

The Jesus Gospel

Osman Kartal

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"How beautiful are the feet of those who bring the good news." This passage from the book of Isaiah figures prominently and repeatedly in Osman Kartal's novel about the hunt for a lost gospel written by Jesus himself. Those who read *The Jesus Gospel* might also apply the prophet's words in describing the postman who delivered this book to them, or the friend who passed it on as a gift, for Osman Kartal's novel is just that: a gift, and a wonderful one at that.

Despite the title, this is not a work of faith, although faith and religion each play a vital role in the plot. *The Jesus Gospel* is part treasure hunt, part Cold War spy story, and part adventure novel—a lively mix of genres, to say the least.

Kartal has borrowed ideas and themes similar to those found in an Indiana Jones or *National Treasure* movie, or a Dan Brown or Robert Ludlum novel. Yet from these, Kartal has crafted a fresh and thoroughly engaging story all his own. His hero, Frankie Karter, may be Kartal's alter ego, and if that is the case, then Kartal has succeeded where many authors fail when they attempt to insert themselves into a book. Karter feels and acts like a real person, with all the flaws, foibles, and false assumptions that plague normal people who are thrust into abnormal circumstances. What Karter believes is true, the reader also comes to believe is true. And when Karter discovers he has been tricked, fooled, and bamboozled, the reader also feels that kick to the gut, and neither sees it coming until it hits.

The plot is rich, and full of twists and surprises. The action takes place in Soviet Georgia, Communist Poland, Margaret Thatcher's Great Britain, and Pope John Paul II's Vatican City, among other places and times (including flashbacks to the eras of Stalin, Hitler, and the early church). The cast of characters is sprinkled with memorable thugs, such as a "driver" who tells the hero rather threateningly: "you are coming where I go." There are also the requisite sidekicks who help the protagonist elude the bad guys and discover the path to the treasure.

Kartal knows how to pen a good phrase: "His blood was cold enough to chill wine," and "He'd need to be some Russian girl acrobat on steroids to get out of this one." Yet he also knows when to restrain himself. The quips, like the action, come in measured doses, with pauses just long enough to allow the reader to savor and digest what has happened before being served the next course.

Osman Kartal's *The Jesus Gospel* is a well-written, exciting, and, best of all, thoroughly entertaining work of fiction. Read it now before someone makes a movie out of it.

MARK G. MCLAUGHLIN (April 24, 2012)

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