

Templar Codes

Lee A. Sweetapple

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Quick-change settings in this international thriller have the good guys and bad guys code-breaking around Europe.

When artifacts that appear to identify the tribes of Israel are stolen, Jim Stillwater, a contractor working for the US government, risks everything to recover them. As locations quickly change and guns are drawn and fired, Lee Sweetapple's thriller, *Templar Codes*, moves at breakneck speed toward its explosive conclusion in Scotland.

Thematically, this book is excellently constructed. Near the end, Stillwater learns about the mission of the Templar order: "We protect and preserve knowledge of ancient times. We do not accumulate and protect treasure...Knowledge will provide the ability to gain the riches we need." This message is demonstrated time and time again when the knowledge of the protagonists trumps that of the antagonists. Decoding the cypher on the plates, for example, gives the good guys an advantage over the terrorists.

This is the third book in the series featuring Jim Stillwater, though it can stand alone. Character development is adequate, making it possible to understand the relationships between the recurring characters. Dialogue does hamper character development, though, as it is often stiff and unnatural, especially when it avoids the use of contractions that would make exchanges more conversational: "'You are so silly,' Gwen said. 'Fine. Now come on, I am hungry.'"

In search of information about the plates and their meaning, Stillwater and his compatriots skip around Europe. The setting details add depth and interest to the story, and the constant movement from place to place amps up the pace. Stillwater moves from Venice to Germany to Cyprus within a twenty-four hour time period, even managing to get in some surfing along the way. Each chapter is labeled with a location and date, which helps to organize where and when the action is occurring.

The packaging of the book is adequate. The photos on the front cover are almost too dark to be effective. The scuba diver and the surfer are very apt choices, but because of the brightness issue, they are not terribly useful to a browser. The pages are laid out well with a great deal of empty space and an excellent font size for easier reading. The back cover does a great job summing up the story and giving the reader a sense of the fast pace and historical bent of the book.

Sweetapple has the background to write about the intelligence community and the military, as he was a lieutenant colonel in the US Army Reserve. Throughout the novel, his familiarity is evident. He is also a scuba diver, which shows in the descriptions of Stillwater's diving experiences: "Jim found the portal and removed his BC and attached scuba tank, keeping the regulator in his mouth. Aware that the portal went up, he added some air to the BC and let it pull him upward."

Fans of international intrigue and code-breaking thrillers like *The Da Vinci Code* will appreciate this book.

LYNN EVARTS (March 18, 2014)

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