



Rogue: The Paladin Prophecy Book 3

By Mark Frost

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Under constant surveillance, Will and his friends secretly devise a plan to defeat Franklin Greenwood and his Knights of the Charlemagne. The team must enter the Never-Was and find an elusive group of supernatural beings called the Hierarchy. But as the battle approaches, the alliance uncovers old secrets that threaten to tear them apart. Can they protect Earth from the demons beyond? Or will a rogue player destroy them and the world they live in?

Thrilling mystery and electrifying suspense abound in Mark Frost's action-packed Paladin Prophecy series, which is compelling to the very last page.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

MARK FROST partnered with David Lynch to create and produce the groundbreaking television series *Twin Peaks*. He has written screenplays, including the *Fantastic Four*, and is the *New York Times* bestselling author of eight adult books, including *The List of Seven*, *The Second Objective*, *The Greatest Game Ever Played*, and *The Match*. To learn more, visit ByMarkFrost.com.

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ONE

WILL'S RULES FOR LIVING #1:

IF YOU REALLY WANT TO KEEP A SECRET, DON'T TELL ANYBODY.

"Have you ever tasted champagne, Will?"

"Can't say that I have, no, sir."

Franklin Greenwood gestured to his butler, Lemuel Clegg, who directed one of the uniformed staff members standing by with an open bottle toward Will.

"Just a splash," said Franklin, then leaned over toward his grandson, seated to his right, and winked. "It's not as if we don't have something to celebrate."

"That's right, sir," said Will.

He watched the crystal liquid swirl around the bottom of his glass as the waiter withdrew the bottle. Will raised his drink, imitating his grandfather, and touched the glass to his.

"To the Prophecy," said Franklin.

"To the Prophecy," said Will.

He took a sip and grimaced at the bitter bite of the effervescence. Franklin drained his glass in one greedy gulp and held it out for more. The nearby staff member holding the bottle rushed to refill it, without appearing to hurry.

"I can't tell you what joy these last few months have brought me, Will. I've never wanted anything more than to share with my family the blessings I've worked so hard to create. And as you know, for the longest time I'd given up imagining that would ever be possible."

Will nodded sympathetically, forced another small swallow of the frothy swill down his throat, then set down the glass, hoping he could get away with leaving the rest of it untouched. "I feel the same way."

“Will, this time we’ve spent together has meant more to me than I can even begin to express. Your willingness to listen and learn without judging, your positive attitude toward our goals .??.” Franklin leaned over and laid a cold hand on top of Will’s. “But do you know what has been most gratifying for me? The opportunity to bear witness to your burgeoning talents.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“I can think of no measurable way to assign a value to that. This is a priceless treasure. After so many disappointments in my personal life, I could never have hoped for more.”

“For me, too.” Will held his gaze and smiled shyly. “Grandfather?”

“Yes, Will.”

“You’ve told me that, as we get to know each other, you wanted nothing more than to gain my trust.”

“That continues to mean more to me than I have words to express.???.”

Franklin’s voice caught in his throat, choked with emotion. Moisture appeared in his hazy blue eyes. He gulped down another half glass of champagne, then took a pocket square from his crested blue school blazer and dabbed away some tears.

“You don’t have to say anything, Grandpa. And I only hope that, with all you’ve seen and heard from me these last few weeks, I’ve gained your trust as well.”

“Yes, of course.” Franklin folded and pocketed his handkerchief and smiled benignly. “How may I convey that to you, Will?”

“I think I’m ready to hear the whole story.”

Franklin considered the request, savored the final bite of his soy-fed Japanese Kobe rib-eye steak, pushed his plate back--another waiting staff member whisked it away instantly--then reached over and patted Will’s hand.

“Let’s take a walk,” said Franklin.

They exited the old, weather-worn castle out a side door that Will hadn’t noticed before, depositing them on the less-developed eastern side of the island. The late-summer sun hung low in the sky, shadows edging toward evening. Franklin started down a trim, graveled path that led through manicured gardens. Will kept exact pace with the old man’s long, even strides.

“I grew up on this island,” said Franklin, looking around as they walked. “My earliest memories are all enmeshed with this place--these trees, the smells, the water, the magnificent views.”

“Were you born here?” asked Will.

“Nearby,” said Franklin, gesturing vaguely toward the mainland. “Father founded the Center a few years

before I was born; I drew my first breath in the small school infirmary that was part of our original campus. All that's gone now, of course. By the time I was a toddler, Father had purchased the Crag and the island from the Cornish family. Everything about the Prophecy and our family's involvement with it starts with Ian Cornish."

"Cornish came to Wisconsin after the Civil War, didn't he?"

Franklin patted Will's arm. "You have been paying attention, haven't you?"

"I figured that's why you wanted me to sort through all those old files up there," said Will, nodding back toward the tower that loomed over the castle's eastern half. "To learn about the Center and the Greenwood family tree."

As he glanced up at the tower's windows, Will held up two fingers behind the older man's back, so quickly that his grandfather couldn't see them.

"Indeed. Well reasoned, my boy. Ian Cornish designed and manufactured rifles, cannons, and munitions and amassed a great fortune, as you know, by the end of the Civil War. But he lost his oldest son in the war's final month, and it unhinged the man. He fled New England and settled here, a stranger to this part of the world, half mad with grief, and as a way to assuage his derangement, he put his fortune to frantic work."

"What did he think that would do?"

"In his diaries, Cornish writes of feeling haunted by the restless spirits of the men killed by his armaments--legions of them appeared to him at night, led by the ghost of his own son. Ian believed he was receiving instructions from these spirits about what to build up here .??. and what to dig for down below. And the only way he could find peace was to obey their instructions."

"So that's why he went down into the tunnels."

They passed the small family graveyard that Will had noticed on an earlier visit--his own family's plot--the Greenwoods--and the gravestone of the man walking beside him, Franklin Greenwood, resting below the stone statue of a winged angel lifting a sword to the sky.

"Something was calling him, all right," said Franklin. "But it wasn't the ghosts of dead soldiers--or should I say, that's not all it seems to have been."

"So that's why he started excavating."

"Extending the preexisting system of tunnels and caves under the island, always going deeper, yes. Driven to find something he believed his visions told him waited for him down there. Something he believed would absolve him of his sins and wash away his undying grief."

"And he found it," said Will. "In that lost city down there."

"Strange the ways and beliefs of men," said Franklin. "But sometimes when the mind breaks, and I believe that's what happened to poor Ian Cornish, it can lead you to even greater truths. Like Cahokia."

Franklin paused in front of a small stone mausoleum to catch his breath.

“Although it seems evident that the last of that ancient civilization died or were driven from their home countless thousands of years ago,” said Franklin, “some trace of them remained in their lost city--a fragment of their consciousness, I suppose, embedded in a few precious objects they’d left behind.”

“Things they called aphotic technology.”

Franklin gave him an admiring glance. “You seldom cease to amaze me, Will. You really set your teeth into these research assignments of mine, didn’t you?”

“Like you said, never do anything halfway.” Will shrugged. “What sort of objects?”

“I’ll come to that, but mark my words,” said Franklin, raising a finger. “For what he brought back to the human race, Ian Cornish will someday be remembered as one of our most courageous explorers, every bit as important to the story of man as Galileo, Christopher Columbus, or the men who split the atom.”

Franklin lifted a small black device from his pocket and pointed it at the stone building in front of them. Carved doors, which had appeared to be purely decorative, pivoted on hidden hinges and with a grind of stone on stone swung open.

Franklin pushed the device again. Just inside the doors, two sleek stainless-steel panels slid apart, revealing the car of a large and ultramodern elevator.

“Allow me to show you,” said Franklin, pointing Will toward the car.

Will stepped inside, and Franklin followed. He punched commands into a complex control panel on a side wall just inside the doors. Looking over his grandfather’s shoulder, Will watched him enter a specific sequence of numbers. The outside stone doors closed, and the steel panels whispered shut. Will felt a whoosh of air compress around him. They began to descend, smoothly ramping up to what felt like considerable speed.

This is the ground-level entrance to the same elevator we discovered in the hospital a mile down below, Will realized.

“If what he found was so important, why didn’t Cornish ever tell anyone about it?” asked Will.

“Oh, but he did,” said Franklin. “Cornish had made many influential friends back in his native New England. Chief among them his fellow members in what, on the surface, appeared to be a social or academic club in Boston. Prominent men, pillars of that community, makers of history, all part of an organization rooted in tradition and culture whose origins were bound up with the birth of liberty and freedom in early America.

“But in fact that organization’s history ran much deeper than Ian knew, back to the ruling castes and monarchies of western Europe, centuries before our continent was even discovered.”

The man took an old-fashioned key from his pocket and held it out on his open palm. It appeared more ceremonial than practical. On its porcelain tab Will saw a three-lettered insignia, intertwined with a ruler and a compass, which he recognized instantly.

“The Knights of Charlemagne,” said Will.

“Exactly. Once he revealed this discovery to his colleagues back east, they took tremendous interest in supporting Cornish’s work here. A few years later, when the poor man’s mental state deteriorated, it was under their supervision that the first meaningful explorations of Cahokia moved forward. Do you begin to see how this all flows together, Will?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Ian Cornish’s oldest son died in the Civil War, but he also had a second son, too young to fight, who knew about Cahokia from the beginning. Cornish initiated the boy into the Knights, and he traveled west with his father when he first journeyed here. This only surviving son of Ian Cornish assumed a key role as the enterprise took shape. And when poor Ian lost what feeble grasp he had on the last of his reason, finally taking his own life, this sturdy young man, Lemuel Cornish, was appointed by his fellow Knights to continue this great work and keep his father’s legacy alive.”

Lemuel. “Kind of an unusual name,” said Will.

“Not for the nineteenth century,” said Franklin, looking up at the walls. “I knew him, of course. As did my father. Lemuel Cornish sold us the estate that became the school. But he didn’t tell my father anything close to all he knew. He saved that for me.”

“Why?”

“Thomas Greenwood--my father, your great-grandfather--was many things. A man of vision, a born leader, and in the field of education nothing less than a prophet. He was also .??. How shall I put this?” Franklin glanced at the ceiling. “You know I’m right, Father--an incorrigible Goody Two-shoes.”

Will couldn’t help laughing. “How do you mean?”

“Thomas never met a heathen he couldn’t convert, a hopeless case he couldn’t save, a sinner he couldn’t redeem. Goodness, always ‘Goodness,’ with a capital G. All of human existence divided neatly into black and white, and my father confidently armed with an unshakeable faith in his ability to discern the difference.”

Will felt the elevator car vibrating ever so slightly as it began to slow, almost imperceptibly.

“What’s wrong with that?” asked Will.

Franklin looked slightly annoyed by the question; the vivid scar tissue behind his ears turned a brighter shade of pink.

“What’s wrong, dear boy,” said Franklin, meeting Will’s eyes with a restrained but reproachful look, “is that such a simple, reductive, dare I say childlike philosophy leaves out all the gray, the in-between, the place where men who learn to actually think for themselves get to decide how to live by their own rules.”

The car stopped, and the panels silently slid open in front of Will.

“And that’s where most of the interesting things happen,” said Franklin.

“Where’s Will?” asked Brooke, just entering the suite.

Nick looked up from his three hundredth push?up. “Dinner with Old Man Elliot again.”

Nick flipped to his feet and toweled off, pumped, covered with sweat, and grinning at her like he couldn’t help it. He couldn’t really. Brooke, as usual, looked effortlessly flawless--outfit, accessories, hair, just a hint of makeup, every aspect of her presented self put together like a perfect recipe.

“He’s spending an awful lot of time over there,” said Brooke as she set down her backpack on the table, then pulled out an appointment book and started writing in it, absentmindedly twirling a stray strand of her golden curls. “What about Ajay?”

“He’s still over at the Crag, too, working late, organizing those old whatchamacallit--archives.”

“Ar-kives, not ar-chives. You put chives on a baked potato.”

“You’re a baked potato,” said Nick, still grinning at her.

Brooke shook her head and laughed, then took a longer, more admiring look at him. “Whatever training program they’ve put you on is doing wonders for your bod. And absolutely zero for your brain.”

Nick turned a chair around and sat across from her, resting his chin on his arms. “Since you’re so deeply into playing camp counselor, don’t you want to ax me where Elise is?”

“Ax you? All right, I’ll ax you. Pray tell.”

“No clue,” said Nick, drumming his fingers. “Why you want to know where everybody is all the time?”

She gave him one of her patented looks of exasperation. “Can’t I be curious about my friends?”

She picked up the black phone on the table and punched the lone button. When the operator picked up, she asked, “Would you page Elise Moreau and have her call me, please?”

“What’s today’s date?” asked Nick when she hung up.

“What does that have to do with anything?”

“You’ve got your calendar right there in front of you, snowflake. What’s today’s date?”

“August seventh,” said Brooke.

“Oh, that’s right,” said Nick, snapping his fingers. “It’s National Be Curious About Your Friends Day.”

She gave him a longer look, and for a moment a flash of malice showed through, before she covered it over. “There must be some way I can unknow you.”

“Keep dreaming, darlin’.”

Nick watched Brooke as she went back to writing in her book, his smile falling off when she stopped looking

his way; then he stood up and moonwalked toward the kitchen, glancing at the wall clock.

“May I offer you a refreshing beverage, Brooksie?” he asked.

“A water would be fine, thanks.” Facedown in her book.

“One H?two?O, coming right up.”

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Pam Wright:

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