



# ALSO BY DAN SOFER

## **The Dry Bones Society Series**

An Unexpected Afterlife  
An Accidental Messiah  
A Premature Apocalypse

## **Novels**

A Love and Beyond

**REVENGE**

**OF THE**

**ELDERS**

**OF**

**ZION**

**SAMPLE CHAPTERS**

**DAN SOFER**

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To Sheila and Eric,  
for always cheering me on



# CHAPTER 1

TOP SECRET

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION  
OFFICE OF PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Transcript of interview with Mr. Hyman Schneider

Also present:

Special Agent A. Maynard

Special Agent in Charge M. Reed

HYMAN SCHNEIDER:

The fiasco began when Sol Zelig's kid stopped by my Manhattan penthouse late one evening with the worst idea I've ever heard. And what a fiasco that was! You don't need me to tell you that. The damage caused—the lives lost and property destroyed—boggles the mind. It simply boggles the mind. I think in your circles you'd call that a *cluster* fiasco. Am I right?

[LIGHT LAUGHTER]

My apologies. I'm an old man. I get carried away. You're busy people and so am I. I'll cut to the chase.

Back to that fateful evening. This was about two months ago. Sol Zelig's kid pitched me the worst idea I've ever heard. Trust me, I hear a lot of bad ideas. Young CEOs swarm to

me like bees to a flower. Confident and dreamy-eyed to a man, they'll promise you the stars in heaven above to get their seed money. But you'd better be careful. If you can't tell the good investments from the bad, they'll sting you. They'll sting you bad.

I'd known David Zelig since his bar mitzvah. He'd filled out into a handsome young man with thick dark hair that needed a cut. He got his looks from his late father. If only he'd inherited his business sense, too.

It was his great-grandfather who started Zelig Pictures, you know. The Zelig progeny no longer ran the studios. David Zelig, the last of the family line, loved the industry but his heart wasn't in management. He wrote screenplays—spy stories and conspiracy thrillers. The executives never greenlit his scripts for production, but rejection didn't get him down. Zelig Pictures was still his family's private company; he should never want for money. He should've been lazing on a yacht somewhere, sipping margaritas and chatting up pretty young women. Or so I thought.

Instead, he'd turned up here. He sat right over there where you're sitting, his hands fidgeting with his whisky glass. After a minimum of small talk, he pitched me the mother of all bad ideas. The pitch was so bad I had trouble wrapping my head around it.

I said, "You mean like a secret society?"

"*The* secret society," David told me. "The Elders of Zion. The one the Gentiles have always accused us of running. They already believe we control the world. What's stopping us?"

Had this been anyone else, I would have kicked him out. But David's late father had been a close friend. Over the years, he'd gotten me out of many a tight spot. The least I could do was steer his kid away from a colossal mistake.

"David," I told him. "Why on God's green earth would you want to get mixed up with such nonsense?"

A fire burned in the kid's eyes. "You read the news, Hymie. There's been one synagogue shooting after another.



It's like open season for anti-Semites, and law enforcement is powerless to stop them. Maybe it's time we took matters into our own hands."

The kid had good intentions, but he needed to calm down. So I poured him another shot of Balvenie and told him a story.

Two yids are sitting in a Berlin coffee shop in the nineteen thirties. One is reading a neo-Nazi newspaper, *Der Stürmer*.

"How can you read that garbage?" the other yid says, outraged.

"Why not?" the first yid replies. "When I read the Jewish newspapers, I learn that the Jews are poor, persecuted, and at each other's throats. When I read this paper, however, I discover that the Jews are wealthy and united, they control banks and are taking over the world. Which story do you prefer to read?"

I hammered home my point to avoid any misunderstandings.

"It's a myth, David," I told him. "A delusion. Jews are too busy bickering among themselves and worrying about what their Gentile neighbors think of them to pull off anything like a global Jewish conspiracy."

He said, "I'll settle for a national one." This, you understand, was one very stubborn young man.

"There is no Elders of Zion society pulling the strings of history," I told him. "Never was. Never could be. The 'Jewish world domination' fantasy is riddled with contradictions. It's as irrational as anti-Semitism itself. People have hated Jews for promoting democracy and for promoting communism, for being rich and for being poor, for sticking to themselves and for trying to assimilate. In times of change and uncertainty, the haters look for scapegoats and they blame the Jews. But it's all in their pickled brains. They pick on us *because* we are powerless."

The kid still wasn't backing down. "But what if we weren't powerless? What if we worked together and fought back?"

"David, do you have any idea how difficult it would be to

run a secret organization? Think about how many people would need to keep their mouths shut. That's why all those conspiracy theories are wrong. Governments are barely competent enough to govern, never mind hide aliens or fake moon landings."

Your organization excluded. I have great respect for you and your fellow FBI officers.

M. REED:

That's "agents," Mr. Schneider. We call FBI employees agents.

HYMAN SCHNEIDER:

Thank you for pointing that out. Agent sounds much sexier, doesn't it?

[LAUGHTER]

Where were we? Right. Conspiracy theories.

"It's a fool's errand," I told him. "Forget about it. You don't need the money. And as for power—power is just a bull's-eye painted on your head. It's not worth it, David."

The kid deflated like an old party balloon. He seemed weighed down by all the world's problems. Only later did I learn the true reason behind his crackpot scheme. You see, David had just lost Zelig Pictures. The last remaining Zeligs had been cheated out of their family legacy and all that went with it. David knew this for a fact but he couldn't prove it. And so his mind had filled with conspiracies.

"I'm glad you turned to me for advice," I told him. "I'm flattered. And I'm sorry to be so blunt. But cheer up, for God's sake. Find something better to do with your time and energy. For example, you could find a nice young woman and settle down. Your father would have liked that."

David Zelig sighed. Then he shook my hand and left. But do you think he listened to me? Ha! If he had, we wouldn't be sitting here, would we?

# CHAPTER 2

“David Zelig, to what do we owe this *rare* honor?”

David stiffened when he heard the familiar oily voice. A smiling middle-aged comb-over sashayed toward him from the other side of the Lincoln Center foyer.

*Rare honor.* The implied criticism was well-founded. All his grown life, David had avoided the showy fundraisers of the Jewish American Public Initiative, the non-profit known by the unfortunate acronym, JAPI.

All around him, gray-haired donors in Canali suits gorged themselves on finger food and snatched wine goblets from floating trays, while their Botoxed wives lectured trapped diplomats on politics. Through the tall French windows, the skyscrapers of Manhattan loomed over Central Park, their myriad yellow eyes leering at David as the evening sky faded to black.

The sudden urge to flee gripped David as Gerry Cantor, the JAPI chairperson, swooped down on him like a smiling vulture, but David held his ground. Tonight, Gerry Cantor was just the kind of man David had wanted to meet at the JAPI Northeast Gala—a man with connections to powerful Jews.

David suppressed his gag reflex at the fawning smile and

shook the outstretched hand.

“The honor is all mine, Gerry.”

Cantor wrapped David’s hand in both of his to prevent his quarry’s escape. “I’ve been trying to get a Zelig to speak at our events for decades. Our foundation deeply appreciates your family’s leadership.” By “leadership” he meant money. Would the chairperson still swoon over him once he learned of the Zelig family’s recent financial troubles?

The man’s doublespeak triggered David’s mean streak. He pointed at the poster depicting the evening’s entertainment, a ventriloquist from Vegas. “Is that meant to be ironic?”

Confusion swept Cantor’s face. “What do you mean?”

“You know. Ventriloquists—people who put words in their dummies’ mouths.” The chairperson maintained his look of blank noncomprehension, so David elaborated. “At a fundraiser for a partisan lobby group. I hope the show won’t offend the politicians.”

A hint of annoyance passed over Cantor’s face like a speeding cloud, then his gracious-host persona bounced back. “We prefer the word ‘education’ to ‘lobby.’”

“I’m sure you do.”

Cantor launched right into a proposal. “What about the JAPI Convention?”

“What about it?”

“It’s two weeks from now. We’d love for you to deliver the keynote speech. People are tired of seeing the same old fogeys every year. It’s time they heard from the new generation.”

“*It’s time,*” whispered the simultaneous translation in David’s brain, “*for the new generation to renew their families’ pledges to the JAPI coffers.*”

David’s brow prickled with sweat. The very thought of delivering a speech before the conclave of Jewish philanthropy triggered a panic attack.

Cantor had hit him with a large ask. David had attended the annual convention in Washington over a decade ago as a curious teenager tagging along with his father, and he had no

intention of repeating that mistake. But he'd do well to ingratiate himself with the showrunner. Soon, David would hit back with his own even larger ask.

“What’s the theme this year?”

Cantor framed an invisible banner with his hands. “Protect America’s Minorities.”

Now that was a cause David could rally behind. At last, a Jewish organization was facing the Hydra of anti-Semitism.

“I like it. It’s about time we did something about those synagogue shootings.”

“Synagogue shootings?” Cantor said, aghast. “No, David. We’re talking about African and Latin Americans. We’re talking persecuted minorities—those who suffer from systemic prejudice and racism. Not Jews! America has treated us very kindly.”

Being gunned down in a house of worship wasn’t David’s idea of kind treatment, but he let the comment go. Was Cantor the wrong man for the job or had David approached him at the wrong time? During the fundraiser, the JAPI chairperson was on set and in character. But on a different soundstage would Cantor sing a different song?

“Gerry, I need a favor.”

“Anything, Mr. Zelig. Name it.”

“Can we speak in private?”

Cantor swallowed hard and nodded, unable to deny the request of an important donor, but probably sensing a dressing down by the young heir. He led David behind a curtain and into a side room jammed with stacks of padded conference chairs.

“Yes?”

“Isn’t it time we used our clout for our own protection?”

“What do you mean?” Again, Cantor seemed genuinely confused. Was the source of his confusion David’s talk of their clout or their need for protection?

“A group of Jewish leaders to get things done on the quiet. Behind the scenes. Like the Elders of—”

Cantor clamped a hand over David’s mouth. “David,” he

hissed. "Never say such a thing!"

David's heart thumped in his chest. The hairs on the back of his neck bristled. Did the Elders of Zion already exist? Was this toady his gateway to a hidden world of Jewish domination?

When the hand released his mouth, David whispered, "Does the Elders exist?"

"No, of course not! But the haters will use any excuse to fan the flames. Do you have any idea how precarious our situation is? Supremacists gun down Jews in synagogues. College kids beat up Jews on campus. A rolling pogrom is ravaging Brooklyn, but that doesn't even make the news!"

A hunted expression transformed Cantor. "You talk of power and clout. 'The all-powerful Jewish lobby.'" He rolled his eyes and groaned. "Don't mistake JAPI for power. These events of ours are glorified ransom payments. 'Here, enjoy this tasty dinner. Now, please, pretty please, treat us like everyone else! We're begging for scraps at the table of human rights, David. A protection racket, that's what JAPI is up against. A protection racket that demands payment in caviar!"

The old man had stunned David into silence. There was no Elders of Zion. Jewish money was a fanciful illusion. But Cantor wasn't done.

"You know why your great-grandfather started Zelig Pictures?"

David shrugged. "He saw an opportunity."

"Opportunity, my hairy behind. Back in the day, nobody thought movies would amount to much. Moving pictures were glorified peep shows. They were beneath the dignity of the Gentile upper class. Nobody dreamed that films would have such an impact. And television was beyond imagining. Trust me, your great-grandfather would have preferred to become a hotshot lawyer or industry tycoon. Do you know why he didn't? Because the Gentile elites shut Jews out of the corridors of wealth and power. Ivy League colleges invented rules to exclude Jews. The country clubs barred entry to dogs and Jews. So the Jews made films the way the Indians opened

motels, and the Chinese went into dry cleaning. That, my friend, is the real story behind Zelig Pictures and all the other big studios.”

His chest heaved; his comb-over dangled at his ear. “And the bigotry didn’t end with business. A hundred years ago, an angry mob lynched Leo Frank in the streets of Georgia while law enforcement looked on. Don’t get me wrong. We’ve come a long way since then, David, and we’ve worked very hard to get here. Anti-Semitism is less socially acceptable, but it still lurks beneath the surface. We’re sitting on a barrel of dynamite.” He jabbed a finger at David’s chest. “So don’t you go striking sparks with talk of Jewish conspiracies. If you do, synagogue shootings will seem like the good old days.”

Cantor straightened his tie, adjusted his comb-over, and returned to the buffet hall, the oily smile back on his face.

David composed himself with deep breaths. Cantor could not help him. He was a scared old man from a bygone generation. But he’d gotten one thing right. David was tired of listening to old fogeys. The time of the new generation had come.

# CHAPTER 3

“You didn’t say he’d be here,” Jordan Brody said.

David’s carrot-haired best friend had just stepped through the front door of David’s loft apartment in the Upper West Side and spotted David’s other best friend flopping on a coffee-colored leather couch.

Mitchell Joffe was the negative image of the straight-laced, techie newcomer. With his tanned arms folded behind his head and chest hair sprouting from his white silk shirt, Mitchell was the quintessential carefree playboy. He turned from the view of the Hudson River and shuttered his eyes at Jordan, a gesture of bored disdain he had stolen from Jack Nicholson.

“He didn’t want you to chicken out,” Mitchell said.

Jordan’s shoulders rose. David knew that pose. The three friends had learned each other’s every quirk and gesture well during the many ski vacations their families had shared in Aspen. Ten years later, their inner teenagers still surfaced whenever they got together. David had five seconds before the meeting devolved into a squabble.

“Guys, this is important—maybe the most important thing I’ll ever ask of you. Can we put aside our differences for a few minutes?”



Jordan folded his arms over his chest. "I will if he will."

After a suitably melodramatic pause, Mitchell nodded. "Whatever."

"Good."

Jordan joined Mitchell on the couch, leaving a large demilitarized zone between them. David stood before his friends.

"You've heard about the synagogue shootings." The statement cleansed the air of teenage grudges. "But have you heard of the Elders of Zion?"

Jordan wrinkled his nose as though he'd tasted pee in his beer. "The secret Jewish organization that controls the world?"

Mitchell's eyes widened. "Awesome!"

"It's a myth, you moron," Jordan snapped. "A conspiracy theory anti-Semites use to blame Jews whenever things go wrong."

"But what if it wasn't just a myth?" David blurted before another fight ignited.

Mitchell said, "You mean like JAPI?"

"JAPI's a dead end. I spoke with Gerry Cantor. JAPI has no real power, and Cantor foamed at the mouth at the very mention of the Elders. But what if we created the Elders of Zion? People would think twice before they walk into a synagogue with an assault rifle."

"Ooh!" Mitchell said. "Like those Nazi hunters in that movie, what was it called?"

Jordan laced his sideways glance with loathing. "*Inglourious Basterds?*"

"Yeah, that's it! They shot up a theater full of Nazis. That was wild!"

Jordan shifted further away from Mitchell. "That was just a movie, and I am not about to step into a Tarantino film. Or become a vigilante. Violence isn't a Jewish value. And Jewish extremists tend to end up dead like Kahane. No thank you very much!"

"No," David said, his hands spread to calm his friend's concerns. "No violence. Nothing like that. Just *influence*."

Pulling the strings. Behind the scenes.”

“Is that even legal?”

David hadn’t considered the legality of running a secret organization.

Mitchell rolled his eyes. “Not if we do nothing illegal.”

David shrugged. “It’s not as though we’re going to apply for non-profit status.”

Mitchell slapped his leg. “Good enough for me, David. Count me in.”

“Great!” David relaxed. That had gone easier than he had expected, and now that Mitchell had signed on, Jordan would not be outdone. The two secret society members glanced expectantly at Jordan, who buckled under peer pressure.

“Fine,” he said, “I’ll join your secret club.”

“That’s my man!” Mitchell raised his hand for a high five, and Jordan grudgingly played along. The mood in the living room warmed. The three friends had put aside their differences to pursue an important mission.

“What are we going to call ourselves?” Jordan said.

“What do you mean?”

“We can’t use the Elders of Zion. That’s a dead giveaway.”

“Right,” Mitchell said, and he brightened as an idea presented itself. “Well, there’s three of us so—”

Jordan interrupted. “Don’t you dare say *The Three Musketeers*.”

“What’s wrong with *The Three Musketeers*? That was a great movie.”

“Book, you idiot. It was a book by Alexandre Dumas long before—”

“Guys,” David said, diving in again to keep the peace. “What did the Romans call that group of three rulers?”

“A triumvirate?”

“That’s it! The Triumvirate. What do you think?”

The two men wiggled their heads, trying the title out for size.

“I like it,” Mitchell said. “The Trio.”

“*Triumvirate*,” Jordan said.

“Like you said. Trio.”

Jordan glanced at David with frustration, but David gave in. “Trio works too.”

“That settles it,” Mitchell said. “Welcome to the Trio, the world’s first *real* Jewish secret society.”

They smiled at each other, savoring their first shared accomplishment.

Mitchell rode the waves of creative juices. “We’ll need a secret handshake too.”

“No secret handshakes, Mitch.”

“You sure?”

“Positive.”

“OK,” Jordan said, and he inhaled a sharp, impatient breath. “What now?”

“What now?”

“How do we control the world?”

“Right.” David scratched his chin. He hadn’t thought this through. To be honest, he hadn’t expected the idea to take off with so little resistance.

Mitchell raised his hand. “We’ll need money.”

“We have money,” Jordan countered.

“Um, no. Jordan, you might have loads of spare cash with all your hot-shot hi-tech companies. I’ve just got the trust fund.”

“Mitch,” David said, “we all need to pitch in.” How David would do so after losing Zelig Pictures was a good question. Once the Trio earned a few notches on its clandestine belt, he’d turn the society’s attention to his own personal troubles.

“I will,” Mitch said, defensive. “I’m just saying Jordy-boy should be the first to fork out.”

Jordan sighed. “Whatever. For argument’s sake, let’s say we’ve put the cash together. What do we do with it?”

They shared an awkward silence. The silence begat more wordlessness, and soon a tribe of unspoken accusations surrounded the friends and poked them with their silent spears. The newborn Jewish conspiracy had no clue what it was doing.

In David's defense, he had hoped that Jordan would do the strategic heavy lifting. David was the founder, Jordan was the brains, and Mitchell... well, a two-man secret society had seemed a little lame.

"I've got it," Jordan said, and the other men exhaled with relief. "We don't need to figure anything out."

Relief became suspicion.

"We don't?"

"Why not?"

They eyed Jordan with foreboding, expecting a sarcastic punch line. None followed. Instead, Jordan beamed at them.

"It's all planned out for us already," he said. "We just need to read the handbook."

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