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Ten Questions with *Matt Gianni* for LEVER TEMPLAR

(1) Can you tell us about the heroes of LEVER TEMPLAR?

In the past timeline there's seventeen-year-old English Templar Sergeant Brimley Hastings. Due to a family tradition, he's accepted into the order at the age of nine following the death of his parents and put to work in the London preceptory scriptorium. My inspiration for Brim was Hiccup, the boy Viking from the *How to Train Your Dragon* movies—a character who just doesn't seem to fit into his warrior environment.

In the present timeline I have US Army Major Richard Lambert, on loan to the Iraqi Ministry of Interior Investigations Unit but maintaining contact with those of his prior post at the US State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research. By the end of LEVER TEMPLAR, he's recognized as the leader of the newly created *Castellum One* team. My inspiration for Rick was half Robert Langdon and half Indiana Jones.

(2) What's *Castellum One*?

The word *castellum* means watchtower in Latin. *Castellum One* is a covert investigations unit financed by the Vatican and run by elements of the US Intelligence Community. The genesis of the team unfolds in LEVER TEMPLAR, as Rick Lambert recruits American Professor Danny Dicarpio, Italian Gendarmerie Corps Lieutenant Maria Anna Belloci, and Irish-American twins and US Army Sergeants Sean and Patrick Duffy.

(3) What threats do your heroes face?

In the past timeline Brim Hastings is at the nexus of a Templar power struggle, with all involved divided over how to use the heretical scroll that has enabled their two-hundred-year leverage over the Roman Catholic Church. The French Crown, sensing their vulnerability, attempts to plunder all Templar wealth in France, guessing the French Pope Clement V will mount little or no defense. In the present timeline religious extremists learn the Vatican is not in possession of the heretical scroll, as previously believed. They will stop at nothing to rediscover its power to shatter Christianity, unless Rick Lambert and the *Castellum One* team can win the race to rediscover the *Vectis Templi*—the Lever of the Temple.



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(4) Why write in dual timeline format?

I heard that question a lot, first from those in my writers groups and later from beta readers. It's just the way the story always reverberated in my mind. I think once the number of flashbacks reaches a certain critical mass, dual timeline really is the way to go. For LEVER TEMPLAR, beta readers report they quickly got used to the rhythmic nature of odd-numbered chapters taking place in the 14th century and even-numbered chapters covering the present. It allowed me to weave the two storylines together using both forward and reverse foretelling, linking all the people, places, and things most affected.

(5) What writers inspire you?

How long do you have? Seriously, I read anything I can find—and often find myself inspired—by authors who integrate rich historical backstories into modern-day thrillers. My top three would have to be Dan Brown, James Rollins, and Robert Ludlum.

(6) How does your writing provide readers with something new?

I think it was Mark Twain who said “There is no such thing as a new idea.” It seems to me it's the *combinations* of old elements that make stories unique. Beta readers describe LEVER TEMPLAR as THE DA VINCI CODE meets NATIONAL TREASURE. I've heard many other seemingly original books and movies described in terms of two or more previous stories.

(7) How do you come up with combinations of elements for your stories?

I'm always on the lookout for odd historical mysteries. When I find an interesting one, I print it out and put it in what I've labeled “Pandora's shoebox.” From time to time I go through them, see how they might be combined, and what affect they might have on the modern world. I had a neat short story idea involving the mysterious “sailing stones” of Death Valley National Park before the physics behind the geological phenomenon was discovered not too many years ago. Darn scientists.



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(8) After your research is done, what does your writing process look like?

I don't think research is ever really done—I'm continually going back to check on details. But after I've settled on the major story elements I start to outline, first at the story structure level covering all the plot and pinch points, then at the scene level. My outline format is very structured, summarizing the goal, conflict, disaster, reaction, dilemma, and decision of each scene. I also use color codes to differentiate between past and present protagonists and antagonists, and to keep track of both forward and reverse foretelling. Then it's just a matter of fleshing out the bones. I do consider an outline a living document, since I'm always going back and adding details and foretelling links, but it's solid enough before I start writing that I rarely find myself having to combine or split up chapters. The outline for my 99,000-word *LEVER TEMPLAR* turned out to be nearly 17,000 words long. Maybe it's my "flow diagram" engineering mentality, but I'll never understand how the so-called "pantsers" can just pour out a book without any plan of attack.

(9) What advice would you give other writers just starting out?

I've had really good luck with writer groups ranging from nonchalant idea-sharing social gatherings to hardcore critique gangs demanding a new chapter to tear apart at each meeting. I'd also recommend reading as much about the craft of writing as possible, and checking out technical guides like *THE CHICAGO MANUAL OF STYLE*—their future editors will thank them for it. When it comes to submitting finished work to literary agencies or publishers, I'd just say never give up—it might take years, but eventually their writing will resonate with someone.

(10) What can we expect from *Castellum One* in the future?

I'm currently writing the dual timeline follow-up to *LEVER TEMPLAR*, called *WHISPER ANGELIC*. The past storyline follows young acolyte Dami Romanos from his actions at Constantine's Council of Nicaea in AD 325 to his momentous decisions at the Council of Rome in AD 382 as Pope Damasus, and involves Christianity's little-known civil war between the Trinitarians and those aligned with the teachings of Arius. In the present storyline all of Rome anticipates the Third Vatican Council, but influential cardinals begin to succumb to delirium, screaming the motto of their long-forgotten Arian enemies before dying, and sending the *Castellum One* team scrambling to find the source of the outbreak, and a cure, before it spreads to world leaders.