

Abalus



In the beginning

STEPHEN L. PADLEY

Abalus
In the Beginning

by
Stephen L. Padley



Strategic Book Publishing and Rights Co.

Copyright © 2012

All rights reserved—Stephen L. Padley

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, or by any information storage retrieval system, without the permission, in writing, from the publisher.

Strategic Book Publishing and Rights Co.
12620 FM 1960, Suite A4-507
Houston, TX 77065
www.sbpra.com

ISBN: 978-1-62212-888-4

Design: Dedicated Book Services, Inc. (www.netdbs.com)

Dedication

This book is dedicated to the DGS (Dead Goat Society), a small group of good friends, like me, in the second half of our short lives on this earth. As the DGS, we walk, run, or cycle for charities. We hike, climb, camp, bush bash, kayak, and snorkel the West Australian countryside and coastal waters. May our bodies continue to hold out as we delight in nature's diversity.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank longtime friend and member of the DGS, Barbara Edwards, who in no small way, through her encouragement, proofreading, constructive critique, and constant verbal poke in the ribs for the next chapter, brought his book into being.

Contents

Dedication	iii
Acknowledgements	v
In the Beginning.	vii
Preface	viii
Chapter 1—The Cardinals Visit.	1
Chapter 2—Incarceration.	10
Chapter 3—Shaun	21
Chapter 4—London, February, 2015 CE	36
Chapter 5—The Journey	41
Chapter 6—15 May 2015 CE.	51
Chapter 7—London	61
Chapter 8—28 July 2015	75
Chapter 9—The Library.	80
Chapter 10—His Eminence the Cardinal.	90
Chapter 11—Journey to Heathrow	96
Chapter 12—Pursuit.	102
Chapter 13—Heathrow	109
Chapter 14—Ally.	114
Chapter 15—Alucious	120
Chapter 16—South Coast	123
Chapter 17—The University	143
Chapter 18—The Notebook.	161
Chapter 19—2 August 2015.	166
Chapter 20—Week of 3 August 2015	185

vi Stephen L. Padley

Chapter 21—Capture	199
Chapter 22—Alucious' Plan	216
Chapter 23—Return to the Cardinal	223
Chapter 24—In the Beginning	237
Epilogue	279

In the Beginning

When I opened my eyes, the first thing I saw
Was a gnarled, grey hand with bloody claws.
My neck was pressed against a wooden beam,
Throat sticky and wet; was I in a dream?
Thin, cold steel pressed against my spine.
Was this to be my last moment, end of time?
I turned and glanced sideways to where he stood,
The dark, heavy monster in black leather hood,
An evil grin spread across his twisted face,
As the axe he lifted, my heart picked up pace.
Tongue dried, lips cracked, last breath did I take,
Final thought of forgiveness for their mistake.
Body freed of head, and all went black.
I look down where the axe did hack.
No sight, no sound, silent scream from within,
Why do I feel this is not the end?
The shell I lived in lies in two parts.
But, my sense of self exists as my heart departs.
My thoughts, they float in the damp, misty air.
I sense a feeling of love and care.
It's all around me, embracing each thought.
The executioner's axe all for naught,
My mind open, to wander, for all to know
As I find my spirit begin to grow.
I understand things I never knew
And yearn to be part of this spirit true.
My thoughts are expanded and spirit immersed.
I am part of this limitless universe.
Memories of earth-bound time grow hazy.
Confined to one planet now seems crazy.
Free of the womb of Mother Earth spinning,
For the spirit released, this is just the beginning.

Copyright (c) Steve Padley 2010.

Preface

This novel came into being following the creation of a picture from an image in my mind. When I showed the picture to family and friends, they were puzzled by the drawing that seemed to be in contradiction of the three words within it, “In the Beginning.” In explanation, I wrote the poem that was inspired by the picture. But, it did not seem enough for those who read the poem and had seen the picture. So, I decided to write a short story to provide a background to the picture. It was intended to be only a short story, but it took on a life of its own and evolved over a period of time. It got me thinking about the constant war of intellect and belief over the subject of creation or evolution and about some of the most astute minds within their fields of study or research sitting on one side or the other. The god in my mind’s eye is far cleverer than either side of this coin, in that if life and this universe are indeed a creation, it was created to evolve. Evolution was built into the whole model. Man’s evolution is not just that of our physical adaptability to the environment to which we are subjected but also of the mind. Our greatest and most powerful tool for this evolution is our curiosity. Armed with it, we explore, discover, and learn about our physical world and that which lies beyond it.

From the human imagination bursts creativity, expressed in the forms of music, literature, and the arts, not to forget architecture and design. But, collectively or individually, to think that we know all there is to know about what has been taught us or that which we are prepared to believe from dogmatic institutions dulls the curiosity by which we can evolve and understand the part we play in this universe. Of course, there are many influences in civilization that distract the majority of us from this. I’m sure many of you can work out what these are.

Many years ago I came across a saying by W. Clement Stone, “Whatever the mind can conceive and believe will be achieved.” This principle is adequately demonstrated in a lot

of science fiction novels of the past. When science and technology catch up with the ideas expressed in some of these novels and even films, then it becomes a reality. Science fact tends to follow science fiction. Does a similar mechanism work in the realm of religion, whereupon our ancestors, in an effort to explain our existence, conceived of the idea of some kind of supreme beings or God? Can the principle expressed in the above quote then influence the growth of individual cultures with some form of belief structure embedded?

Is there a message in this novel? Maybe, I leave that for the reader to find out.

“Once you’ve come to the conclusion that what you know already is all you need to know, you have a degree in disinterest.”— John Dobson

Chapter 1—The Cardinals Visit

A loud knock on the heavy, wooden door reverberated through the house, followed by the deep commanding voice, “Open in the name of his Eminence, the Cardinal of Surrendom.”

Mother looked at Father with a worried, puzzled frown on her face. Father quickly closed the book he was reading to us, turned to the fireplace, and removed the left-hand hearthstone to reveal the small recess holding several books that we were not supposed to be reading. It was not our place to enquire of any knowledge outside the teachings of the Lord Master of Surrendom. The Cardinal was renowned for his dogged pursuit to seek out those citizens like my father, who thought there was more to understand than the church had ever told us. The likes of us had a tendency to disappear. Having replaced the book in the secret recess, he repositioned the stone and scuffled ash and old embers into the cracks. Unless you looked really hard, it was almost undetectable in the flickering light of the burning logs. Father picked up the Holy Writings issued to all Surrendom households. The book, leather bound with gold-leaf embossing, was to always be in a place of prominence in each house by commandment of the Lord Master.

Visits by clergy of each town were frequent and unannounced under the guise of fatherly concern for the well-being of the flock in his care. But, everyone knew that these visits were more about ensuring the dwellers were following the path laid out for them in the writings of the good book. It was the Father’s duty to report any doubts about a family’s devotion to the Faith. A visit from the Cardinal was not entirely unexpected since the last unannounced call from the Father became a somewhat animated discussion between my father and the Father. Part of the ritual of these visits was a compulsory tithe collection that demonstrated one’s devotion to the Faith. My father, in an unguarded moment, questioned the necessity for the third increase in the tithe this season. The Father simply reminded him that it was not

for him to question what the Lord Master's servants required the money for. My father could not let it go at that and glibly remarked that an omnipotent Lord Master would have no need of money; indeed, the creator of all things did not create for profit. The Father, shocked by this remark, retorted with some vehemence that the Lord Master could see into the minds and hearts of all his flock and would seek out those found untrue. He quietly left.

That was two days ago.

The second knock on the door was followed by a more impatient demand for the door to be opened. The Holy Writings were placed on the table. My father walked over to his chair, sat, picked up his pipe, and began to refill it.

"Go open the door, Evey. It'll be OK."

Mother brushed down her dress, patted her hair into place, glanced into the mirror, and smiled falsely. I sat down by the fire on my stool, picked up my knife, and continued to whittle my stick into the fireplace. Mother crossed the room to the door and, with a sharp deep sigh of breath, opened it and stepped back as two of the Cardinal's guards strode in and gave the room the once-over to ensure there were no potential threats to the Cardinal. Once satisfied, the taller guard nodded back toward the door, and his Eminence strode in. His heavy, blue velvet cape with hood was held close to his body by a jeweled chain and clasp across his upper chest, and he was clearly clutching the lower section of the cape with his hands. He was tall, almost as tall as my father, but thin and wispy looking, with piercing dark eyes that reminded me of a cat focused on its prey and ready to pounce. Two bony hands opened the cape and unclasped the gold chain, and with a wide sweep of his left hand, he removed the cape and held it out to my mother to relieve him of it. Father stood respectfully and bowed his head without taking his eyes off the Cardinal.

"Welcome to our humble home, your Eminence. I trust you are well."

Without a word, the Cardinal strode into the center of the living area and slowly cast his intense gaze around the room, taking in every detail, turning slowly on the balls of his feet in full circle.

After several seconds, his intense gaze returned to my father, still standing by his chair with pipe in hand.

“Can I offer you some refreshment? Some wine perhaps, or would you prefer a warm beverage this chilly evening?”

“No, I have brought my own refreshment, but you can provide me with a chair by the fire.”

“Abalus, move the rocker by the fire for his Eminence,” Father gestured toward the heavy oak rocker.

I quickly put down my knife and stick, went over to Mother’s small sewing area, and moved the rocker to the fire. Without his cape, the Cardinal looked quite frail, but each movement and posture seemed precise, calculated somehow. Dressed in a loose, plain-black, full-length tunic, what he lacked in bulk was made up by the volume of his clothes. He sat in the rocker and waved at the two guards to remove themselves from his presence. They turned, walked out the door, and closed it behind them. Presumably, that was where they would remain unless called upon.

“You are Rider, Adiemus Rider, are you not?” The Cardinal’s voice was deeper than I had expected from this thin, frail frame.

“Yes, your Eminence, I am, and this is my wife, Evey and my son Abalus,” Father responded, casting an open palm toward each of us in turn. Mother sat by the table and rested her hands in her lap. I could see in her face she was very uncomfortable with this man in her house.

“Be seated, Rider.” The Cardinal’s voice had all the force of command.

I returned to my stool, picked up my knife, and whittled stick. Father gave me a stern look. I instantly put the stick down and placed the knife in the pigskin scabbard on my belt. From where I sat, I could see that the rocker was placed

over the hearth stone that concealed our books. I smiled gently to myself and immediately regretted it as the intense eyes bored into mine from just across the fireplace. I looked down into the fire so I did not have to have my thoughts ripped out of my head. The Cardinal's attention returned to my father. "I understand from the Father of this district that you had questioned the increases in the tithe; is this true?"

"My apologies, your Eminence, they were words born out of frustration. It has been a difficult year for blacksmiths with the loss of so many horses to the equine phage and the increasing rarity of good metal. Much of my business revolves around horses and the needs of farmers. I have barely been able to put food in the mouths of my family, let alone pay increases in tithes."

I knew this was only partly the truth; Father had indeed lost trade with the farming community, but he turned his hand to making swords and axes. Although not a master in these weapons, his reputation was beginning to grow, each new weapon an improvement on the last. Knowing this was at least a part truth allowed my father to return his Eminence's gaze by looking him straight in the eye without a flinch.

"Hmm," his Eminence responded. "It has also been noted that your attendance to worship has been somewhat erratic over the last six months."

"I have not been well, and neither have my wife and son. In times of need, we take care of each other."

"Hmm, I see," the Cardinal responded. He began to gently rock in the chair.

"I see you have the Good Book on the table there. Do you read this to your family every night?"

After a brief pause that would only have been the merest time to blink, my father replied, "Yes, your Eminence."

The Cardinal did not miss the pause before the response. He had been a Pursuer of the faith long enough to know when he was being lied to. The Cardinal turned to me and fixed his eyes to mine. My heart began to race, and I caught my breath, waiting for what was to come next. My fifteen years of life

had not been enough to know how to lie when the needs of the family demanded it. Indeed, my father had always told me to tell the truth regardless of the consequences. A noble attribute, but now my father's life might depend on a lie.

The Cardinal continued to rock the chair. "Son, what was the last passage your father read to you out of the Book?"

I turned my eyes down to the rocking chair and saw the hearthstone move under the weight of the rocker as it tipped forward. "Well, tonight we read the story of how the mighty armies of the Northern provinces were overcome by the chosen warriors of the Lord Master in the ancient land of Hedonim."

"Really, and who was the leader of the Warriors, and what prayer was spoken before battle?" his Eminence replied with a sickly smile on his face.

My mind went blank; it was almost a month ago when we read this story. "It was . . . It was . . ." My eyes looked up, and I found myself caught in the intense eyes of his Eminence.

"Come now, son, surely you have not forgotten such an exciting story. Who was the leader of the Warriors?"

My eyes dropped back to the hearthstone, which was now looking distinctly loose. With alarm, I turned my eyes to my father and back to the stone. This did not escape the intense gaze of his Eminence. He followed my eyes downward to the stone, leaned forward in the chair, and saw the stone move with his weight.

"Well, Mr. Rider, what have we here? It seems your fireplace holds a little mystery maybe, or is it just in need of repair?"

His Eminence had documented past visitations and recorded some of the more novel ways in which citizens had attempted to secrete banned knowledge. The fireplace had provided several places in the past. In the chimney, the shelf over the fireplace, under the grate, a false bottom of the wood basket, even behind pictures above the fireplace were all recorded.

Father took a step forward. His Eminence reminded him of the guards just outside the door. Removing a short dagger

with a red, jeweled handle from his belt, the Cardinal stooped down, shoved the rocker away from the hearth, stuck his blade into the gap between the stones, and levered the loose stone up. Then, he jammed his knife underneath so the stone did not fall back into gap. He released the knife and thrust his fingers under the stone to lift it out of the hole. At this moment, he took his eyes off my father and me.

Without even thinking about it, I dove across the hearth, withdrawing my knife from its scabbard at the same time, swung it around, and buried the blade into his neck. He was totally caught by surprise and looked round into my face, mouth open but no sound coming out. I looked into his eyes; the intense gaze was still there, boring into my mind. I looked at his neck. The knife had gone right through where his voice box would have been. He could not yell the alarm, just give a sort of grated cackle. I looked again more closely, something was not quite right.

“Father . . . Father, he does not bleed. There’s no blood!”

Father was by my side in two strides, squatted down, and looked for himself. Mother was still at the table with her hands held up to her face, trying to blot out the scene before her.

Father leaned forward to reach out for the knife. The Cardinal’s reactions were quick and precise as his left hand swept round and grasped my father’s wrist. I could see the pain in his face as the grip was crushing the bones in his forearm together. Still maintaining the grip, the Cardinal got to his feet and, with seemingly little effort, pushed my father across the room, where he fell against the table and was barely able to prevent himself pushing over my mother. With careful and deliberate motion, his fingers clasped round the knife stuck in his throat, and as we gazed in amazement, unable to speak, he withdrew the knife. No blood. No pain showed on his face. The Cardinal turned his attention to me, his attacker, and his right arm slashed across the space—his bony fingers sunk into my neck. I could feel the pressure of the blood in my temple and could barely breathe.

My mother was the first to react. I guess a mother's instinct to protect her young spurred her into action as she grabbed a cast-iron saucepan from the stove and swung it menacingly across the side of his skull. It would surely have crushed bone, but instead of the dull crunching sound, there was a sound more like metal on metal. As I looked up into the Cardinal's face in terror, I could see the skin of his left ear had turned sort of hazy and indistinct, and underneath, there was a crimson, metallic glint in the firelight. His grip did not relax, and my eyes became unfocused. There was another metallic thud and a third. The iron grip was gone, and I fell to the floor, gasping for breath. The Cardinal's head looked misshapen and flatter on the left-hand side, and the intense gaze, which was the hallmark of his presence, was gone; the dark eyes held no focus as he fell to the floor. Just as he dropped to the floor, there was a loud clatter as my mother released her grip on the saucepan, which landed on the stone floor as she stood in shock at what she had done. The noise was followed by the front door being flung open as two guards, alerted by the noise, took in the scene before them. The shorter of the two guards leveled a stubby, single-handed crossbow directly at my father and pulled the trigger. The next instant, the shaft of a six-inch bolt appeared in my father's chest, and he went limp and sank to his knees.

"Adiemus . . . nooo!" my mother screamed as she rushed over to where he fell, dropped to her knees, and cradled his head with shaking hands, stroking his face. The tall guard grabbed me by the hair, forced me to stand up, and pushed my face against the wall; strong hands grabbed both my arms, and I felt my wrists being bound behind my back with a leather lace. The second of the Cardinal's guard had moved over to where my father had fallen and checked his pulse for life; he was gone. Turning to my mother, he dragged her away and pushed her to bend forward over the table, face planted into the wood with a firm hand on the back of her head. My captor yanked me over to the door and pushed me

so hard that I fell outside, and he followed, slamming the door behind him.

I heard mother cry out in pain and anguish, “Forgive me, Adiemus. I know not what I do . . .” There was a loud clatter of furniture. “Mother! Mother!” I shouted, struggling against the guard to run back toward the house.

The guard caught me a swift backhand across the face. “Silence, you wretched sinner!”

I looked across the street to see a horse-drawn cart. The guard dragged me over to the side. The cart was a fully enclosed box with a small door in the back just big enough for an adult to crawl or be pushed into.

“Get in,” the guard commanded.

“Where are you taking me?” I blurted. “I want my mother.”

“You are to be judged and convicted by the Lord Master. Your mother will be . . . judged as well, shortly.” The guard’s face showed some kind of masked pleasure, a slim smile on his lips.

I heard no further noise come from the house apart from stifled sobs. My incarceration alone in the box, which a person could just about sit up in, seemed like an age, but it was probably as long as it takes to read the Lord Master’s prayer. I heard the door of the house open and footsteps to the back of the cart. The bolt was unlatched, and the door opened. The guard with dark smudges on his face and hands stood in its frame with my mother over his shoulder. She was bundled through the door, and it was secured into place. I pushed myself forward to her side, but I could not even lift her head up as my wrists were still bound behind my back. I could only whisper in her ear, but there was no response. She lay bunched up just as she was pushed in. I tried to move her into what I thought to be a more comfortable position, but without the use of my hands, it was difficult to maneuver the dead weight of her body. In the little light of the setting sun coming from the cracks in the planks of the box, I could see her face was cut and grazed across the right cheek, and I saw bruises around her eyes. Her apron was gone, and her dress

was ripped as was her white blouse. Tears began to form in my eyes, and I felt their warmth run down my face.

There was a sudden lurch, and the sound of the horses' hooves as the box began its journey to wherever the Lord Master ruled from. I knew not where.

Buy the B&N ePub version at:-

<http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/abalus-stephen-l-padley/1113117366?ean=2940015543599>

Buy the Kindle version at:-

<http://www.amazon.com/Abalus-In-the-Beginning-ebook/dp/B009KWLXIW/>