

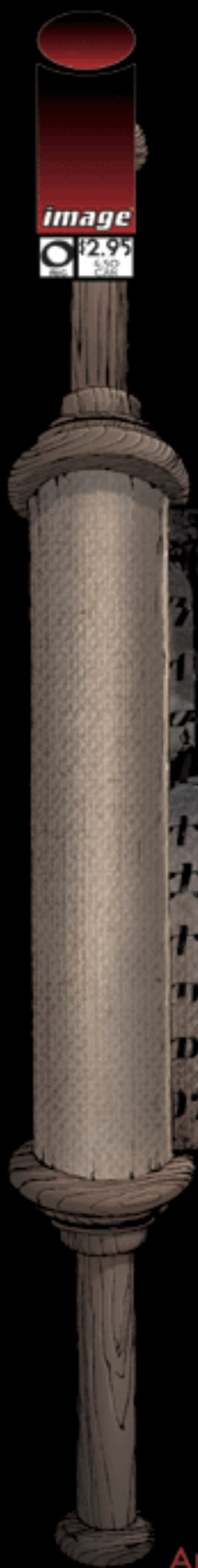


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KEX MUNDI



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Free preview of Rex Mundi #0: The Secret Beneath the Church
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BUT PARIS IS AN ANCIENT PLACE,
AND THE WEIGHT OF THE CENTURIES
IS AN ALMOST PALPABLE SHROUD.

STRANGE THINGS HAPPENED
HERE WHEN THE DARK AGES
CAST THEIR DEEPEST SHADOWS.



SECRET THINGS.



BLASPHEMOUS THINGS.

THINGS I WISH I DIDN'T KNOW NOW,
BUT I LOOKED TOO CLOSELY AND
WAS REWARDED FOR MY CURIOSITY.

IT ALL SEEMS SO
OBVIOUS NOW...

ET IN ARCADIA EGO







THERE IS A CACHE OF MEDIEVAL MANUSCRIPTS HIDDEN IN A VALLT BELOW THE CHURCH. NO ONE BELOW THE ARCHBISHOP EVEN KNOWS OF ITS EXISTENCE.

SAVE FOR MYSELF, OF COURSE. IT IS MY DUTY TO SAFEGUARD THESE TEXTS...



...AND ONE OF THEM HAS JUST BEEN STOLEN.



I HAVE NO ONE ELSE TO TURN TO, DOCTOR. IF THE INQUISITION HEARS OF THIS I'LL BE DEFROCKED.

YOU'RE THE MOST RESOURCEFUL PERSON I KNOW, AND I NEED YOUR HELP.



HOLD ON A MOMENT, FATHER. I'LL BE GLAD TO HELP ANY WAY I CAN, BUT I'M NOT EVEN SURE I UNDERSTAND WHAT HAPPENED.



I...I DON'T THINK SO, DR. SALNIÈRE.
THEN HOW...
THAT'S WHAT WORRIES ME MOST. I SUSPECT SPELLCRAFT.



ISN'T IT POSSIBLE SOMEONE ALLOWED ACCESS TO THESE... TEXTS... TOOK THE MISSING MANUSCRIPT AND JUST DIDN'T TELL YOU?



MAGIC?



I THINK MY PREDICAMENT WILL BE MUCH CLEARER IF YOU COME WITH ME TO LA MADELEINE.

PLEASE, DR. SALNIÈRE...



I'LL GET MY COAT.



THANK YOU.



L'ÉGLISE DE LA MADELEINE



THE RECTORY

IT BEGAN HERE...

GASTON WOKE ME UP AROUND MIDNIGHT. I'VE NEVER SEEN HIM SO WILD.



HE WAS BARKING AT THE CHURCH, BEGGING FOR ME TO UNLOCK THE GATE.

I DIDN'T SEE ANYTHING AWISS, BUT THERE WAS A STRANGE, CLOYING SCENT IN THE AIR.

"I WENT UP TO A WINDOW.

GASTON CHARGED UP TO THE CHURCH. THEN ALL OF A SUDDEN, HE STOPPED BARKING.

AS I APPROACHED, THE SCENT GOT STRONGER.

I THOUGHT I SAW A PAIR OF CANDLES BOBBING DOWN THE AISLE...

... BUT THEY WENT OUT BEFORE I COULD GET A CLOSER LOOK."



I ENTERED THE CHURCH. STILL NOTHING OUT OF THE ORDINARY, SAVE FOR THE ODD SCENT.

AT THIS POINT IT WAS STRONG ENOUGH TO TELL IT WAS SANDALWOOD, AND I DETECTED THE SMELL OF SULFUR UNDERNEATH IT.

GASTON WOULDN'T FOLLOW ME INSIDE.



SEE? HE'S STILL AFRAID.

I GATHERED MY RESOLVE, LIT A CANDLE AND WENT INSIDE.



WHEN I GOT TO THE ALTAR...



... I DISCOVERED THIS.

THIS IS THE ENTRANCE TO THE REPOSITORY. THE ALTAR SWINGS ASIDE WHEN YOU FLIP A HIDDEN SWITCH.

I FOUND IT LIKE THIS. OPENED.



THE SANDALWOOD AND SULFUR WAS REALLY STRONG AT THIS POINT. I THINK YOU CAN STILL SMELL IT.

YES.

ODD.



WHY ALL THIS EFFORT TO HIDE THESE BOOKS IN THE FIRST PLACE?

I DO NOT KNOW, DR. SAUNIÈRE. I'M NOT ALLOWED TO COME DOWN HERE...

HAVE YOU ANYWAY?

AH... YES, YES, I HAVE.

SOME OF THE BOOKS ARE HISTORIES OF THE KNIGHTS' TEMPLAR, AN ORDER FOUNDED IN JERUSALEM DURING THE FIRST CRUSADE...

...RIGHT. A FRENCH ORDER, VERY POWERFUL UNTIL THEY FELL FROM THE POPE'S FAVOR AND WERE ROUNDED UP BY THE INQUISITION. IN... 1207, I THINK.

EXACTLY, DOCTOR. THERE ARE ALSO SOME MANUSCRIPTS ON THE FIRST CHRISTIAN KINGS OF FRANCE, THE MEROVINGIANS. THEY RULED FROM SHORTLY AFTER ROME'S FALL UNTIL THE LATE 600S.

KNIGHTS TEMPLAR, MEROVINGIAN KINGS... ARE THE TWO RELATED?

...AND THE MEROVINGIANS RULED FRANCE WHEN PLAGUE AND FAMINE WERE FAR MORE COMMON THAN LITERACY.

IF SO, I HAVE NO IDEA HOW... MOST OF THE TEMPLAR RECORDS WERE BURNED BY THE INQUISITION...

YOU SAID YOU THOUGHT MAGIC WAS INVOLVED, BUT SO FAR I DON'T SEE WHY IT COULDN'T HAVE BEEN AN ORDINARY THIEF.

WHY DO YOU SUSPECT SPELLCRAFT?



I'LL SHOW YOU...



HERE WE ARE. YOU SEE, NONE OF THE BARS HAVE BEEN TAMPERED WITH, OR EVEN SCRATCHED.

AT FIRST I WAS RELIEVED...

...BUT UPON CHECKING THE LIBRARY ITSELF, I DISCOVERED ONE SCROLL WAS MISSING.

I HAVE THE ENTIRE LIBRARY MEMORIZED, AND I KNOW THE EXACT LOCATION OF EVERY ITEM. IT IS SIMPLY NOT HERE.

AND WHAT INFORMATION DID THIS SCROLL OFFER?

IT WAS A TREATISE ON MEROVINGIAN BURIAL SITES IN THE LANGUEDOC,* WRITTEN BY A TEMPLAR SCRIBE IN THE MID-1200S

*SOUTHWESTERN FRANCE



WHY ON EARTH WOULD ANYONE WANT TO STEAL A SCROLL ON BURIAL SITES?

TREASURE, MAYBE?

POSSIBLY. I DON'T KNOW. AS FAR AS I CAN REMEMBER, THERE WAS NOTHING IN THE SCROLL THAT MENTIONED ANY KIND OF TREASURE. IT WAS JUST THE LOCATION OF A TOMB.

EXACTLY WHOSE TOMB?



CLOVIS II, THIRD MONARCH IN THE MEROVINGIAN DYNASTY. DO YOU KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT HIM?

NO... BUT IT'S PROBABLY WORTH LOOKING INTO, AND IT'S THE ONLY LEAD WE HAVE...

...NOW NO ONE KNOWS ABOUT THIS BUT YOU AND THE ARCHBISHOP, CORRECT?

Y... YES.



IT'S... HER NAME IS MARIE-CHRISTINE.



FATHER FORGIVE ME...



GO ON, FATHER.

YOU KNOW I WORK AT A MAGDALENE* IN THE 13TH ARRONDISSEMENT. SHE CAME THERE ONE NIGHT, SEEKING HELP. SHE LOOKED SO LOST...

WE STARTED TALKING. BEFORE I KNEW IT WE WERE FRIENDS AND THEN...

IT HAPPENED SO FAST...

*HOUSE FOR REFORMED PROSTITUTES.



ONE NIGHT SHE ASKED ME IF I HAD ANY SECRETS I WANTED TO CONFESS, ABOUT LA MADELEINE. I THOUGHT IT WAS AN INNOCENT GAME...

PLEASE DON'T JUDGE ME, DOCTOR SALINIÈRE. I KNOW IT WAS WRONG.



IT WAS WORSE THAN WRONG. IT WAS STUPID.



I KNOW JULIEN, I KNOW...



YOU'RE ABSOLUTELY SURE.



YES.



FATHER...



I... THERE IS ONE PERSON.



SO YOU TOLD HER...

YES, I NEVER THOUGHT, EVEN FOR A MOMENT, BUT I SUPPOSE THERE'S NO OTHER EXPLANATION...



...WHERE IS SHE NOW?

SHE RETURNED TO A LIFE OF SIN.

WITHOUT SO MUCH AS A GOODBYE, AND I'M TOO ASHAMED TO CONFRONT HER.



MAYBE I SHOULD BE DEFROCKED FOR THIS...



NONSENSE.

AFTER ALL YOU'VE DONE, AND NOT JUST FOR ME, IT WOULD BE A MISTAKE FOR YOU TO SPEND THE REST OF YOUR LIFE IN A CLOISTER.

YOU KNOW IT AS WELL AS I.



DR. SALINIÈRE HOW CAN I EVER THANK--

IT'S NOTHING JUST GIVE ME HER ADDRESS.



BY THE TIME I BADE MARIN FAREWELL, THE BELLS OF NOTRE DAME WERE RINGING TWO AM.

QUESTIONS...

SANDALWOOD AND SULFUR...

MARIN WAS PROBABLY RIGHT, SOMEONE HAD USED SORCERY TO EXTRACT THE TEXT FROM THE VAULT...

...BUT WHY?



AND HOW WAS THE GIRL, MARIE-CHRISTINE INVOLVED?



SO MANY QUESTIONS...





I HAD APPOINTMENTS UNTIL LATE IN THE AFTERNOON THE NEXT DAY...



HEY!



THIS IS MY HOTEL. IF YOU WANT TO SEE ONE OF THE GIRLS, IT'LL COST YOU TWO FRANCS.



I DON'T NEED A ROOM, I NEED TO SPEAK TO SOMEONE.

HER NAME IS MARIE-CHRISTINE.



LIKE 'EM YOUNG, HUH?

ROOM 5B, SHE HADN'T LEFT SINCE LAST NIGHT.





MY GOD, MARIN...



...WHAT HAVE YOU
GOTTEN YOURSELF INTO?