

By the Rivers of Babylon Study Guide

By the Rivers of Babylon by Nelson Demille

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Plot Summary

By the Rivers of Babylon, by Nelson DeMille, is the account of a mission of peace gone horribly wrong. A delegation from Israel is hijacked by terrorists set against any form of peace in the Middle East. Crash landing in Babylon, the passengers and crew mount a defense against the group of Arabs that wish to hold them hostage to stop the peace meeting. Escaping in the end, the peace delegation hopes that peace can still be established.

Two Concorde from Israel set out for New York, to take part in a historical meeting, with the hopes of establishing peace in the Middle East after centuries of unrest. Unbeknownst to them, there are bombs with transmitters in the tail section of each plane, placed there during construction more than a year earlier. Ahmed Rish, an Iraqi terrorist, has been planning to destroy the mission of peace, and hold the parties on both planes hostage in Babylon. The planes leave Lod International Airport with no problems, under military escort, led by Teddy Lascov, a brigadier general of the Israeli Air Force. Not long into the flight, another plane appears on the radar, refusing to respond to repeated calls from the air force. Lascov prepares to shoot the plane down, but hesitates, thinking about his lover Miriam on board Concorde 02. She had requested at a pre-flight meeting that everyone use caution if there were signs of trouble. Miriam did not think it would be a good idea to start the process of peace with an act of aggression. Teddy waits too long, and no longer has a clear shot with the weapons he is carrying. If he had the 20mm cannons on board he might have been able to take the plane down, but he had left them off on the advice of Tom Richardson and American Colonel and attaché.

Communication begins between the concordes and the smaller plane. Ahmed Rish is aboard the small plane, his voice recognized by Jacob Hausner, who has had dealings with Rish in the past. He swears to kill him. Rish in turn promises to kill Hausner. Rish informs the two aircraft of the bombs on board, and instructs them to follow his plane. The pilot of El Al 01 decides to take evasive action, and Rish detonates the bomb. Concorde 02 follows, but at the last minute takes evasive action on the ground. Rish detonates the bomb in their tail section, but the plane is already on the ground, and they wind up on a hilltop, an ancient citadel covered in the sands of time.

The members of the Israeli party set up as much of a defensive position as they can with their limited experience and weapons. Many lives are lost over the course of the stand off, which lasts for a few days, but feels like years. While the peace delegates wait on the mountaintop, Laskov decides to construct a hoax to convince the Prime Minister that the planes are in Babylon. He is halted at the last minute by news from Iraq that the planes have indeed been found. A rescue mission is underway immediately, but due to the strong winds, the Hamseen, there is trouble reaching the hostages as quickly as warranted. A final desperate battle takes place on the mountaintop. The Concorde 02, *Wings of Emmanuel*, regains the use of its auxiliary power unit and in a last attempt for freedom, drives the aircraft off the sand covered citadel into the raging waters of the Euphrates River.

At last the survivors of the flight are rescued. There is much discussion about the meeting in New York, and how to continue on the road to peace despite all that has happened. Miriam Bernstein says she will not go to the meeting, as she no longer believes in the possibility. In New York, the Arab and Israeli delegations at the United Nations had been assembled receiving reports of the situation in Babylon. When word reaches them of the rescue mission's success, those present celebrate together this small peace that might one day bring a much larger peace in their homelands.

Prologue, France: St. Nazaire

Prologue, France: St. Nazaire Summary

Nuri Salameh works as an electrician on a Concorde. Nuri nervously keeps an eye out for others, while checking the final assembly of the tail section of the plane. After checking with the inspector that the tail section is ready to be closed, Nuri climbs up into the strut work of the tail. Removing a black box, he attaches the box to the interior of the tail near the top. Splicing a wire into the rear navigation light, he then runs the wire down the framework and molds it to the number 11 trim tank with white putty like substance.

Nuri then takes his bike and travels to the waterfront to the deserted area that once held the German U-boats during World War II. Ahmed Rish patiently asks Salameh if the job is done. Nuri confirms that the job is finished. Rish claps his hands and three men quickly move from the shadows, kill Nuri Salameh and drop his body over the edge of the dock into the water.

Back at the plant, the tail section has been completely closed off. The Concorde has been painted enamel white, and men carry stencils in and drums of light blue paint. Two artists remove a vinyl stencil revealing the words EL AL and the Star of David.

Prologue, France: St. Nazaire Analysis

The prologue of *By the Rivers of Babylon* introduces Nuri Salameh, a French speaking Algerian working at the plant in St. Nazaire where Concorde airplanes are constructed. Salameh nervously attaches a bomb, plastique, to the interior of the tail section of a Concorde being constructed for EL AL, the Israeli airline. Salameh is compelled to do this by Ahmed Rish, a terrorist, because his parents and sisters still live in Algiers. Salameh knows that he has committed a sin, and has never felt the same drive as the terrorists, but in order to save his family, he plants the bomb. The stage is set, more than a year before the peace meetings are to take place in New York, for the attempted sabotage by Ahmed Rish of hope for peace in the Middle East.



Book One, Israel: Chapters 1-5

Book One, Israel: Chapters 1-5 Summary

By the Rivers of Babylon is the story of a group of people traveling to the United Nations to take part in a Peace Conference that will finally establish peace in the Middle East. A terrorist group that has plotted for over a year to derail the mission hijacks the two El Al Concordes carrying the delegates. Rather than submit to the terrorists, the passengers decide to take a stand and fight for their lives, as well as peace.

The novel opens with four men looking down over Lod International Airport in Israel. These men have been called upon to fire mortar rounds at the airport, and the two El Al Concordes that will carry the delegates to the Peace Conference. They wait patiently for the opportunity to strike.

Teddy Laskov, Brigadier General in the Israeli Air Force, and Miriam Bernstein, the Deputy Minister of Transportation, discuss the importance of the pending meeting, after making love. Bernstein is very optimistic, while Laskov prefers to wait and see what will come. They are interrupted by Tom Richardson, an American Air Force Colonel, who needs to go over the flight details with Laskov. Bernstein leaves to meet with Abdel Majid Jabari. Jabari is an Arab, and Bernstein looks on him as a father figure.

Jabari and Bernstein meet in a café, and discuss the pending trip to New York, as well as the outlook for lasting peace. Jabari is hopeful, but cannot help but feel that something will go wrong. Bernstein sees the arrival of the Hamseen as an omen, not only bringing spring, but peace to Israel.

Laskov and Richardson discuss the details of the mission. Laskov informs Richardson of the change in flight plan, as well as the call signals of the two Concordes and the radio frequencies that will be used. Richardson advises Laskov not to carry the 20mm cannons that are usually on board the F-14's to reduce the weight of the plane. They part ways, Richardson cautioning Laskov not to get trigger-happy while escorting the Concordes.

El Al's Security Chief, Jacob Hausner discusses the upcoming flight with his assistant Matti Yadin. The two men adjourn to the conference room for a brief meeting regarding the upcoming flight. Attending are Miriam Bernstein, Chaim Mazar, head of Shin Beth, the Israeli Internal Security Service, Brigadier General Itzhak Talman, the Air Force Chief of Operations, General Benjamin Dobkin, representing the Army's Chiefs of Staff, and Isaac Burg, head of Mivtzan Elohim, "the Wrath of God," the anti-terrorist group.

Hausner informs the group that the Concordes have never left the sight of El Al Security since their arrival thirteen months ago. An auxiliary power unit has been installed in each Concorde eliminating the need for any outside equipment to start the planes at a foreign airport. Most services are in fact performed at Lod, and after each flight the



plane and its contents are inspected for anything unusual. Each member gives a brief statement. Mazar states that the biggest worry is shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles. To prevent this risk, the Defense Minister has called for a series of short air-raid drills. Burg discusses questioning a Palestinian guerilla in Paris. He states that the Palestinian assured them that there were no plans that he knew of to disrupt the mission. Benjamin Dobkin does not have the confidence that some in the room do, but thinks that overall things should go smoothly. The most logical assumption would be an attack by sea or air, however, the Navy Department is patrolling the flight path in the Mediterranean. Itzhak Talman explains briefly the details of the F-14 Tomcats that will be escorting the Concorde on their flight. He has the strongest faith in Laskov and his crew, and accepts all responsibility for the safety of those aboard. Bernstein speaks for a moment about being cautious with any aggressive actions. She believes it is important to project the right image, one of peace makers.

Hausner reflects on his uncomfortable relationship with Bernstein. She had declined and invitation to spend a weekend at his villa, and he had been angry, yet he still feels that there is something unresolved between them. He also ponders the information from Burg, about the Palestinian questioned in Paris. Hauser remembers that Ahmed Rish, a terrorist whose specialty was airplanes, had been seen in Paris over a year ago. Hauser wonders over the connection, and decides to retrieve the file of information on Rish.

David Becker, the pilot of El Al Concorde 02, waits in the Operations room with his First Officer Moses Hess, and Peter Kahn the flight engineer. Also present are the crew from El Al Concorde 01, Asher Avidar the pilot, Leo Sharett the flight engineer, and Zevi Hirsch, the First Officer. Talman informs those present that they will be leaving thirty minutes earlier than planned, and that the flight plan has been altered. Laskov provides the radio frequencies, as well as the alternate tactical frequencies. Becker asks for the call signs. Laskov states that he is Angel Gabriel followed by his tail number. Concorde 01 will be the Kosher Clipper, or simply Clipper on air, and the 02, Becker's aircraft, will be Wings of Emmanuel, Emmanuel on the air.

Laskov informs Becker that John McClure, an American Embassy man on leave will be joining his flight. Becker tells Laskov that Tom Richardson will also be aboard, having requested Becker's ship.

In the VIP lounge, Miriam Bernstein approaches Jacob Hausner and apologizes if she upset anyone with her comments. He informs her that he is going to be flying on the mission on 02. Bernstein states that she too is traveling on that plane and asks if she should change planes. Teddy Laskov enters looking for Tom Richardson to give him the alternate frequencies, even though something about Richardson strikes him as odd. Laskov sees Bernstein and Hausner talking, and though struck with a bit of jealousy, is relieved because he knows they dislike each other. Laskov decides not to give Richardson the alternate frequencies after all and leaves to prepare for the flight.

Richardson becomes aware that he never received the second frequencies from Laskov. It is too late to ask for them. He steps quickly into a phone booth and makes a call to Jericho in the occupied West Bank.



As the Concorde prepares to fly, the Palestinians on the hillside prepare to strike. At the right moment, Sabah Khabbani, the leader signals for the others to fire the mortars. Nothing happens, the firing pins having been removed years ago when the weapons had been discovered. Captain Ephraim Dinitz signals to his forces to arrest the four men. Three surrender, but Khabbani is killed trying to flee. Chaim Mazar is pleased with the arrest. The Israelis had been watching the site for years, and had received a tip earlier that day about the plot. He is worried that it is a red herring, designed to relax the high security around the mission.

The Concorde takes flight, first 01, followed two minutes later by 02. David Becker takes off, feeling extremely anxious. He realizes that flying no longer gives him joy, and decides that after the mission is complete, he will quit.

Book One, Israel: Chapters 1-5 Analysis

Several main characters are introduced in the early pages of the book. Teddy Laskov, the Brigadier General, and Miriam Bernstein, the Deputy Minister of Transportation, are lovers. While Bernstein has the utmost faith in the upcoming Peace Conference in New York, Laskov feels that it is too soon to be secure in true peace.

Tom Richardson, the American Colonel and air attaché to the mission, seems over anxious for information about the upcoming flight, and reacts inappropriately to a joke from Laskov about sharing secret information. Though Laskov finds this odd, he explains it to himself as stress due to the importance of the undertaking. When Laskov is informed by David Becker that Richardson had specifically requested to fly on 02, he becomes uncomfortable. No one is supposed to know who is flying on which plane. For this reason he decides to withhold the emergency frequencies from Richardson.

Jacob Hausner is uneasy for several reasons. He feels there is something between him and Miriam Bernstein that could come to a head at any time. Though he claims to dislike her, the slight of her refusing his invitation to his villa had stung him. He tries to put her out of her mind but can not. Hausner is also uneasy because of the discussion of a terrorist being interrogated in Paris. The realization that Ahmed Rish had been seen near Paris a year ago bothers him, but he cannot figure out why.

The many personalities of the characters are introduced in this section. It is telling that even though there are two Concorde making the journey, only the passengers of the 02 Concorde are introduced with any detail. Also telling is the description of Asher Avidar, the 01 pilot as a young hot head. The many questions asked by Tom Richardson, and his recommendation to Laskov to leave certain munitions behind, as well as his quick phone call to Jericho and his explicit request to fly on the 02 are also revealing. The reader can infer that something may happen to the 01 Concorde, and that Richardson may be tied to it in some way.



Book One, Israel: Chapters 6-9

Book One, Israel: Chapters 6-9 Summary

The two El Al Concorde take flight, climbing through the clouds. Avidar checks in with Becker, asking if he can see the F-14's. Becker reaches Laskov on the radio. Laskov responds that he can see both planes. Laskov contact the ED-2 Hawkeye, with all of the latest electronic monitoring equipment on board. The technician on the Hawkeye asks Laskov if he can see anything to the southwest, as they have a blip on the radar. Those aboard the Hawkeye try to establish radio contact with the craft.

Laskov considers his options. The Phoenix missiles he carries on board the F-14 will reach the approaching aircraft before it can fire upon the Concorde if he acts immediately, however he remembers Miriam Bernstein's plea for restraint. At the Citadel, General Talman acknowledges the dilemma Laskov faces, and leaves the decision to fire on the unknown aircraft to Laskov.

The Hawkeye informs Laskov that the approaching jet is not military, as they can detect no sophisticated radar emissions. They receive information that the Lear had filed a flight plan from Cairo to Cyprus, Istanbul to Athens. Aboard the jet are six businessmen. The Hawkeye continues to fail in reaching the aircraft by radio, despite trying in several languages. Laskov makes the decision to fire on the plane, but as he does, David Becker announces that the Lear is calling the Concorde on the company frequency. A distinctively Arabic voice comes over the radio and states that each Concorde has a radio-controlled bomb in the tail section, placed there during construction. The bombs are attached to the number 11 fuel tank. The speaker states that he is aware of the F-14's escorting the Concorde. If he sees a smoke trail from a launched missile, he will detonate the bombs.

Avidar reacts in anger aboard the 01. Decker calmly calls for Jacob Hausner, General Dobkin and Mr. Burg to come to the flight deck.

The Lear stays in a position where none of the ordinance carried by the F-14's can strike. Laskov realized that if he still carried the 20mm cannons, he could act. Laskov feels betrayed by both Bernstein and Richardson. Though well-intentioned, they had effectively tied his hands.

In the cockpit of 02, a brief meeting takes place. Becker asks Hausner if it is possible that there is a bomb on the plane. Hausner apologizes. Though the planes have been under constant watch since delivered, no one had considered a bomb being planted during construction. Matti Yadin calls on the radio from the 01 Concorde and tells Hausner he was right about Rish.

Hausner recognizes the voice, confirming that it is in fact Ahmed Rish, and that Rish will in do as he says. He instructs Becker to tell Laskov to go away. Laskov realizes that



there is nothing he can do, and calls into Talman that he is coming home. Rish gets very agitated, screaming for the F-14's to turn back. Calling the El Al 01 and 02 on the alternative frequency, Laskov tells them that he will be monitoring the situation, and they will hang back, waiting for a time to strike.

In 01, Avidar considers his options. When given clearance to climb, he realizes that he can be out of range of the radio signal in 15 seconds. Rish give instructions for the two planes to follow him. When the Lear makes a turn, Avidar hits the afterburner switch, and begins a rapid climb. Rish grabs the radio control and depresses the button marked 01. Avidar realizes he has lost his gamble. Becker watches, amazed at his own cool detachment. He calmly orders Peter Kahn to override the system and drain the number 11 fuel tank. Rish calls angrily on the radio that those aboard the 01 had forced his hand. Hausner grabs the microphone and addresses Rish, telling him that he will kill him. Rish responds, clearly fighting for control, that the first thing he will do is kill Hausner.

Hausner and Bernstein speak to each other, both sharing a sense of guilt over the situation—Hausner for failing to consider the possibility of a bomb planted so early, Bernstein for asking for restraint from the F-14 escort. Abel Majid Jabari and Ibrahim Ali Arif, the two Arab members of the delegation discuss their situation as well. As Arabs, they are sure to be killed as traitors when they land.

The Lear leads the Concorde out of Saudi Arabia and into Iraq. Those in the cockpit speculate on their destination and how much farther their fuel will carry them. Below they see two rivers, the Euphrates and the Tigris. The Lear begins to descend, and Becker announces that they are making a landing approach. As he is guiding the Concorde down behind the Lear, Dobkin and Hausner burst into the cockpit. Hausner tells Becker that the bomb is no good on the ground, the most it can do is mangle the tail. Quickly considering, Becker pulls up on the controls, heading toward a hill to his front left. Rish, at first thinking that the Concorde has hit a bad patch of ground, realizes what is happening, and screams at the Concorde to stop. Rish pushes the button marked 02, to detonate the bomb. During the rough landing Moses Hess is killed by debris coming through the windshield. Becker feels the rudder pedals go slack even before he hears the explosion, and orders those on the craft to evacuate.

Hausner and Dobkin quickly evacuate and take stock of the situation. Hauser directs his men to where an attack will likely come from. Dobkin assesses the location for military strategy. Tom Richardson and John McClure stand at the river side of the slope. Richardson states that as Americans they do not have an obligation to stay and suggests that they can be in Baghdad by tomorrow. McClure calmly asks him how he knows where they are. Richardson does not answer. When he sees flashlights on the hillside, McClure states that they have already been surrounded. When Richardson suggests that they may be civilians, McClure fires a shot from his .357, which is answered with automatic weapon fire.



Nathan Brin takes the M-14 and looks through the starlight scope. He sees about 20 Arabs headed their way. He quickly kills two men, but the third person he shoots makes a noise alerting the others.

On the aircraft, Becker wonders aloud where they are. Peter Kahn, who had monitored the co-ordinates, informs him that they are in Babylon.

Book One, Israel: Chapters 6-9 Analysis

Another major character is introduced, Ahmed Rish, the Iraqi terrorist who specializes in attacks on airplanes. Rish is the mastermind behind the attack on the El Al Concorde. Hausner knows him from a time when Rish was held in Ramla Prison. Rish was one of the few people that had angered Hausner so much that Hausner had struck Rish. During the operation, Rish shows that although he is very smart, having planned the hijacking so long ago, he is also unstable. He has difficulty controlling his anger and struggles to maintain his dominance of the situation.

When Hausner hears his voice on the radio, all of the things that were bothering him fall into place. Rish had been seen outside of Paris over a year ago in two small towns. These towns were close to the two plants where the Concorde had been constructed. Hausner feels beaten, having not thought as far ahead as Rish had.

Miriam Bernstein feels responsible for the fact that Teddy Laskov had not shot the Lear from the sky. If she had not been so optimistic and had not cautioned restraint, perhaps those on the 01 would be alive and they would not have been hijacked. Laskov feels like a failure because he allowed sentiment for Bernstein to cloud his military judgment. He is also upset, knowing that if he had ignored Richardson's advice about the 20mm cannons, he would have had another option of defense against Ahmed Rish.

The conversation between Richardson and McClure again brings to light the possibility that Richardson is somehow involved with the plot to hijack the Concorde. McClure effectively prevents Richardson from fleeing by firing into the night, and drawing fire on their position.

Becker, who had begun to lose faith in his ability, and had in fact felt fear of doing so, reacts calmly and instinctively to the situation at hand. He knows that regardless of the outcome, flying behind the Lear was perhaps some of the best flying he has ever done.

When the passengers voted to fight on the ground, they have in effect chosen to fight for peace, refusing to give in to the terrorists. The battle lines have been drawn, between Hausner and Rish, good and evil, and between war and peace.



Book Two, Babylon, The Watchtowers: Chapters 10-15

Book Two, Babylon, The Watchtowers: Chapters 10-15 Summary

Hausner knows that what takes place in the next few minutes will determine whether the passengers of 02 will survive. Using the scope on the M-14, he scans the night and sees the AK-47's near the bodies of the men that Brin had killed. If he can retrieve them, they will have more weapons with which to fight. Moshe Kaplan, one of his security detail goes with Hausner down the hill. Nathan Brin is providing cover. Proceeding down the hill, Hausner hears someone calling out. He realizes that one of the men that Brin had shot is not dead. Hausner knocks him unconscious. Kaplan gathers the weapons from the dead men, and Hausner lifts the wounded man, and they retreat quickly.

Hausner asks Dobkin where they are. When Dobkin informs him that they are in Babylon, Hausner can only stare in disbelief. Dobkin suggests that it may be some kind of twisted joke on Ahmed Rish's part, a reminder of the Babylonian Captivity. Hausner and Dobkin discuss the tactical ability to defend their location. Dobkin believes that they can defend themselves, explaining that they are sitting atop a citadel. He tells Hausner that they have distributed the few weapons they have to strategic points along the perimeter. Richardson and McClure have the only weapon on the side bordered by the Euphrates, but as the river is flooded this time of year, no one is likely to attack from that side.

The Foreign Minister calls a meeting. Hausner stops at the plane to get the file on Ahmed Rish. He speaks with Peter Kahn who discusses fixing the APU. Leaving the plane, Hausner asks Rabbi Levin if they can bury Moses Hess. The rabbi states that it is the Sabbath. Hausner gets angry, but Levin pulls him aside, explaining that internal strife is not a bad thing. They will compromise and the work will begin but the burial will wait. By maintaining some normalcy, the people on the hilltop will not lose hope.

Ariel Weizman and the ten official delegates are present, including the two Arabs. The prisoner is bound in a corner. Hausner and Dobkin become impatient while the delegates argue over points of order. Hausner requests that Burg question the prisoner and he agrees. Bernstein becomes angry at Hausner. He has effectively disbanded democracy and arranged the torture of a wounded man. Hausner tell Bernstein that at this point the delegates are useless as anything but soldiers. She slaps him, but Hausner's only reaction is to ask her to leave so Burg can question the prisoner.

Hausner and Dobkin meet up with Richardson and McClure. Hausner suggests that they may be able to leave safely, as Americans. McClure declines. Richardson suggests negotiating. Hausner senses tension between the two Americans. While waiting for a report from Burg, Hausner and Dobkin continue to assess the situation. Dobkin points



out different areas. He tells Hausner of the small museum near the Ishtar Gate. Dobkin knows the curator. They discuss the possibility that Dobkin can get to the location and somehow contact help. Dobkin agrees to try after nightfall the next day.

Burg approaches with details obtained from the prisoner. The mastermind behind the plot is indeed Ahmed Rish. His Lieutenant is Salem Hamadi. There are approximately 150 terrorists. They are Ashbals, or Tiger Cubs, Palestinian orphans of the wars with Israel. The Ashbals, both men and women, live to hate Israel, trained since birth to fight against them. They agree that when the moon sets, the Ashbals will attack.

Nathan Brin sees them advancing through the scope on the M-14 and sends the alert. Dobkin wants to fire while they are still far away. Burg wants to wait until the terrorists are closer. Hausner agrees with Dobkin and moves down the hill to give the order to fire. The battle erupts. Burg states that they will court martial Hausner in the morning for giving the order to fire. Dobkin suggests caution. The Ashbals advance up the hillside, getting to within 100 meters. Brin takes advantage of situation and begins to fire at the obvious commanders in the ranks. Confusion ensues, and the Israelis on the hillside, sensing it, charge down the hill yelling and firing. The Ashbals break ranks, and retreat. The Israelis gather the weapons they can find and return to the hilltop.

The next morning, Hausner meets with Burg and Dobkin, who inform him that he will be court-marshaled. Hausner disagrees, effectively telling them that he is in charge not them. Hausner has the loyalty of the armed majority. Burg admits that this is true and that Hausner has effectively manipulated the situation for his own sake. Dobkin suggests to Hausner that he is taking over in order to make himself a hero, as it was his responsibility to prevent a hijacking. Hausner then meets with the Foreign Minister, who realizes that Hausner has made it clear to Burg and Dobkin that he is in charge. Sending the group that is gathered with Weizman to collect the luggage and other items that have fallen from the plane, Hausner instructs them to fashion dummies from the clothing and to catalog the other things they gather. Miriam is upset that he has humiliated Weizman, and asks what has come over him. He tells her of the attempted court martial. She is shocked, but he explains that he is not angry, that they simply know what needs to be done. Order needs to be maintained.

Book Two, Babylon, The Watchtowers: Chapters 10-15 Analysis

After Nathan Brin kills two of the Ashbals, Hausner takes the chance of gathering up the much needed extra weapons. He and Moshe Kaplan go down the hill to retrieve them. Hausner takes advantage of the fact that one of the men is wounded, taking him back to the hilltop to question him. Neither man realizes how close Hauser came to being shot by Brin.

When Hauser enters the hut and finds a meeting of the Knesset taking place, he becomes first impatient and then angry. The members of the peace delegation still do not seem to understand the situation they find themselves in. He requests that Burg



question the prisoner, as it is the most important thing to be done. Miriam Bernstein becomes angry at Hausner for pushing aside their attempts to discuss the situation, and to allow the torture of a wounded man. Hausner taunts her and she strikes him.

With nightfall the Ashbals attack, and the beginning of a power-play takes place. Dobkin and Burg assume that they are in control having military experience. Hausner simply goes around them, ordering the hostages to start firing on the Ashbals. Burg is angry, yet Dobkin is less agitated. He had expected as much.

The following morning, Burg and Dobkin meet with Hausner regarding his court-martial. Hausner is calm as he states simply that he will not be put on trial because he is in charge. Burg realizes that both he and Dobkin played a part in Hausner taking control. When Dobkin suggests that Hausner is trying to become a hero to make up for his failure to protect the Concordes, Hausner's face turns red, either in anger or embarrassment.

Hausner speaks with Bernstein briefly. He realizes that he can never read her, never really know what she is feeling, yet he senses a buried passion within her. Despite all that is going on around them, Hausner and Bernstein are still drawn to each other. Even when they are fighting, they are passionate.



Book Two, Babylon, The Watchtowers: Chapters 16-20

Book Two, Babylon, The Watchtowers: Chapters 16-20 Summary

Hausner and Dobkin concur that the terrorists will send a party to parley. Hausner asks Dobkin if he is with him or against him. Dobkin refuses to answer, and changes the subject to his leaving for the museum that evening. Dobkin does not think he will make it, and Hausner agrees, though he respects that Dobkin is still willing to go. Hausner spots a village in the distance. Dobkin confirms that it is the village of Kweirish, but doubts they will be of any assistance. They are peasants, and he is sure the Ashbals have taken control of the place. As Hausner reflects on the desolation of the area, he sees five men walking up the slope with a white flag. Dobkin and Hausner go to meet them.

Having instructed the passengers to remain out of sight, they wait for the men to arrive. Realizing that Ahmed Rish is not among them, Dobkin states that he is angry that the terrorist would doubt their honor. They reflect on the irony that the terrorists wish to speak with them now; when the Concordes had been on the way to a conference to do just that—talk. Hausner does not want the delegation involved in the parley. He states that they would be too willing to see the good side of any proposal.

When the group of men arrives, Hausner states that he will speak only to Rish. The leader introduces himself as the lieutenant Salem Hamadi, and asks Hausner and Dobkin to accompany him to meet with Rish. He guarantees their safety, stating that Rish's vow to kill Hausner has been rescinded. Dobkin and Hausner follow the group of men into the unexcavated ruins of Babylon. Along the way Dobkin takes great interest, as an amateur archeologist, asking constant questions.

At the Lion of Babylon, the men are searched and blindfolded. They climb upward and when they reach the top their blindfolds are removed. Ahmed Rish is there, and they can sense more men in the darkness. Rish states that he wants them to be his hostages while he negotiates with their government. He wishes to avoid further bloodshed. Hausner comments on the amount of dead and wounded that the terrorists had lost the night before. Rish will not discuss it. He guarantees that if they surrender by sundown, no Israelis will be killed. He also states that if the government will not negotiate they will be released anyway. Hausner replies that the interrogation of those on the planes might have been a secondary goal. When asked if Rish will guarantee that they will not be detained and questioned Rish does not reply. Rish begins to get angry when Hausner asks if he will also guarantee the safety of the Israeli Arabs, and whether Rish is even sane. Dobkin cautions him and Hausner can see that Rish is trying to maintain control of himself. Rish states the ultimatum again, and goads Hausner, stating he might not be able to control the Ashbals, and cannot guarantee the



safety of the women in the delegation if they do not surrender. Hausner curses him in Arabic and tells Rish that he learned such things in Ramla Prison from Rish. Rish is reminded of the time Hausner stuck him, and takes the opportunity to strike Hausner. He states that they are now even. Hausner tells Rish that he will let him know their decision by sundown, and that he will be sending the prisoner back.

Upon their return to the Concorde, Hausner and Dobkin relate some of what was said in the meeting. Hausner promises to take a vote by sundown and then sends the others back to work on their defenses. The aircraft is cannibalized for any useable parts that might aid in the defense of the hill. Hausner watches the work around him and wonders how long they can defend themselves.

In Israel, Teddy Laskov and General Talman meet to discuss the situation. They agree that though the military thinks that the Concordes were taken west, both men agree that they had in fact gone east. Chaim Mazar joins them in the café. The three men discuss the operation that had taken place. Mazar states that there must be a spy somewhere in Israel that fed the information to Rish. He provides Talman and Laskov with satellite images of areas east, though it is a court martial offence to do so. In return, Laskov writes something on a napkin and hands it to Mazar.

The passengers stage a party of sorts before the prisoner is released. Weapons are paraded in front of him, and he is served a good meal with plenty of water. Before he is blindfolded and sent on his way, he is allowed to see certain things, such as the Molotov cocktails they are making with the remaining fuel from the airplane and what looks to be a machine gun, but is really a clever ruse. He is released, and the Israelis hope that his tales of the morale on the hillside as well as their weapons and supplies, will dishearten the Ashbals.

Burg complains to Hausner that Miriam Bernstein is causing problems by complaining about the way things are being run. He suggests that Hausner speak to her. He does, telling her that Burg is complaining and could charge her with causing dissention. Bernstein is outraged, stating that such things do not happen in a democracy. Hausner tells her that there is no democracy in Babylon. Bernstein tells him that if his family had stayed in Europe during the war, he would have been a Nazi. Hausner strikes her, but apologizes.

Hausner next meets with the Rabbi, who informs him of some who are planning to commit suicide if the terrorists take the hill. The Rabbi becomes furious when Hausner says that he agrees with them, and that all present should have the right to choose death over capture. He insists that Hausner forbid anymore talk of suicide among the passengers. The Rabbi has a statue in his hand. A grotesque idol, the Rabbi threatens to smash it, but Hausner takes it to give to Dobkin, because of his interest in archeology.

Hausner meets with Richardson and McClure, once again offering them the option of leaving. McClure refuses, stating that he does not trust Rish not to interrogate them about the defenses of the Jews. Richardson says that he will stay too, but wishes that



Hausner would parley again before sundown. Hausner takes it under advisement. He notices that though both of the men are very dirty, Richardson has his Air Force uniform folded neatly and protected.

Hausner finds Dobkin examining the compressed-nitrogen bottle from the plane, and trying to figure out how to best use it in their defense. Hausner gives him the idol, which Dobkin informs him is a Pazuzu, the wind demon that brings sickness and death. The remainder of the afternoon is spent working to bolster the defenses for the attack that will surely come after the moon has set. Hausner finds a shallow hole and lies down. Miriam Bernstein finds him and tells him the funeral for Moses Hess is about to begin. Hausner asks her to make love with him. She declines, asking what they see in each other. They are very different people. She makes to leave, but Hausner tells her "you can not go to the animals den and expect no problems." They make love in the trench, and say nothing afterwards.

Book Two, Babylon, The Watchtowers: Chapters 16-20 Analysis

The seeming defeat of the attempted court-martial has more or less established Hausner as the commander on the hillside. He is respected and feared. Dobkin has become Hauser's lieutenant more or less, and Burg is his assistant as well. This sets Hausner as the leader in the eyes of those that were not loyal to him from the outset.

During the meeting with Rish, Hauser goads him, trying to see how far he can push him. Hausner is aware how dangerous Rish is, not only because he is a psychopath, but because he does not seem to be one. He seems calm and reasonable, and if the passengers were to meet him, they might not see him as the danger he is.

The faux party thrown by the passengers is done to cause dissention among the Ashbals when the prisoner is returned to them. Hausner is hopeful that the young fighters will become disheartened and give up the fight.

Once again, Richardson encourages communication with the hostage takers. He is very carefully taking care of his uniform so that he is identifiable as an American. When asked if they want to leave, McClure responds that he will stay, and Richardson is more or less forced to agree. This is the second time that McClure has taken away the ability for Richardson to leave.

Hausner and Bernstein make love before the funeral of Moses Hess. Hausner is drawn to Bernstein, and she to him. She states that can not justify him to herself. Despite the fact that they are polar opposites, they are still attracted to each other. At the funeral when Bernstein reads the poem, Hausner realizes again that they are two very different people.



Book Three, Babylon, The Ishtar Gate: Chapters 21-24

Book Three, Babylon, The Ishtar Gate: Chapters 21-24 Summary

Not long after the funeral, the terrorists came again. The Ashbals moved cautiously and stealthily, aware that the Jews would have set up early warning devices. In a fox hole ahead of the young fighters, a two man sniper team wait, watching for signs of a night scope.

With the wind blowing, it is difficult to see or hear anything. Brin and Haber sit at their post, taking turns scanning the hillside. Brin sends Haber to let the others know that nothing is going on yet. An early warning device is tripped, and Brin scans the hillside. A sniper team below sees the scope and shoots him. Yigael Tekoah, in an outpost realizes that the Jews are still unaware of the pending attack. He knocks Deborah Gideon, his secretary unconscious, and yells to the Israelis that they are surrounded.

The west slope is under fire, and a runner is sent to fetch weapons for McClure and Richardson. Dobkin had jumped into the river, momentarily stunning the Ashbals, yet they recover and continue. The weapons arrive and Miriam Bernstein helps distribute them. Left with the last rifle, she is faced by a young Ashbal woman who fires upon her. Reflexively, Bernstein fires, killing the girl. Hausner finds her, in shock over having killed another. He tries to help her by stating that she probably did not kill her, just wounded her. Bernstein means to thank him, instead declaring her love. Hausner does not reply, knowing that there is no hope of a future for them, and not wishing to hurt her anymore than she has been already.

On the opposite bank, Dobkin wakes to people standing over him speaking in broken Arabic. Realizing that these people are not in fact Arabic, but believe him to be, he shows them his pendant of the Star of David. The Jews of the Iraqi village of Ummah state that of course they will assist their brothers.

Standing alone on the bank of the Euphrates, Hausner wishes for home, though he knows he will never get there. He listens to the wind blow, longing to be finished with this fight, and home. He longs for a day when he can bring Bernstein to his father's home and celebrate the holy days, in some type of normalcy, though he knows that it will never happen.



Book Three, Babylon, The Ishtar Gate: Chapters 21-24 Analysis

The Israelis are attacked, and almost lose the battle because the Ashbals are better prepared. The casualties are higher, yet the psychological warfare that the Jews have devised is effective. The Ashbals retreat, even when they know that Rish is not the one commanding them to do so.

Bernstein is forced to kill another human being in order to defend herself, and is in shock. Perhaps she realizes now how Hausner has felt, even if only for a moment. He in turn feels for her, realizing that Miriam can no longer see herself as a peace-keeper. She has killed, and even though it was in self defense, she will not be able to rationalize it.

Even though the Jews have suffered many casualties, it is not long before they recover and begin taking care of what needs to be done. Though only the second night on the hill, they are already more of an army than simply passengers on a plane.

Hausner longs for a life with Bernstein, and wishes that their lives were not so different. Having grown up wealthy and privileged, he knows that there will always be distance between them, regardless of where life were to lead them.



Book Three, Babylon, The Ishtar Gate: Chapters 25-29

Book Three, Babylon, The Ishtar Gate: Chapters 25-29 Summary

Teddy Laskov and General Talman take their belief that the Concorde is in Babylon to the Prime Minister. Laskov recommends that the Prime Minister request the United States take satellite pictures of the area. When Laskov and Talman are dismissed, the Prime Minister agrees, stating that if Richardson is indeed the traitor, the United States owes them a favor.

Deborah Gideon is in the headquarters of the terrorists outside the Gate of Ishtar. She has been beaten and burned, and has been bitten by Rish himself in order to obtain any information she has. Rish orders her shot, burned and her ashes thrown in the river. He does not want evidence when dealing with the Israeli government about the hostages. Hamadi is disgusted, but can do nothing, as Rish is a hero to his people.

Hausner and Burg walk through the howling winds discussing their next course of action. They come across two women sleeping in a foxhole. One is Miriam Bernstein. Hausner angrily wakes her. Burg informs Bernstein that sleeping on guard duty is a capital offense. Burg demands immediate action. Hausner angrily tells him that they will deal with it in the morning. Later in the confines of the ruined Concorde, Hausner tells Bernstein that the other woman, Esther Aronson, has confessed that she fell asleep on guard duty before waking Miriam. Bernstein denies it. Hausner tells her not to be noble, but she states that someone must be. She is one of them now, having killed the Ashbal girl, even in self defense. Hausner explains that holding those responsible for acts that jeopardize the group is also a form of self defense. Bernstein asks if he himself will shoot her. He declares his love, stating that he would die himself first. Bernstein cries, knowing that they have no future.

The Prime Minister receives photos from America and Laskov is present when the analysis is made. The photo analyst tells the Prime Minister that all signs show that the Concorde 02 is really in Babylon. The Prime Minister contacts the President of Iraq, who is reluctant to allow the Israelis access to his country. After much debate he agrees to approach Babylon by river in the morning. The PM realizes that this is as much as he will get, thanks the President and ends the call. A discussion takes place, with those present arguing for or against taking action themselves. Laskov states that he will prove that the Concorde is in Babylon. The Prime Minister gives him until dawn to do so.

Dobkin is taken to the river and given a small boat and guide. He asks the leader of the village if he would go back to Israel if given the chance. The man states that some must always be outside of Jerusalem. If Jerusalem is destroyed someone must survive to rebuild it.



Book Three, Babylon, The Ishtar Gate: Chapters 25-29 Analysis

For the first time, it is seemingly confirmed that Tom Richardson is the traitor. Throughout the novel it has been assumed, but Laskov tipped it to Chaim Mazar, who gave the information to the Prime Minister. It is ironic, that the man who helped the entire kidnapping take place, is now in a way responsible for the attempted rescue that will take place.

Dobkin, the archeologist, leaves the village, amazed that he has met the men and women that live there. They are the remains of the Babylonian Captivity. Ironic again, as Rish seems to have brought the Concorde to Babylon to taunt the Jews, tis he realization that even thousands of years later, the Jews have survived.

Hausner is torn by the dilemma of Bernstein and Aronson sleeping. Had it been anyone else there would have been a court-martial, and the guilty parties would have been executed. Hausner realizes that Burg is essentially using Bernstein to get to him. Bernstein knows that she has put Hausner in a terrible position. Her refusal to admit that Aronson is the guilty party frustrates him. Her nobility throughout the entire ordeal has made him want to be a better man, to be worthy of her.



Book Three, Babylon, The Ishtar Gate: Chapters 30-33

Book Three, Babylon, The Ishtar Gate: Chapters 30-33 Summary

Dobkin finds his way to the museum and enters. He finds Deborah Gideon in the office, barely alive, but can spare no time for her. He quickly takes the phone and has a call routed to the Prime Minister in Israel.

Hausner and Burg discuss what to do when the ammunition is almost gone. They realize that some of those left on the hill have formed a suicide pact. Bernstein suggests fighting on the river side, and fleeing down the river. When asked what to do about the wounded, she states that they are lost either way. Burg comments that she has come a long way. Bernstein admits that it is strange coming from her, and that she has changed. Hausner comments that he still believes that Laskov will keep to his word and rescue them. Miriam is pleased that he has faith, but admits to herself that she has thought less and less about Laskov. Hausner sends her to the airplane and tells her to stay there. Bernstein asks if she will see him again, and he says yes, but they both know it is not true.

John McClure speaks to Tom Richardson as Richardson dresses carefully in his Air Force uniform. McClure asks him why he betrayed the people on the Concorde. Rather than deny anything, Richardson says it was for the money. He tells McClure that no one was supposed to get hurt. When McClure asks how he can justify hurting his friends, Richardson admits to being an anti-Semite. That coupled with the money was enough. McClure realizes that Richardson can never be punished as he should be, so McClure kills him.

Hausner and Burg stand on the hilltop, knowing that the battle is lost. Hausner tells Burg that he will not return to the Concorde, he has a few things he would like to say to Ahmed Rish. As he is about to leave, they hear the sound of airplanes, and see the light of missile flash.

Laskov shoots the Lear out of the air, finally breaking the jamming signal that had kept the Concorde out of contact. He calls on the radio and is surprised to be answered by Bernstein. She yells for Becker who runs in and gives Laskov as much information as he can. A defense is mounted as quickly as possible and Hausner stays outside the Concorde to delay the remaining Ashbals as much as possible.

Peter Kahn has finally fixed the APU. He suggests that though the plane can not fly, they can still move it.



Book Three, Babylon, The Ishtar Gate: Chapters 30-33 Analysis

The pace moves quickly, with the Ashbals getting closer. There is a sense of foreboding. Most of the remaining passengers are waiting to die. As they prepare to fight the last battle the sound of the approaching aircraft gives them the energy to go on. The APU is fixed at the same time that help arrives. Peter Kahn is sure that they will be able to move the plane and clear the way for the upcoming air raid. The novel opens with a sense of good fortune, that things are finally going to change. The passengers have felt despair most recently, but with the return of the Air Force, hope surges once again.

Bernstein realizes that despite her high hopes for peace, there will always be some conflict. She admits that she is now like the others. By bringing up Laskov, Hausner hopes to deflect Bernstein's thoughts. Throughout, Hausner has been frustrated with Bernstein's failure to be realistic about the peace process. Now that she has become more like the rest of them, he is saddened.



Book Three, Babylon, The Ishtar Gate: Chapters 34-38

Book Three, Babylon, The Ishtar Gate: Chapters 34-38 Summary

The C-130s arrive in Iraq behind the F-14s. Landing 100 meters from the village of Ummah, the troops are surprised to find a Jew to welcome them. Captain Geis radios Israel asking for permission to bring the people of the village home to Jerusalem, and receives it. Laskov flies over the site in his F-14. He sees the museum and gate house but holds off on firing, in case there are hostages in the buildings.

On the Concorde, Becker is able to start the APU. He starts the engines of the large plane and is able to get three of the four running. Peter Kahn gathers the Israelis onto the aircraft. Burg keeps an accurate accounting of the people aboard. Bernstein hears him telling another that Hausner is not coming. Bernstein tries to jump from the plane, but is restrained.

Lieutenant Giddel finds Dr. Al-Thanni, the curator of the museum, checking the spring inventory. Al-Thanni gives the troops information on the Ashbals in the guest house, and where any hostages would most likely be. They attack the base, and find Dobkin and Gideon inside, barely alive.

The battle continues, as Becker struggles to get the plane off the hilltop. Ahmed Rish pushes from behind, firing at the feet of the remaining terrorists, urging them on. Laskov is unable to fire on the terrorists, because they are so close to the plane. Jacob Hausner waits for the opportunity to kill Rish. He watches as the Concorde slides over the side of the hill toward the Euphrates River, below. Hausner finds Rish, standing on the hillside watching the Concorde in the river. His remaining terrorists are dead. Rish taunts him, blaming Hausner for everything that has happened. If he had only checked the Concordes more thoroughly, none of this could have ever taken place. Hausner promises Rish a quick death if he answers the questions asked. Rish says they do indeed have Dobkin and Gideon, and that both were alive when he last saw them. He confirms that it was Richardson who sold the secret of their mission to the terrorists. He refuses to provide any information about Bernstein's husband or the family members of the other Israelis. Though Hausner knows that Rish would suffer for life in Ramla Prison, he feels more drawn to revenge, and shoots him first in one knee, then the other. He fires at him again, and when Rish passes out, he shoots him in the head, and then pushes him over the bank to the River. There are two remaining Ashbals, firing at the Concorde, as he sees an F-14 above him. Rather than wave to the airplane, he fires down the bank. The F-14, flown by Teddy Laskov fires, killing Hausner and the remaining Ashbals.



Becker sits in the Concorde and having turned on a small generator propeller is able to guide the crippled plane toward the shore. Almost unbelievably, the Concorde reaches the opposite shore near the village and they are safe. Major Bartok radios Captain Geis to tell Jerusalem that the captives have freed themselves and they will bring them home.

Major Bartok once again tries to convince the Iraqi Jews to come with them to Israel. Shear-jashub explains that by being outside of Jerusalem, there is no way for anyone to capture all of the Jews again.

Book Three, Babylon, The Ishtar Gate: Chapters 34-38 Analysis

Hausner and Bernstein have come full circle. Bernstein, formerly a calm and resolute woman, who had taken the difficulties of her life and used them to fight for peace, now only wants Hausner. She is hysterical that he is not on the Concorde and tries to escape those aboard in order to be with him, even though this would mean almost certain death.

Hausner kills Rish, which he had vowed to do from the beginning. His life had been blessed with wealth and luxury; however he had finally found something worth living for in Miriam Bernstein. He sacrifices his hope for the future, perhaps in penance for having lived his fortunate life, while hers was filled with pain and tragedy. He had been amazed by her, how someone could suffer so much devastation and still be so optimistic, willing to believe in the greater good of man.

Becker is amazed that the airplane has made it across the river, and by the small miracles that got them there. He salutes the aircraft that he had been so afraid of at the outset of the trip. In the end, the Concorde had not only survived, but had carried them to safety.



Epilogue

Epilogue Summary

Isaac Burg discusses the battle with Major Bartok. Though Burg tries to explain it, Bartok can not understand how a group of peace-keepers could have decimated the Ashbals, terrorists that had trained for years for such a battle. Burg explains that it is really no different than a mother tiger defending her cub. Those on the peace mission were not willing to give up their "child." Burg reflects on the massive loss of life among the delegates, and wishes that those killed could see that they had freed themselves from captivity in Babylon once again.

Miriam Bernstein decides not to go on to New York. She no longer believes in the Peace Conference. In New York, the advance delegates of the Israeli and Arab nations wait in hope, knowing that the mission has been altered, but hoping that it can continue. In Ummah, they survive, and continue to be Jews away from Israel, surviving so that no matter what may happen, there will always be someone to rebuild Jerusalem, should the city fall again.

Epilogue Analysis

The peace mission, though devastated, will go on. Despite all that they have been through, the passengers came together to fight against the terrorists and win, against amazing odds. Miriam Bernstein has lost faith, for what may be the first time in her life. After a lifelong struggle to overcome her past and make the world a better place, Bernstein loses Jacob Hausner, and it is enough to kill the optimism that has kept her going for so long. Perhaps she will overcome the desolation she feels, and she is content to wait and see. She is no longer concerned with peace, having fought for it in a way that most had not.



Characters

Miriam Bernstein

The Deputy Minister of Transportation in Israel, Bernstein is unshakeable in her belief that the peace conference in New York will be a success. Miriam has a strong belief in the inherent goodness of man, believing that, if given the opportunity, all will choose the path toward peace. A child of the Holocaust, Miriam was raised by an adoptive family after her birth parents were killed in the concentration camps of Nazi Germany. Bernstein bears the tattoo of the camps, wearing it with pride as a survivor. She eventually grows up and marries, losing her husband, Yossef, a pilot in the Israeli Air Force. He was her "step-brother," also adopted after the holocaust. They shared the same past, had seen the same things, and had survived. They had one son, Eliahu, who was killed during the Yom Kippur War. Bernstein and Teddy Laskov are lovers, though he is unsure of where he stands with her. He wonders if she still has hope that her husband is still alive, though he has been missing for three years.

Bernstein is challenged to hold onto her belief in peace after the hijacking of the Concordes. At the beginning of the standoff, she is still reluctant to engage in a battle, still believing that there is a way to peace. Gradually she gives up her ideals, surrendering to the fact that some people will always fight against peace. Bernstein and Jacob Hausner become lovers, struggling to understand each other in the brief time they have. When the remaining passengers are finally rescued, Bernstein states that she will not be going on to New York as she no longer believes in the peace process. She is no longer certain of her relationship with Laskov, or of any part of her life before the days in Babylon.

Jacob Hausner

With the appearance of a European aristocrat, the chief of El Al Security earned his position after World War II. A member of the Fifth Aliya, or wave of immigrants from Germany, Hausner's family settled near the seaport of Haifa, in Palestine.

When the war broke out, Hausner joined MI-6, the British Secret Intelligence Service. He was well suited to this position, as he could easily pass as a German, and as only the young rich can do, looked on his position more as a war time hobby. He learned to fly during the war, and that, combined with his intelligence background, led him to be one of the first security officers for El Al, the Israeli airlines.

Hausner takes control of the situation on the El Al 02, as well as on the ground in Babylon. Organizing the passengers to defend the hilltop, and fight against the terrorists, Hausner is at odds with Miriam Bernstein, and her belief that fighting the terrorists goes against the planned mission to establish peace. They struggle to reach



an understanding, but eventually Bernstein realizes that there is no other alternative except to fight for their freedom, as well as their lives.

Hausner vows to kill Ahmed Rish, the Iraqi mastermind of the hijacking plot when he first makes contact with the two Concordes, and is determined to do so. In the final standoff on the ancient citadel, Hausner sacrifices his life and any hope of a future with Bernstein in order to accomplish his task. As the Concorde struggles through the sand toward the Euphrates River, Hausner finds Rish and kills him, ensuring that Rish will not escape and continue to plot against peace.

Ahmed Rish

An Iraqi terrorist, Ahmed Rish has planned for years to derail the peace process in the Middle East. Having arranged for bombs to be planted in the tail section of the two Concordes owned by El Al, the Israeli airline, he not only has access to the hostages he needs to accomplish this, but also strikes back at his nemesis, Jacob Hausner, the El Al Security Chief. Rish and Hausner had met years before when Rish had been captured and questioned in Ramla Military Prison. The psychiatrists at the prison had labeled Rish as unstable and psychopathic. Hausner had lost his temper with Rish, striking him. It was a slight that would not be forgotten. Rish was released in an exchange of hostages with a terrorist group, before Israel adopted a policy of not negotiating with terrorist groups, despite Hausner's recommendation that he be held.

Rish is determined to capture both El Al Concordes, but detonates the bomb in El Al 01 when the pilot takes evasive action and tries to escape, proving that he has no problem with taking innocent lives. He commands a force of terrorists made up of Ashbals, Palestinian orphans of the wars with Israel. The Ashbals, or "Tiger Cubs" have an intense hatred of the Israelis, and Rish puts that hatred to good use at the outset.

Determined to capture the passengers of the remaining Concorde, Rish pushes his small army, showing no mercy to those that do not meet his expectations. At a meeting with Jacob Hausner in the ancient throne room of Belshazzar, Rish states his purpose of negotiating with Israel and promises to release the hostages unharmed when the time is right. He demands that they surrender or die. During the brief meeting, Rish reveals his temper and instability. Hausner takes the information imparted back to the hilltop, but never really considers giving into Rish's demands.

Rish fights until the very end, charging the hilltop even as Israeli troops mount a rescue mission. In the end, he is killed by Hausner. Though the original mission has been stalled, Rish will never be able to battle peace again.

David Becker

The captain of El Al Concorde 02, or "Wings of Emmanuel," Becker is an American Jew. Becker always wanted to be a fighter pilot, but his extreme height prevented him from doing so. Becker wound up flying troops in transport planes. During the 1967 war,



Becker volunteers to fly re-supply flights to Israel. His marriage ended, and he marries a woman from the Israeli Air Force. Since he had flown a supersonic bomber for the American Air Force, Becker is one of the few pilots qualified to fly the Concorde for El Al.

Though earlier in life Becker longed for the action and excitement of a fighter pilot, he is at the point in his life where excitement and action no longer hold the allure they once did. In fact, flying itself is no longer the joy it used to be. Doubts and fears creep up with each takeoff and landing, almost freezing Becker in panic. At the start of the most important flight of his life, Becker decides that he will resign when the mission is complete.

In Babylon, Becker is strong and calm, the "captain of the ship." He overcomes his fears and is a pivotal player in the escape of the remaining passengers.

Tom Richardson

An American Air Force Colonel, Tom Richardson is an attaché on the peace mission. He is introduced early on, when he meets with Teddy Laskov to discuss the flight details of the two Concorde. Though it is not confirmed until near the end of the story, Richardson has sold the details of the flight and radio frequencies to Ahmed Rish for one million dollars before the hijacking, and another million afterwards. During a confrontation with John McClure, an American CIA agent on the flight, Richardson admits that he is an anti-Semite, and does not feel any regret about selling out the people aboard. He states that no one was supposed to get hurt, but admits that he chose the 02 Concorde because he was informed that if there was a need to detonate one of the bombs, the 01 Concorde would be destroyed first as an example.

Richard is anxious to surrender to the terrorists, knowing he will be released. Even if he were exposed and went to trial in the United States, upon his release from prison he will still have access to the millions he was paid. In case of his death at the hands of the terrorists, a letter in a safe deposit box detailed the names and locations of terrorist agents in Israel. He feels he has all avenues covered. McClure informs him that this is not the case, for as a CIA agent he is authorized to act on his own, and kills Richardson.

John McClure

McClure is an American CIA agent, and passenger on El Al Concorde 02. His identity as a CIA agent is not known to most of those on board. To the other passengers he is simply an American Embassy man, going home on leave. A very tall man, he reminds others of Abraham Lincoln without a beard, and seems always to have a wooden match stick in his mouth. McClure seems never to get excited or emotional, taking things in stride. When the Concorde crash lands in Babylon, McClure takes a defensive position on the large hillside along the Euphrates River with Tom Richardson. McClure seems to be immediately aware of the fact that Richardson is not what he seems, and is always by his side, keeping a close watch on the traitor.



At the end of the captivity in Babylon, McClure confronts Richardson, and rather than see Richardson either escape punishment, or serve a jail sentence and still profit from his betrayal in the end, McClure kills him.

Teddy Laskov

A brigadier general in the Israeli Air Force, Laskov is as pessimistic about the upcoming conference as Bernstein is optimistic. A former Captain in the Red Air Force, he returned from a mission to his village to find most of his family dead in what the government claimed a civil disturbance. Laskov realized that a Jew was a Jew, no matter which part of Russia you lived in. Before fleeing to Jerusalem, Laskov bombed a camp of his own army. In Jerusalem he joined the Haganah Air Force.

Laskov is the commander of the F-14 Tomcats that are the escorts and protection of the two El Al Concordes. He took the advice of Tom Richardson and removed the 20mm cannons that might have been able to strike out at the Lear jet. Laskov hesitates to use other weapons, first because they might cause damage to the Concordes, and second because his lover Miriam Bernstein had cautioned against unnecessary use of force before such an important meeting in New York.

Abdel Majid Jabari

An Arab that more than thirty years ago made his personal and private peace with the Jews in Israel, Jabari has been at the top of the death list for Palestinian terrorists. He is in fact missing part of his left hand, the results of a letter bomb. Jabari loves Miriam Bernstein deeply, enough to put himself at risk by meeting her before sunrise at a café owned by a Christian Arab. Bernstein fills the void left in Jabari by the loss of his family, who fled to the West Bank in 1948. In 1967 after the West Bank came into Israeli hands, he had hoped to reunite with his family, only to find that they had fled to Jordan. He was amazed at the hatred of those left in the refugee camp.

Jabari is one of two Arabs that will take part in the conference in New York.

Itzhak Talman

Talman is a Brigadier General and the Air Force Chief of Operations. A man with a highly nervous and emotional nature, Talman acts the part of a calm, upper class officer. During the committee meeting before the take-off of the El Al Concordes, Talman states that Laskov is the best they have, and he will take responsibility for the two aircraft with no hesitation.



Isaac Burg

Burg is the head of Mivtzan Elohim or "The Wrath of God," the anti-terrorist group. Burg affects habits that are very disarming, when in reality he is capable of killing in cold blood.

Chaim Mazar

Mazar is the head of Shin Beth, Israel's Internal Security Service. He arranges for the Defense Minister to call for short air-raid drills to keep people inside during the take-off of the two aircraft. The point of this exercise is to prevent anyone from shooting at the planes with shoulder fired missiles.

Benjamin Dobkin

Dobkin represents the Army's Chiefs of Staff. An amateur archeologist, Dobkin is well acquainted with the site in Babylon where Concorde 02 comes to rest.

Matti Yadin

Jacob Hausner's assistant, Yadin is a passenger on the 01 Concorde. He is on the plane to supervise the security detail that is aboard. Yadin offers to switch planes with Hauser so that he did not have to fly with Miriam Bernstein. Hausner refuses, on the grounds that it is bad luck to switch planes.

Asher Avidar

Avidar is the hot headed pilot of Concorde 01. During the pre-flight meeting, he questions Teddy Laskov about who is in charge should a problem arise. Laskov informs him to follow orders. Avidar is not pleased with the response. During the hijacking of the two Concordes, Avidar decides to take a risk and fly quickly out of range of the radio controlled detonator held by Ahmed Rish in the Lear jet. He fails, and Rish blows up the Concorde.

Nathan Brin

An El Al security officer on 02.

Chaim Levin

Rabbi flying on 02



Salem Hamadi

Rish's second in command. A good leader, but afraid of Rish and the apparent insanity that guides him. Hamadi escapes into the Euphrates River, after deciding to spare more lives at the end of the standoff in Babylon.

Captain Geis

Captain of a C-130, on the mission to save the captives in Babylon

Dr Al—Thanni

Curator of the museum in Babylon. He has been in the museum during the entire confrontation, and provides information to the commandos when they arrive.

Shear-jashub

The Rabbi in the village of Ummah. The village is made up of the remainder of the Jews taken to Babylon thousands of years ago



Objects/Places

Babylon

An ancient city in Iraq, bordered by the Euphrates River.

Hamseen/Sharav

The Hamseen in Arabic, or Sharav in Hebrew is a constant desert wind. The word Hamseen means fifty, and it is said that there are fifty days a year when the wind blows. Only the first wind of the year is welcome, as it announces the arrival of springtime.

Ashbals

Ashbals, or Tiger Cubs are Palestinian orphans of the wars with Israel. Young men and women, they believe in and live for their hatred of Israel. Trained from their earliest memory in battle, they long for the day when they can complete a mission against Israel and its people.

Lod International Airport

Located in Israel, Lod is the point of take-off for the two Concorde carrying the delegates to the United Nations in New York.

Ramla Prison

Where Ahmed Rish had been detained and questioned at one time by Jacob Hausner.

Ishtar Gate

The base camp of the terrorist group, in the desolate city of Babylon

Ummah

Village of approximately fifty Jews, descendants of the Jews captured in Israel thousands of years ago



St Nazaire

In France, the location of one of the plants that assembled the Concorde. The bomb on the 01 was hidden at this plant.

Outpost

A strategic location, the Israelis set up several outposts in order to detect early movement from the Ashbals.

Euphrates River

The river that borders the hilltop where the Concorde 02 comes to rest. It is also the means by which the captives make their final escape from Babylon.



Themes

Good vs Evil

A classic tale of good versus evil, *By the Rivers of Babylon* pits the peace delegation against a group of Palestinian terrorists. Ahmed Rish and his second in command, along with a group of young terrorists, conspire to take a group of people hostage. The group, consisting mainly of Israelis, though some Americans and Arabs are also among them, is on the way to New York for a peace conference at the United Nations when they are hijacked. One of the Concorde is blown up, while the other is forced to land in Babylon. Rather than follow the instructions of the terrorists, the group aboard the second plane choose to take their chances and battle for their lives as well as their beliefs.

The goal of the delegation is to bring peace to the Middle East. The goal of the terrorists is to stop peace in the Middle East. The battle that takes place in Babylon between these two opposing forces brings to mind the battle of David and Goliath. The terrorists view themselves as the clear victors, as they have spent over a year planning for this moment. The members of the delegation should be easily handled. When the people on the remaining Concorde choose to fight, using the few weapons they have, and creating more with the limited supplies on board, the "giant" is slain. The terrorists must re-evaluate the spirit of the hostages, and have a battle on their hands, as opposed to the easy mission that they thought originally.

Loss of Innocence

The members of the delegation are forced to give up their dreams of peace in the Middle East when they are hijacked by a group of terrorists led by Ahmed Rish. The members of the delegation that believe heart and soul in the mission for peace are forced to fight, the one thing that they are so dead set against. Though no member of the group is a true innocent, they truly believe that they are going to accomplish their goal of finally creating peace in the Middle East, a truth they are forced to abandon when they are hijacked.

Perhaps surprisingly, the group of young terrorists also loses their innocence. Fighting for what they believe, in what they perceive to be an easy battle, they are stunned by the seemingly defenseless group of hostages fighting back, as well as the strength of their leadership. When they fail in the initial attack of the hostages, they are forced to continue against their will by Rish and Salem Halmadi, his lieutenant, and seem no longer to be fighting for what they believe, but simply to survive.

Miriam Bernstein perhaps loses more than any other. Despite her early life, surviving the concentration camps, losing her son and her husband, she has never given up on her idea that peace was possible in the Middle East. The hijacking stuns her, yet she



does not give up hope that all will be well. During the standoff in Babylon, Bernstein begins to realize that there will always be someone willing to do anything to destroy peace. In their short time together, Bernstein and Hausner, who seemed to detest each other at the start, become lovers. By the time the survivors escape Babylon, Bernstein has given up, deciding not to go onto New York and the peace conference. She no longer believes that peace is possible.

Betrayal

There are many instances of betrayal throughout *By the Rivers of Babylon*, the foremost being the selling of information by the American Tom Richardson. Though hinted at in the early chapters, it is not confirmed until the near end of the novel. Richardson sells information to Ahmed Rish regarding the trip details, making it possible for him to intercept the *Concordes* on their way to New York. When confronted, Richardson tries to buy the cooperation of John McClure, another American on the trip, but is refused. Perplexed, he cannot understand why anyone would turn down such a large amount of money for information on a trip that in his opinion probably would have failed, and does not affect him directly one way or another.

Miriam Bernstein suffers a betrayal of self. Her belief in the mission that she is on is shattered by the hijacking. While fighting with the others from the hilltop in Babylon, she must go against her inner self, first by fighting the terrorists at all, culminating in her killing another human being. Though it is in self-defense, the act of killing another devastates her. Before the *Concordes* are hijacked, Bernstein cautions others to allow peace to win. In Babylon, her belief that everyone would choose peace is destroyed.

Bernstein also betrays Teddy Laskov when she and Jacob Hausner become lovers. She had been able to justify her relationship with Laskov, despite the fact that she could never be 100% certain that her husband was dead. When she begins her relationship with Hausner, she suffers internally, feeling that she is betraying herself, her husband and Laskov. When the remaining delegates are rescued from the hilltop in Babylon, Teddy Laskov publicly declares his love for Bernstein, yet she cannot return his message. By this time, she feels that she would betray Hausner by doing so.



Style

Point of View

The point of view of the novel is the third person omniscient. The thoughts and feelings of the characters are clear and concise throughout. This is important, because as the story progresses the struggle of each character and the way they are changed due to circumstances beyond their control is made clear to the reader.

Taking place over a few days, the novel is fast paced and filled with action, both physical and emotional. By using the third person narrative, the author is able to draw the reader into the story. Though there are many characters, the author has made each easy to follow, providing insight into their actions and reactions.

The novel is told in dialogue and descriptive passages. The dialogue is interspersed fairly evenly throughout the story, and the narration is well balanced. This is done in such a way that the reader is able to become engrossed in not only the story, but the lives of the characters and how they are affected by the events that take place.

Setting

The majority of the story takes place in the ancient city of Babylon. Ahmed Rish leads the remaining El Al Concorde to this location, perhaps in an ironic reference to the Babalonian Captivity. The city is in ruins, buried under thousands of years of sand. The plane comes to rest on the top of what is believed to be an ancient fortress. Many battles have taken place in Babylon over thousands of years, and the Israelis and Palestinians continue the history of the desolate place.

St Nazaire, France is the location of the planting of the bomb in the 01 Concorde, and is the setting of the Prologue.

The beginning of the peace mission takes place in Israel, as the Concordes ready for flight. Israel is also the location of Teddy Laskov and General Talman who try to convince the Prime Minister that the hostages are in Babylon, and they should mount a rescue immediately.

The village of Ummah, is the final resting place of the hostages aboard the 02 Concorde once they escape from Babylon. The villagers are the descendants of the original captives of Babylon, thousands of years ago.



Language and Meaning

For the most part, *By the Rivers of Babylon* is written in an easily read, straightforward manner. The author clearly conveys the background of the characters involved, as well as the action that takes place throughout.

There are quite a few characters in the novel, both major and minor. The author tends to jump around from character to character, and place to place, but manages to tie things together, so one does not lose sight of the story or plot. Military terms, such as aircraft and weapons are explained in enough detail to understand, but not so much as to overburden the reader. The settings are described in such a way that the reader understands any significance they might hold, but are written so that the storyline does not slow. This is important, as the story itself is fast paced, and one might lose sight of the action if bogged down with unnecessary detail.

Though the novel contains very descriptive passages, informing one of character background or describing action or locations, there is an equal amount of dialogue, allowing the reader to become part of the ongoing drama as it unfolds.

Structure

The novel is made up of a prologue, and epilogue, as well as 38 numbered chapters of approximately ten to fifteen pages. The chapters are separated into three sections, Book One, Israel, Book Two, Babylon, The Watchtowers, and Book Three, Babylon, The Ishtar Gate. The chapters are not overly long, moving the storyline quickly. The prologue provides a bit of back story, describing how the bombs were planted in the El Al Concorde more than a year before the mission for peace is to take place. Book One is the shorter of the three sections, taking place before the hijacking of the delegates on the way to a peace conference in New York. This section provides character background, allowing the reader a better understanding of the many personalities in the novel. The second and third books, set in Babylon, are much longer, providing the largest part of the story—the landing in Babylon, and the fight between the passengers and the terrorists that have hijacked the Concorde in order to destroy hopes for peace in the Middle East. This section also details the personalities of the characters, giving the reader a broader comprehension of the way events unfold.

The main body of the novel surrounds the passengers of the Concorde that is hijacked and forced to land in Babylon. There are a few sub-plots, including Tom Richardson's betrayal, and the love of Miriam Bernstein and Jacob Hausner. The author ties everything together in such a way that the reader is able to follow each without difficulty.



Quotes

"Only her mouth smiled, Laskov noticed. Her dark eyes remained expressionless. That full, rich mouth had become quite accomplished at showing the full range of human emotion, while the eyes only stared." Book One, Chap. One, p. 18.

"She noticed that new almond blossoms had come out during the night and the hills were smudged with pink and white clouds. The rocky foothills were softly green and carpeted with brilliant red anemones, cream-colored lupins, and yellow daisies. The yearly miracle of rebirth had returned, and along with the wildflowers brought into bloom by the Hamseen, peace was breaking out in the Holy Land. Or so it seemed." Book One, Chap. One, p. 34.

"He affected fussy habits and mannerisms that were very disarming. In reality, he had no such habits. He was much younger than he looked, and he was capable of killing in cold blood while he searched his pockets for a nasal spray." Book One, Chap. 3, p. 44.

"Becker had a recurring nightmare: a brain-damaged crew coming out of their blackout-sucking on the oxygen masks, if they still had the wits to grasp that simple necessity-trying to figure out what all those funny lights and dials in front of them were, while their eyes rolled and saliva drooled from their mouths. And all the while, the computerized Concorde held steady, waiting for a human hand to guide it. Neanderthals in Apollo." Chap. 4, p. 59.

"He knew that Hausner was a man who would rather die than face life after what had happened here, unless he could personally save the situation. He also knew that Hausner was a man under sentence of death, anyway. He couldn't trust his judgement any longer." Chap. 8, p. 96.

"He felt totally responsible, although in fact it was Talman's word of caution and Laskov's minute of indecision that had put the situation beyond saving. It was Laskov's mellowing with age, his sharp military instincts blunted by the promise of peace. It was the anxious voices from the Hawkeye assuring Laskov that the Lear was only a group of businessmen. It was bad French security at the assembly plants. And it was everything else that had happened over the past several thousand years, all coming together under those cloudless skies, thousands of feet above the Mediterranean. But Hausner dismissed these thoughts. He was wishing that he had switched planes with Matti Yadin." Chap. 7, p. 88.

"'Babylon,' he said aloud. It was one of those evocative names in the lexicon of world geography. A name that was more than just a name. A place that was more than just a place. Like Hiroshima or Normandy. Camelot or Shangri-La. Auschwitz or Masada. Jerusalem or Armageddon." Chap. 10, p. 119.

"The silence of the place screamed in his ears as if he were hearing the ghostly crashing of Babylonian chariots, the fleeing enemy, and the shouts of her victorious



armies. Opulent Babylon. In the Old and New Testaments, a symbol of Biblical prophecy fulfilled. Hausner knew that there must be some meaning in all the nothingness that stretched before him. Yet, perhaps the meaning was nothingness. Sand. Dust. Death." Chap. 16, p. 171.

"He came around to the west side and looked out at the endless mud flats. He threw his hands in the air. 'God, I want to go home! I am tired and I want to go home!' He thought of the famous questions, 'Why me, God?' and the sardonic answer, 'Why not?' He laughed and shouted, 'Yes, why not? Jacob Hausner is as good as anyone to bully around! Thanks, God! I'll remember this!'" Chap. 24, p. 268.

"Babylon. What an incredibly dead place. And the dead city was trying to kill him and add his bones to its bleached earth. 'And Babylon shall become heaps, and a dwelling place for dragons, an astonishment, and an hissing, without an inhabitant.' Jeremiah's prophecy had been as accurate as Isaiah's." Chapter 30, p. 318.

"Hamadi turned away. More and more he felt that their fate was sealed. They were being hemmed in on all sides by forces over which they had no control. If he were to turn around and walk away into the night, he would live to see the sun come out of Persia. But he could not do that any more than he could kill Rish." Chap. 32. p. 344.

"Miriam Bernstein looked up at him. 'I won't be going to New York with you.'

The Foreign Minister looked startled. 'why not?'

'I don't believe in it.'

'Nonsense.'

She shrugged. What would Jacob Housner have advised? He had always been cynical of the peace mission, but maybe he'd advise her to go and make them know that she was going to be one hell of a tough negotiator. If the Arabs had counted on her as the weakest link in the Israeli mission, then they had better think again." Epilogue, pp. 418-419.



Topics for Discussion

What is the importance of the Peace Conference? What do the Israelis hope to accomplish?

Why is there bad blood between Jacob Hausner and Ahmed Rish? How is it significant in the way Hausner handles the situation in Babylon?

How are the early lives of Jacob Hausner and Miriam Bernstein different? How does this affect the way they relate to each other as adults?

What is the reason that Ahmed Rish led the Concorde to the city of Babylon?

How is Miriam Bernstein changed by her time in Babylon? Did Jacob Hausner help or hurt her?

Why do the Iraqi Jews choose to stay in Ummah?

Why did Jacob Hausner choose to die in Babylon rather than escape with the others? How was his life changed by his time there? How did the relationship between Miriam Bernstein and Hausner change him?