

# MIKE EVANS



# THE CANDIDATE



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*The Candidate*

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*This book is dedicated to  
my mentor and Israel's sixth prime minister,*

*Menachem Begin,  
to whom I owe a deep debt of gratitude.*

*He was, in my opinion,  
Israel's greatest prime minister.*

*He endorsed my first book,  
and when I warned him against it,  
he laughed and said, "I am a short prime minister.  
If they criticize me, I will stand on the newspapers  
and be much taller. Besides, today's news  
is just a wrapper for tomorrow's fish."*

*Menachem Begin was my hero then and still is today.*

*Over thirty years ago, he inspired me  
to build a bridge based on mutual respect between  
Christians and Jews—a bridge that now  
has tens of millions of supporters—a bridge of love.*



# CHAPTER 1

## ZURICH, SWITZERLAND

**FATHER PENALTA SHIFTED POSITIONS** in the chair and glanced around the room. Before him was a heavy oak desk, the top of it clean and spotless. A lamp sat to the left. Its amber glow sent shadows dancing across smooth paneled walls that had been burnished to a deep, rich luster from centuries of meticulous care. Beneath Penalta's feet lay a stone floor, worn smooth by the footsteps of faithful penitents. Saint Anton's Cathedral, the oldest Catholic parish in Zurich, had been around since before Charlemagne, dispensing grace and mercy to the contrite committed to its care. Seeing it now, with its paneled walls and stone floor, reminded Penalta of the lives that had been entrusted to him and the secrets he'd come to betray.

As a young man, Penalta had entered the priesthood from his home parish in Formia, a city of modest size on the western coast of the Italian peninsula, halfway between Napoli and Rome. After seminary, he was assigned to a church in Tivoli. The following year, he petitioned for admission as a novitiate in the Order of the Knights of Malta.

A blend of political influence, military might, and ecclesiastical dogma, the Order had been formed in the Middle Ages to provide security for Christians making the pilgrimage from Europe to the Holy Land. With the help of Spain, its members fought valiantly but even they could not

stem the tide of history. As the region came under Islamic control, the Order retreated, first to Malta, then to the island of Rhodes. Yet, though cloistered behind the walls of Knights Castle, change found its way inside. Slowly, spiritual discipline gave way to political expression and in a perversion only pride and power could create, the Order turned from defending the faithful to the all-consuming task of extracting revenge on the Jewish race for the death of Christ. It was that unholy purpose that brought Father Penalta to Zurich and the meeting at Saint Anton's Cathedral.

Seated across from Penalta behind the oak desk was Serafino Rampolla. As secretary to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Rampolla was the first stop for all accusations of heresy, the gatekeeper for all challenges to the doctrinal propriety of the religious orders subject to the Pope's authority and jurisdiction. He flipped through the handful of documents that lay before him and looked over at Penalta. "You have more?"

"Yes," Penalta nodded. "Much more."

Penalta had come there that day to present evidence that the Order of Malta no longer conformed to the tenets of the Christian faith—that its practices had moved beyond the bounds of orthodoxy, and that it operated for no purpose other than the attainment of its own glory. In short, it had succumbed to heresy. It was a bold statement, even for one with the reputation and experience of Father Penalta, urging the Pope to exercise his authority over the Order and bring its operations to an end. In support of his claims he spent the afternoon with Rampolla outlining the Order's most grievous breach, the formation of Sierra Resources and the nature of its unholy agenda.

An American corporation, Sierra Resources had been formed for the sole purpose of conducting business with the United States military and intelligence community. Using the Order's vast resources and its far-flung network of relationships, Sierra won initial contracts to provide guards for military and intelligence detention facilities operated by the CIA at locations around the world. Later, the company expanded to the rendition of detainees, seizing and transporting suspected terrorists to secret facilities

in countries where lax criminal justice systems incorporated torture as standard procedure. When the White House finally cracked down on the use of aggressive interrogation techniques, Sierra Resources took over that role, establishing its own facilities in remote areas of central Africa and northern Mexico, where it conducted prisoner evaluations without the limitations placed on government agencies. That program proved successful, yielding information that curtailed attacks by insurgents in Iraq, put the Taliban on the run in Afghanistan, and revealed previously unknown threats in Yemen, Bahrain, and Syria.

As Sierra's success continued, it expanded into special operations and experimental warfare employing mind-altering psychological techniques. At first designed to assist in the recovery of soldiers suffering from stress disorder, the program quickly shifted to focus on capability enhancement. Its most recent efforts included a plan to retrain captured terrorists using implants and electronic chips, then send them back to infiltrate their own terrorist cells. It was an incredible tale, one Penalta was sure would be met with skepticism, but he had come to the conclusion there was no other way, especially now, after all that had happened in—

Rampolla cleared his throat. "And you are certain the additional documents you have will verify these accusations?"

"Yes," Penalta nodded. "I am certain."

"It seems a little far-fetched." Rampolla laid the documents on the desk and leaned back in his chair. "A religious order in the defense contracting business. Interrogating prisoners. Implanting terrorists with computer chips." His forehead wrinkled in a troubled frown. "Controlling their minds and sending them back to their own people."

"I know." Penalta nodded in agreement. "It is far beyond what one would expect, which is why I am here."

"You think the Order is aware of this?"

"Aware of Sierra Resources?"

"Aware of what the company is doing."

"It was their idea," Penalta replied. "It is part of their plan." He leaned

forward, his hands resting on the edge of the desk. “Their ultimate plan is to use these programs to gain control of an American president.”

Rampolla struggled to maintain his composure. “An American president?”

“Why do you find that so hard to believe?”

“We are talking about a religious order.”

“A military order. One whose sovereign is recognized by the nations of the world.”

“And why would they want to control an American president?”

“To exterminate the Jews in America and remake the American government into an entity of the Order.”

“Really?” Rampolla’s eyes darted away. He ran his hand over his chin to hide the amused smile that turned up the corners of his mouth.

Penalta knew he had lost the moment, but he’d come too far to stop now. Instead of retreating, he plunged headlong into an explanation. “They already have implemented enough changes in American law to allow this to happen. Their Patriot Act and newly enacted state immigration laws have given their government unprecedented power and authority at every level. Sierra Resources will provide them with a private army accountable to no one. All they need is a president who is willing and able to put the Order’s plan in motion.”

Rampolla turned back to face Penalta once more. “But a candidate. Really.” He tossed his hand aside in a dismissive gesture. “That would require someone willing ... gullible. Not even the Americans are that oblivious.”

“The Order has already found its candidate and he is well on his way to gaining office. That is why I decided to come to you.”

“And who might this candidate be?”

“David McNeil. Governor of Virginia and the Republican front-runner in the current presidential election.”

“Well ... I don’t know. This matter is far beyond the scope of my purview. And well beyond the authority of our office.”

“I have documents to prove what I am saying.”

“What sort of documents?”

“Bank statements. Ledgers. Correspondence.”

“That can directly link the Order to Sierra Resources?”

“Oh my, yes,” Penalta sighed. “That’s what I have been telling you. The Order created Sierra. The Order funds Sierra. The Order controls Sierra. The Order owns Sierra Resources.”

“You know this for a fact?”

“I was there when we voted to do it.”

“You voted for it?”

“That is beside the point. And the documents go further.”

“Further? How much further?”

“There were political contributions from the Order, through Sierra Resources, to several political action committees. Those committees in turn transferred the money to Governor McNeil’s campaign accounts. All of which is contrary to the laws of the United States.”

Rampolla’s face turned serious and he glanced again at the documents on his desk. After a moment, he scooted back his chair and stood. “Well,” he said, smiling politely. “I will need time to look over what you have presented.” He came from behind the desk. By then, Father Penalta was standing and Rampolla guided him toward the door. “If you will send me those additional documents, I will look at them, as well. But this will take some time.”

Penalta glanced up. “You understand the sensitive nature of this, do you not?”

“Certainly.” Rampolla reached around Penalta and opened the door. “We shall treat our discussion today as confessional in nature.”

“Good,” Penalta sighed. He stepped from the office to the hallway. “I would not want—”

“I will be in touch,” Rampolla interrupted. He stepped back, moving inside the office, and closed the door without waiting for a reply.

As the door closed behind him, Penalta turned away and started across the hall. Seated along the wall was his assistant, Angelo Barberini. He’d been waiting since they’d arrived more than three hours earlier.

Like Penalta, Barberini came to the Order as a novitiate early in his career as a priest. Italian by birth, Barberini was from Cagliari, Sardinia. He became a candidate for ordination during high school but, unlike others in the Order, he took his ordination vows in the Greek Orthodox Church and came to the Order upon the recommendation of the abbot at Saint Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai. Though an Italian citizen by birth, his membership in the Greek Church touched deep-seated prejudices that reached back almost as far in the life of the Order as its hatred of the Jews.

Barberini rose from his chair as Penalta approached. "Did all go well?"

Penalta brushed aside the question with a wave of his hand. "Come," he grumbled and started down the hall. "We have wasted too much time here already."

"Did he not listen?"

"Whether he listened is only important if he acts."

"Surely he will act on what you have shown him."

"There are powerful people who do not want us to succeed."

"Yes. I understand, but surely Rampolla is not one of them."

"One can only hope."

On the sidewalk outside, Barberini hailed a taxi. They climbed in back and rode in silence for several blocks. Finally Penalta spoke. "Powerful men in the Church secretly want the Order to succeed in eliminating the Jews."

"You are worried he is one of them?"

"Rampolla is not a powerful man."

"But he can help us."

"If he will. Every man holds in his hands the power to do good or evil." Penalta gave a heavy sigh. "Perhaps we should have taken this to someone else."

Twenty minutes later they arrived at an apartment building in Wiedikon, a neighborhood along the western edge of the city. As the taxi came to a stop, Barberini reached for the door handle. "Perhaps we should eat dinner out tonight, before we retire for the evening. It will do you good to take a break."

“No,” Penalta said, shaking his head. “There is no time for that.” He stepped from the car to the curb. “Go to the café on the corner and get something for us to eat. Bring it back to the apartment.” He turned toward the entrance to the building. “We have work to do.”