – “I wish you good luck”

Avarnu et par’o, na’avor gam et zeh – lit.: “we got through Pharaoh, we’ll get through this too”

balagan – “mess, disaster, confusion”

b’chayyecha – lit.: “in your life”; “oh, come on”

beshu’shu – “undercover; in secret”

bul – “to the point; bingo”

chai b’seret – lit.: “living in a movie”; “to have unrealistic expectations”

dohd – “uncle”

echad – “one”

ein matzav – lit.: “there isn’t a situation”; “not a chance; impossible”

elef ahuz – “1,000 percent right”

gilita et America – lit.: “you discovered America”; “duh; no kidding”

goy – “Gentile”

habib(i) – “my dear, my friend”

Hatikvah – the Israeli national anthem

Hatyul ha’Gadol – lit.: “the Great Trip”; a tradition among Israeli young adults in which they travel after completing their mandatory service in the IDF, often backpacking in Central and South America or India and southeastern Asia

ima – “mother”

ma pitom – lit.: “what suddenly?”; “no way!”

manot krav – IDF field rations

mashu mashu – lit.: “something, something”; “great, fantastic”

Min haShamayim Tenuhamu – “May you be comforted from heaven”

motek – “sweetheart”

Root – “acknowledgment of order, ‘Yes, sir’”

saba – “grandfather”

sababa – “cool, good”
safta – “grandmother”
shlosha – “three”
shnayim – “two”
shuyot bamitz – lit.: “nonsense in juice”; “ridiculous; utter nonsense”
smar'tut – lit.: “rag, dishcloth”; “wuss, wimp”
ta'ut sheli – “my mistake; I’m sorry”
tembel(im) – “jerk, idiot”; the *-im* is the Hebrew plural
toda – “thank you”
tusik – “butt”
walla – “wow”
yeshiva – “a Jewish educational institute”
yirah – lit.: “fear, awe”; expresses awe and wonder
yutz – “fool” (Yiddish)
ze meh-vah-es oti – “that’s a bummer”

RUSSIAN

begi – “run”
dva – “two”
ne dvigaysya – “don’t move”
nu izvinite – “well, excuse me”
nyet – “no”
raz – “one”
tri – “three”
vashe zdoroviye – a toast; “your health”
za rodinu – “for the Motherland”

TURKISH

eve gidin – “go home”
garson – “waiter”
kirli köpekler – “dirty dogs”
kusura bakma – “forgive me”
rusça – “Russian”
Türk köpeği – “Turkish dog”

CHARACTER LIST

ISRAELIS

Dima Aronov – Kidon operative
Efraim Cohen – assistant deputy director of Caesarea
Irin Ehrlich – Kidon team leader
Rafaela Eisenbach – Yaron's wife
Yaron Eisenbach – Kidon operative
Kaleb Hadane – Mossad analyst
Gil Haviv – Kidon operative
Sharon Haviv – Gil's wife
Dan Hurvitz – minister of defense
Hoshea Kaplan – foreign minister
Ira Katz – *ramsad*; head of Mossad
Aryeh Neeman – Kidon team leader
Daniel Ramon – former prime minister
Elias Rochman – Nir Tavor's brother-in-law
Menashe Rochman – Nir Tavor's nephew
Noach Rochman – Nir Tavor's nephew
Shayna Rochman – Nir Tavor's sister
Dafna Ronen – Mossad analyst
Idan Snir – prime minister
Lahav Tabib – Mossad analyst
Adah Tavor – Nir Tavor's mother
Dina Tavor – Nir Tavor's niece
Eliana Tavor – Nir Tavor's niece
Ezra Tavor – Nir Tavor's father
Hannah Tavor – Nir Tavor's sister-in-law
Maya Tavor – Nir Tavor's niece
Michael Tavor – Nir Tavor's brother
Nir Tavor – Kidon team leader
Imri Zaid – Kidon operative
Liora Zaid – Mossad analyst

AMERICANS

Evan “Trip” Reed – independent photojournalist
Moshe Graetz – American Mossad asset
Oscar – American Mossad asset

IRANIAN

Sadeq Mirza – member of Iranian special forces

NEO-RUSSIAN RESISTANCE

Hristo Angelovski – Macedonian group member
Ivan Božiković – Croatian leader of group
Ziva Božiković – Croatian group member
Pavel Ognyanov – Bulgarian group member
Penko Ognyanov – Bulgarian group member
the *shakal* – Kosovar group member

RUSSIAN

Pavel Belousov – president of Russia

SOUTH AFRICAN

Nicole le Roux – Mossad analyst

TURKISH

Adnan Albayrak – president of Türkiye



CHAPTER 1

CHEESEQUAKE CREEK, NEW JERSEY, USA—
AUGUST 4—01:55 (1:55 AM) EDT

Steel girders passed overhead, giving just enough clearance for the antennae that rose from the roof of the low-profile yacht. Decades of saltwater had caused rust and decay to peel away at the metal. Still, the drawbridge was operational. Not that anyone operated it. The span remained locked in a permanently closed position because yachting was not high on any American's priority list these days.

Nir Tavor stepped back under the roof of the watercraft's bridge. According to his analyst team back at the Mossad headquarters in Tel Aviv, Cheesequake Creek, just below South Amboy, New Jersey, had been a hotbed of recreational traffic for decades. Hundreds of slips filled the five marinas along the shoreline, and numerous boat ramps allowed weekend revelers to back up their pickups and slide their roundabouts into the water. Ten minutes east, and the boaters would find themselves out in the Atlantic Ocean for a day of fishing or cruising or whatever water activity struck their fancy. Since The Disappearance, though, recreational time was at a premium. Most people in America were primarily focused on survival.

“Right up ahead,” said Oscar. A Jewish-American Mossad recruit who chose to keep his last name unknown, the squat, gray-bearded pilot had remained aloof since he picked up Nir’s Kidon team from Nova Scotia a couple days ago. A gradual shifting of his weight from one foot to the other was the only indication of his nerves.

Nir didn’t blame the man for being nervous. They were entering a shady area known for smugglers and drug running. He also supposed that Oscar’s transporting a team from Kidon only upped the man’s stress level. In an org chart of Mossad’s intelligence apparatus, the hard C–pronounced Caesarea was its violent, operational subsidiary. And within Caesarea was Kidon, the bloody tip of Mossad’s spear.

From past experience, Nir also knew his personal appearance added to the intimidation. It wasn’t that he was especially tall or muscular, although he did tend to receive female attention whenever he wore a snug-fitting T-shirt. His fear factor came through the trails of scars that wove across his olive skin and cut thin patchwork lines in his beard and tightly shaved head. Each line told a story of violence, both given and received, throughout the years.

Maybe a little conversation will ease his nerves.

“You been running Cheese-quake Creek your whole life?”

Without looking over, Oscar said, “It’s pronounced Chess-a-quake, not Cheese-quake.”

“Wait. What?”

“The name of the creek is Chess-a-quake. You’ve been butchering the pronunciation ever since you first got on my boat. It’s like you think there’s a factory at the marina where you can get an overpriced dinner and an artery-clogging dessert. It’s driving me crazy.”

Nir stared at the man’s profile.

Apparently, there’s a fine line when it comes to physical tells between someone who’s nervous and someone who is just plain exasperated. Ten to one my little band of misfit analysts at CARL knew I was mispronouncing

the name the whole time and laughed whenever they fed into my delusion. Which reminds me.

He turned away from the pilot and triggered his coms unit. “CARL, this is Lead, we’re getting close. Alert transport.”

“Lead, *Root*,” he heard Dafna Ronen respond. Along with Dafna in CARL, Nir’s team headquarters at Mossad in Tel Aviv, were Liora Zaid and Kaleb Hadane. Together, they were monitoring the operation long-distance. In another part of the Mossad building, another analyst team was watching the moves of a second Kidon team just about to make landfall in the US. Led by Irin Ehrlich, their mission was taking them to San Francisco Bay, and on to Oakland.

“One more thing, CARL. How do you pronounce the creek that we are on?” Nir asked.

There was a pause. Then Dafna answered, “How do you pronounce it?”

“That’s what I thought. Out.”

The 2004 Viking 48 convertible fishing yacht drifted to the right to pass through the gap of the Morgan Draw, a rail bridge that was much lower than the first one they had cleared. Once everything had gone south in the United States, someone had thankfully seen fit to open the waterway’s path and leave it open. The regular runs of the New Jersey Coast Rail Line that had used the draw ceased after a train derailed south of the creek during *The Disappearance*. The story was that a couple of vehicles had drifted onto a crossing after their drivers had suddenly vanished. The train hit with enough force that the front three railcars shattered their couplers and rolled several times. Nir couldn’t remember the casualty total, but it was significant. One day, he figured, New Jersey or FEMA or some other official agency would get the tracks cleared and the line running again. For now, convenient commuter travel was not high on the needs list for the state or the USA.

“Docking in five,” said Oscar. Nir clapped him on the shoulder,

then climbed down from the bridge. As he did, he scanned the shore for movement. Thick summer air hit his face like a lukewarm towel after a cheap shave. Even though the temperature had dropped to a not-unpleasant level, the moisture had his T-shirt sticking to his body, and he could feel water dripping down his legs.

The shore is so dark. No streetlights, no window glow. If it wasn't for the three-quarter moon, we'd be navigating in complete darkness. That'd be ideal for this waterway's new crop of smugglers and bandits.

A brief scenario ran through his mind that had his team fighting off a surprise assault.

It'd turn out to be a very bad day for them. But it would also seriously hinder the vital "sneaking" element of "sneaking into the USA."

He crossed the deck toward the salon and walked in. Two very comfortable seating areas were spread out in front of him, along with a well-accountered galley. At the far end, two steps down, were accommodations that allowed only four of them to sleep at a time, assuming none of his team of assassins volunteered to spoon together on the full-sized bed.

All the faces looked up at him, and he stepped in and closed the door.

"Docking in five."

A smattering of responses acknowledged his words. The two men to Nir's left had been with him for years. Yaron Eisenbach, a mid-40s veteran whose salt-and-pepper hair had migrated from his head to his face, was built like a fireplug and had more missions under his belt than anyone else on board. He had been Nir's right-hand man for years. Next to him on the wraparound bench sat Dima Aronov, a Russian Jew whose family had immigrated to Israel when he was still young. Nicknamed Drago, everything about the towering hulk of a man made it clear that he must break you.

Across the salon, in the other seating area, were the most recent

additions to Nir's team. Imri Zaid was the youngest, fastest, and, as he would be quick to point out, best-looking of the quintet. Several months ago, he had been removed from the dating pool when he had married the former Liora Regev of the ops team. This created a potential conflict that made Nir nervous, and he had temporarily considered transferring one or the other. But because their skills were so good he couldn't afford to lose either one, Nir figured they'd just ride it out and make it work. Besides, if he split up the team of analysts, they'd find a way to take revenge on him, with his credit rating being the most likely victim.

The newbie of the ops team was Gil Haviv, a former member of Shayetet 13, the lethal batwing force of the Israeli navy. Stealthy, smart, and possessing an incredible skill for blending into his surroundings, Gil had more military combat experience than any of them. When Yaron decided he was finally too old to lift a gun, Nir wanted Gil in his place. Unfortunately, by that time, the born leader would probably have a team of his own.

A string of poorly linked curse words reminded Nir that there was one more person on this operation.

"You need help with that?" Nir asked Lahav Tabib, who was sitting on a very large plastic case trying to hook the latches.

"We asked, but he insists on doing it himself," said Imri. "Says there's delicate stuff inside, and us helping just might get us all blown up."

"Good thing he's bouncing on it like it's a trampoline."

Lahav dropped his full weight onto the case one more time, then reached between his legs and twisted. There was an audible snap, and he jumped back to his feet. "Perfect! Like it's made for it," he said.

In what was becoming a more familiar occurrence, the analyst had been brought along as a "sixth man" for the ops team. Brilliant, creative, and a tireless worker, Lahav was also brash, obnoxious, and unconcerned about petty issues like legality and decorum. Years back, after

discovering a vulnerability in the power grid in southern Israel, he took his concern to his higher ups. They pooh-poohed his warning, so he proved his point by shutting down the electrical grid for the city of Eilat. The government quickly remedied the vulnerability, and Lahav found himself occupying a cell in Maasiyahu Prison. It was from that home away from home that he had been snatched up to occupy a place on Nir's experimental team of unconventional analysts.

"Can you at least tell us what you have in there?" asked Dima.

"Boss asked for a nonlethal boom; I'm giving him a nonlethal boom. Just hard to fit all that boom into one bag without a blast." Lahav smiled as he stood, obviously proud of his alliteration. He tried to lift the case. It didn't move. "Crap. That's heavy. Little bit of help?" he asked, rolling the Pelican case toward the big Russian. It caught a seam in the floor and began tipping forward. Dima dove to straighten it, while the other operatives flinched.

Nir, though, kept his eyes on the analyst, who was grinning as he turned to grab his backpack.

He knows exactly what he's doing.

Before any of the team had time to retaliate, Nir said, "Dima, carry Lahav's case. Lahav, please try to be less you. Let's gear up and get ready to go. I can feel the boat slowing."

Gil hefted a pack toward Nir, who slung it over his shoulder. Turning back toward the door, he put his hand on the knob and waited for the signal from above.