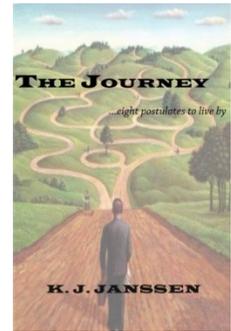




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## **The Journey** ***Eight Postulates to Live By*** **By K. J. Janssen**

### **Chapter 10 A dangerous movement is afoot**

*Aaron walked Gordon to the door before returning to his office and ten emails that had accumulated during the day. Most were routine business messages which he dispensed of within several minutes. The last one was lengthy. It filled the screen from end to end without any paragraph indentations. By the time Aaron reached the end of the message, the blood had drained from his face. The email read:*

*From: New Plaines Public Librarybooks@NTPL.org*

*To: Library Patrons, New Plaines Public Library*

*CC: Reverend Aaron Masters, Reverend Peter Benson, Admin.COAM*

*Date: Wed, April 28, 2014 4:16:27PM*

*Subject: New Plaines Heretic Center*

*There is a dangerous movement afoot in our town. It is called the New Plaines Metaphysical Center. It claims to represent the teachings of a deity they call God Almighty, but their concept of God is a single all-powerful deity, totally ignoring Jesus, the Son of God, our Lord and Savior, who died a painful death on the cross for all our sins. They misquote the Christian Bible to serve their means and build their belief system on ancient documents of questionable origins and authenticity.*

*They don't celebrate Sunday with any reverence. They don't worship God in the solemn way He should be honored. They are akin to pagans who pay homage to rocks or the sun or something else. They say there is no hell or devil. I went to the Center only once. I felt ill listening to the heretical words spewing from the mouth of Aaron Masters who calls himself a Minister of God. Another curious thing is that they don't take up any collections. It makes one wonder what subversive organization provides financial support for the center. The New Plaines Metaphysical Center is morally reprehensible. We must find some way to remove this abomination from our town. The poor souls that have been misled by Aaron Masters should return at once to one of the many God fearing traditional Christian churches in town and talk to the pastors about the error of their ways; our Christian God is forgiving of wayward souls. Heed my advice. Attend their Services at your own risk; the wages of sin is death. The vengeful God that they deny is bound to protect the town of New Plaines by removing them from our midst. For your own safety and that of your family, don't be caught in the cross-hairs when that happens.*

*A concerned Christian*

*Aaron immediately reached for the phone to call Reverend Worthington As he did he remembered that he had shut off the phone when Gordon arrived. He pressed the voice mail roster and saw that Reverend Benson called*

him at 4:30 and Reverend Worthington at 4:45. He listened to both voice mails. The Reverends had read the anonymous email and both expressed concern.

He called Reverend Worthington first. They talked for twenty minutes and concluded that the police needed to be brought in to assure that the email was only from a crank and did not pose a threat to the Center or its members. Media coverage, however, was to be avoided if at all possible.

Reverend Benson was openly disturbed by the email threat. "This sort of thing has never happened in New Plaines. Our townspeople are very tolerant of new ideas, whether it is a religious organization or even an abortion clinic. We've had some teenage pranks; every town has those, but nothing this intentional has ever happened. I think you need to call Chief Henderson right away. The Chief is a close friend of mine. Have him come out to the Center and check this thing out. I'll come right over there as well if you think I can be of help."

"No thanks, Peter. That won't be necessary, but I am going to call Chief Henderson. I'll call you later and let you know what he recommends." Aaron felt a chill as he put down the phone. Although Peter said all the right words, given the circumstances, Aaron couldn't help but sense something disingenuous in his voice. I wonder why I have that feeling.

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William Henderson was a burly man; a typical small town Chief of Police. New Plaines had a seven man police force with officers ranging from the minimum twenty-five years of age to the fifty-five years that graced the five-term Chief; only one female was on the all-white force. She accompanied Chief Henderson to the Center. Officer Thelma Weinstein was in her forties. She worked out regularly which showed in her well-toned arms and legs. Thelma walked behind the Chief as they entered the Center shortly after 6 o'clock. Aaron came out of his office to greet them.

"Good evening, I'm Reverend Aaron Masters."

The Chief reached out to shake hands. "Pleased to meet you, Reverend. I'm Chief Henderson and this is Officer Weinstein," he said, gesturing toward Thelma. "I hear that you received a rather threatening email earlier today. It seems that a copy was sent to every man, woman and child in town who has a Library card. The Station isn't in their files so I didn't hear about it until several ladies in town called to tell us about it. Unfortunately, I was out at the time so I missed the message on my desk. Anyway, we're here now." He gestured toward Aaron's office, "Can we go to your office and take a look at what you received?"

"Sure, please come this way."

The Chief looked at the printout for a minute before he asked, "What's Admin.COAM?"

"That's our sponsor in Philadelphia. It stands for the Church of the Ancient Mystics. We are not a church however; the Center is a teaching ministry."

Officer Weinstein opened a pad and began taking notes as the Chief continued.

"Have you talked with COAM to see if they know anything about this?"

"Yes, that was my first call."

"It's after six now. I see that the email was sent at 4:16. What took you so long?"

*"I had a counseling session until around 5. As soon as I finished, I checked my computer."*

*"That's when I saw it. I immediately called Reverend Worthington. He's my superior at COAM. I also noticed that I had a voice mail from him and from Peter Benson. My phone was turned off to avoid distractions during the counseling session, so I wasn't aware of their calls. Both he and Peter advised that I call you."*

*"That was sound advice. Is that Peter Benson, the Lutheran minister?"*

*"Yes, sir. He wrote us up in his "Religion Corner" column in the New Plaines Herald. He's been quite supportive."*

*"I see. Is it common for local churches to embrace a place like this?"*

*Thelma looked up from her note taking. From her experience, the Chief's question appeared to be the type of question usually asked of a suspect rather than a victim. She lowered her eyes and resumed writing.*

*"What exactly do you mean by 'a place like this'?"*

*"I don't mean any offense, Reverend," the chief said quickly. "I just mean that from what I've learned so far, I would imagine that the churches here in town might find a Metaphysical Center such as this a bit too 'new agey', if there is such a word. I don't know anything about what you do here. I'm just saying that it would seem very likely that you might get a few noses out-of-joint with what you teach."*

*Thelma's eyes widened as she looked first at the Chief and then at Aaron. Her pen was poised above the pad. The silence seemed endless.*

*Aaron chose his words carefully. He had been taught to expect passive resistance from government officials as well as law enforcement officers. "Chief Henderson, I understand your concern about how the opening of our Center might be received by the town of New Plaines. The Church's site selection process was very thorough in their survey of the town before deciding on this location. They found that people of New Plaines were receptive to new ideas and openly invited new organizations to their town and, just for the record, the Church that supports the Center has a sterling reputation. I am a certified minister with a degree from their theological school"*

*The Chief looked embarrassed. "I didn't mean anything disrespectful, Reverend Masters. But it is obvious that you got someone's nose out-of-joint."*

*"Yes, that's apparent," Aaron conceded.*

*Officer Weinstein looked up from her notes and asked, "Do you have any reason to suspect that any of the churches in town, or for that matter, even Reverend Benson might be behind this?"*

*Henderson shot an angry look at his officer. "Why would you ask a question like that? The religious community in New Plaines has always been tolerant of one another and Peter Benson is certainly no exception. I've lived in this town for over forty years. We all get along very well together. If this isn't some hacker being mischievous, then there is obviously something more sinister going on."*

*Officer Weinstein was not to be quelled. "I agree with what the Chief said before. I think it's unusual that a controversial organization like a Metaphysical Center to come to New Plaines and just be received with open arms. It doesn't make any sense to me. It almost seems too easy if you catch my drift."*

*Aaron held up his hand to assure the Chief. "I don't mind answering that. Officer Weinstein is correct. I've had a similar concern myself. Don't get me wrong, I'm not looking for a fight and I did find Peter Benson's*

*enthusiastic support puzzling at first, but not being one to look a gift horse in the mouth, perhaps I let my guard down. I can't say for sure, but the email seems to be worded to give the appearance of being sent by an individual. Knowing what I know about traditional churches and columnists, they usually fight their battles openly from the pulpit and in print. They don't hide behind anonymity and make veiled threats. Whoever did this is clever and apparently covered his tracks well. How do you intend to follow up on this?"*

*Henderson replied, "Well first, let me say that I've known Peter for over thirty years; ever since he came to town as an assistant minister over at Our Redeemer Lutheran Church. He's probably the last person I would suspect of this kind of thing. I've read his column off and on and I don't ever remember him ever saying anything inflammatory. Now, to answer your question, we'll follow up at the Library to see if we can pinpoint how their email system was used to send this email out. That's hacking and it's a crime. I only have one officer that knows his way around computers. He's on vacation, but I'll be assigning him to follow up on this when he gets back tomorrow. I'll talk to Reverend Benson and the other ministers in town to see what they can add to this. You'll have to give us some time; we have no leads other than the email itself."*

*"Do you think that there is any danger to the congregation or to me? There is an inference about a potential danger to anyone attending our Services."*

*"It's a veiled threat, but it can't be ruled out. That seems to be the intent of using those words. I've seen a lot more come out of softer words than that. Would you feel better if we posted a uniformed officer here during your Service? Or we could use the guise of traffic control. I doubt if anyone would try anything with one of my officers nearby."*

*"That's a possibility. Let me think about it and get back to you."*

*Thelma nodded and closed her notebook. "We'll keep you informed of our progress. In the interim, if you get any more emails or come across anything that may be useful in our investigation, give us a call." She smiled as she handed him her card.*

*"I'll do that. I appreciate your help with this. Thanks for coming in so quickly."*

*"Like I said," Henderson said, "This is an illegal act. I don't care what their motivation was. I won't tolerate this kind of behavior in New Plaines whether it's just a prank or a genuine threat. Rest assured we'll get to the bottom of this."*

*"We'll be in touch," Officer Weinstein said. "Do you mind if I take one of your brochures. You never know, there may be something in there that might help us with our investigation. I must admit that this stuff is new to me."*

*"No, of course not and call me here or at my home if I can be of any more help."*

*Their visit ended one half hour after it began. Henderson looked around the Center on the way out. He shook his head from side to side a few times. Aaron wondered what was going on in the Chief's mind.*

*After they left, Aaron sat back in his chair to mull over the meeting. His mind kept coming back to Peter Benson. Maybe Reverend Benson is just stringing me along, pretending to welcome and support the Center? God, I sure hope not. I'm uncomfortable suspecting a man who has supported me from the start; especially after all the help he's given me.*

*He set aside his feelings of guilt and dialed Reverend Worthington.*

*“Good evening, Reverend. The Police Chief and an Officer just left.”*

*“How did it work out? Do they have any suspects?”*

*“It’s obvious that the Library’s computer system was hacked, so they’re launching a full investigation. They don’t seem convinced that the email threatens the Center or me. I got the impression from the Chief that he would just as soon see us gone from his town.”*

*“That’s interesting, but I do believe that the threat of physical harm was definitely implied.”*

*“They did offer to have a uniformed officer on duty during the Service on the pretense of controlling traffic.”*

*“You know, I was thinking that it isn’t actually necessary to do anything in order to have the desired effect of scaring people away.”*

*“What do you mean?”*

*“The email went to just about everyone in town. The implication of possible trouble at the Center may have the desired effect of keeping people away, especially if they actually see a policeman in the Center. That idea of having a traffic cop outside the building makes more sense. You should probably follow up on that offer. Whatever you decide, I’m afraid that if they don’t find out whom it is right away, your attendance is going to suffer.”*

*“The Chief has only one man who knows anything about computers and he won’t be returning from his vacation until tomorrow.”*

*Percy got quiet for several moments, finally breaking the silence, “I’ve been thinking about this ever since I saw the email. I’m going to do something and I expect your complete support. We can’t afford to have this investigation drag on. Every day that passes will result in more people weighing whether or not it’s safe to attend your Services and more families, especially those with children, will opt to stick with their would-be ‘safer’ traditional churches.”*

*“What do you have in mind? What do you want me to do?”*

*“You don’t have to do anything the Special Agent in Charge of the New Haven FBI office is a good friend of the Church. I’m going to inform her of the situation out there. They have a top notch Cyber Crimes Unit that should be able to get to the bottom of who sent that email very quickly. Your local law enforcement might be upset for a spell, but eventually they would land up calling in the FBI anyway. This will just speed up the process and allow them to track down clues while they are still fresh. I’m going to call her and get them involved in the case. Time is important here.”*

*“I agree that Chief Henderson won’t like it, but if it will resolve this situation quicker, I’m all for it. I’ll be alert for any contact from them. Thanks for your help, sir.”*

*“That’s what I’m here for, Aaron. Let’s get this thing behind us as quickly as possible and move on.”*