

Greetings Club Member

While you were making resolutions, promising fresh starts and clean slates, the dangerous men and women of this world were also busy. Because villains awaken in January.

I'm not kidding. History is replete with examples. Warlords, empire builders, smugglers and mercenary commanders who used the closing months of the prior year to organise alliances, stockpile weapons and prepare campaigns. January was for decisions, March for movement.

And like the mighty al-Mahdi of the Sudan, they often gained the upper hand. Caught opponents ill-prepared and wrong-footed. Planners who emerged from the shadows to put their opponents to the sword. And in fiction as in life, that makes for a great story. Whether they prevail or not makes for a satisfactory conclusion.

What makes life more interesting is when a protagonist faces multiple enemies. Take the Allies in Arabia during WW1. They had to contend with Constantinople's military machine and local tribal leaders (who could switch sides over a coffee) and an unforgiving desert. In fiction, Ludlum's Jason Bourne defends himself against his former employers and the Russians. While Jack Ryan in Clancy's *Clear and Present Danger* has to deal with drug cartels and corrupt US officials. They never know what's coming next.

The protagonist in my upcoming third instalment of the McGavell trilogy also faces layers of adversaries, from one in his own backyard to others who are distant yet more methodical and brutal. And like *Those Who Favour Fire*, I've integrated the storyline with history to give it a realistic edge, making the conflict between people and nations feel more authentic. I'm looking forward to its release later this year. Hope you are too.

So as this New Year gathers pace, let's raise a glass to the bad guys, if only because they allow the good guys to shine.

Best for 2026.

Till next time

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