

Q: Awakening

G. M. Lawrence

Steve Stone, Illustrator

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Harrison Ford, Ben Kingsley, and Mark Strong, here is your next movie project. The title may be lackluster, but the story in G. M. Lawrence's *Q: Awakening* has box office blockbuster written all over it. Lawrence's book is exciting, tightly written, and, best of all, smart. *Q: Awakening* belongs on *The New York Times* Best Sellers list.

The hunt for biblical artifacts that have the potential to alter the course of world events or reveal the true word of God is not a new theme, but rarely has it been written this well. Lawrence's scarred and reluctant hero, Declan, is not the first to be drawn out of exile to strap on his holster for one last quest to save the world, but Lawrence has a talent for making Declan appear as authentic as he is conflicted. Even the villains come across as human and believable—no easy task in this well-worn genre.

The "Q" of the title is "the source," a gospel written by Christ himself, entrusted to the Apostle Paul, and hidden away for two thousand years in a remote desert temple by a small yet devoted secret brotherhood. The plot does indeed smack of an *Indiana Jones* movie or a Dan Brown novel, but *Q: Awakening* is even smarter, edgier, and more credible.

To call this a page-turner is not enough. The book, like the manuscript for which the cast of the novel is searching, "is like opium," as Lawrence writes. The story, as one character tells another of the search for Q, is "a tale of obscure excavations, forgotten crates, a desert monastery, and above all a priceless treasure."

Lawrence's prose is nothing short of lovely. This is a delightful and unexpected discovery, especially in what at first glance would appear to be just one more tale of biblical archaeologists running amuck. The surprise that it is not just such a trifle is what makes *Q: Awakening* a real treasure. As Declan declares to a young woman he is trying to protect, "Q isn't what you think it is. It isn't about the light. It's about the darkness. I've pursued this damn parchment my whole life. That's what it does to you. It takes you over. It's like a drug, a vicious, addictive, deadly narcotic. It makes good men do bad things and bad men do terrible things."

The cast of *Q: Awakening* is pure Hollywood in some ways, but with more depth than is common in the genre. The three villains at first seem to be one-dimensional bad guys from some cartoon, but as they begin to play against each other, it is revealed that not all is as it seems. Much the same can be said for the good guys, although here Lawrence restrains himself, keeping them good if flawed. While the epilogue is a bit hokey and may leave many unsatisfied, the 280 pages that get the reader there are a joy.

Although the book begs for a decent title, *Q: Awakening* is a thrilling and thoughtful read—a quest of discovery not unlike the one Lawrence's characters, both good and evil, are embarked upon.

MARK MCLAUGHLIN (May 29, 2012)

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