



THE

SMUGGLERS

WESTON FIELDS

WESTON FIELDS

The Smugglers



First published by Lumen Books 2025

Copyright © 2025 by Weston Fields

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise without written permission from the publisher. It is illegal to copy this book, post it to a website, or distribute it by any other means without permission.

This novel is entirely a work of fiction. The names, characters and incidents portrayed in it are the work of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events or localities is entirely coincidental.

The theological beliefs expressed by characters in this book do not necessarily reflect the theological opinions of the author. All acts of God are purely fictional, although they have been based off of similar real-life accounts whenever possible.

Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

First edition

This book was professionally typeset on Reedsy.

Find out more at reedsy.com

Chapter 1

How did I get myself roped into this? Gearwire wondered as he glanced over at his companion. Elijah looked down at him, a smile creeping across his face. He was a giant of a man, standing just over seven feet tall.

“This is it. There’s no turning back now,” Elijah said, unsuccessfully trying to lower his voice to a whisper.

“No turning back now,” Gearwire agreed reluctantly, turning to look at their cargo one last time.

It’s not too late to call the mission off, a voice whispered in the back of his mind. No one would blame you. You have a fledgling rebellion to consider, after all.

Gearwire shook his head, banishing the thought from his mind. Before he could reconsider, he flipped a switch on his robotic legs, transforming in the blink of an eye into Elijah’s middle-aged apprentice, Samuel.

Elijah’s smile grew wider as he watched Gearwire rearrange the contents of the cart to conceal their true cargo. “That won’t be necessary,” he said, taking a book from the bottom of the pile and placing it in plain sight at the top of the stack. “We are relying on God’s power to complete this mission, not our own devices, remember?”

Gearwire grimaced. Sometimes, the older man’s childlike dependance on God’s providence irked him. The general in him urged him to take

every available precaution to ensure their success. And yet, he couldn't deny that he envied Elijah's unshakeable trust.

So, with every fiber in his being screaming in protest, he forced himself to walk alongside Elijah as he pulled the handcart up the hill to Duncan's Ridge.

"Halt," a voice commanded, and Gearwire came to a stop. A member of the Security Force emerged from the other side of the ridge, flanked by a pair of Blanks. The security officer stepped closer, and Elijah muttered something under his breath to Gearwire.

"Pray."

"What business do you have here?" the security officer asked, coming to a stop only a yard away,

"I'm Elijah Temple of Kawts," Elijah said. "My colleague and I are bringing books from the Kawts Library to exchange with the librarian here in Duncan's Ridge. We're trying to get the books circulating to a wider audience."

"And you have the Council's permission for this?" the officer asked skeptically, scrutinizing the pair.

"I have the documents right here," Elijah said, pulling a folded packet of papers from his shirt pocket and handing them to the man.

The officer inspected them critically. "This doesn't say anything about your friend here. It only authorizes you."

"I am nearly sixty-five years old," Elijah replied evenly. "There are times when I need an assistant to help me drag this cart between the five cities of Kawts."

This answer seemed to satisfy the officer, and he nodded sharply. "I'll just have to check your cart there, and then you'll be free to go."

Gearwire's hand strayed to his glue gun as the officer approached the cart.

Don't let them find the Bibles, he prayed, watching in tense uneasiness as the man began to shift the stacks of books, looking for anything that

could be deemed contraband. Once, he stared directly at the Bible atop the cart, and Gearwire gripped his weapon tighter. After what seemed like an eternity, the man looked away, straightening up and stepping back from the cart.

“Everything looks like it checks out,” he said, returning to his post. “Good luck on your trip.”

Elijah beamed at him. “God bless you, sir,” he said, picking up the handles of the cart once more. Gearwire tensed, examining the security officer’s face for any sign that he suspected the true meaning of Elijah’s words. The officer’s face remained unchanged, and the pair quickly carried their cargo into the city.

It was only once they were out of earshot of the guards that Gearwire breathed a sigh of relief, releasing his grip on his glue gun. Though a veteran of countless battles against the most ruthless of foes, he still found that his heart was pounding.

“That,” he said sternly, turning to his companion, “was a dangerous and foolish thing to do.”

For the first time that afternoon, Elijah’s perpetual smile faded. “Indeed it was,” he agreed at last. “Dangerous, anyway. I’m not sure I’d agree that it’s foolish.” He stared out at the town below them, and Gearwire knew without asking that he was thinking about the state of the Kawts church.

“But someone has to tell them, Gearwire,” he said, sorrow in his voice. “They need someone to tell them the Truth. You know just as well as I that the odds of that man ever hearing the Good News are slim. Isn’t the soul of one man of more value than my earthly life?”

“And there are thousands more who will never get to hear the message if you get us killed before we’ve even begun our mission,” Gearwire said gently.

Elijah nodded slowly, but said nothing.

Satisfied that he had made his point, Gearwire asked, “How were you

THE SMUGGLERS

planning on making contact with the believers here?”

Elijah stopped to look at him, his smile returning. “I rather thought we’d start in the library.”

* * *

Ten minutes later, they were pulling their cart through the doors of the Duncan’s Ridge Library. The librarian was a wiry, bespectacled man who seemed even older than Elijah. He looked up as they entered.

“Pastor Elijah!” he exclaimed, pushing his chair back. He smiled warmly. “What brings you around to Duncan’s Ridge?”

“Good to see you again, Josiah! We have a book transfer from the Kawts Library,” Elijah replied. “And a few books from elsewhere.” He reached into the cart behind him and pulled out one of the Bibles.

The librarian’s eyes widened as he realized what Elijah was holding. “Is that what I think it is?” he asked, gently taking the book from Elijah’s hands.

Elijah nodded solemnly. “It is. Gearwire here managed to track down several dozens of them to distribute around Duncan’s Ridge.”

For a brief moment, Josiah seemed puzzled. He peered at Gearwire through his thick glasses. “Gearwire? He looks like your apprentice Samuel to me.”

Gearwire flicked the switch on his legs back and forth, revealing his true form for a split second.

Josiah nodded in understanding. “We owe you a debt of gratitude, sir.”

Gearwire shook his head. “It was Elijah who convinced me to set up an operation to get these printed off.”

“But it was God who pulled everything together,” Elijah said. Then,

CHAPTER 1

grinning at Gearwire, he added, "Although I didn't anticipate it taking nearly three years."

It's hard to focus on a project like that when you're trying to build a resistance movement, Gearwire thought defensively, but he said nothing.

"Well, regardless of whose idea it was, you're both here now," Josiah said, adjusting his spectacles. "I'll distribute the rest of these as soon as I can. But say - our next meeting is tomorrow night. It might do our congregation good to hear from someone other than me for a change."

"Unfortunately, we have to keep going," Elijah said quickly, before Gearwire could respond. "We still have four more cities to visit."

Josiah nodded. "I'm sorry to see you leave so soon. But if you run into Daniel while you're out, say hi to him for me."

"I will," Elijah promised.

Gearwire picked up a crate of books. "Where do you want these?"

Josiah considered the question for a moment. "Let's store them beneath my desk for now," he said at last. Gearwire set the box on the ground and unloaded the rest of the crates. He left the library with Elijah only a few minutes later.

* * *

After picking up another shipment of Bibles from Gearwire's ship, the pair set off again. The same process repeated itself in Garrington and Johnson's Clearing. Each time, Elijah would insist on leaving at least one of the Bibles in plain sight during their inspection, much to Gearwire's chagrin. Each time, Elijah would instruct him to pray while he talked to the security officer guarding the gate. And each time, to Gearwire's utter amazement, they were allowed to enter the city without any trouble.

But as they continued their journey, Gearwire noticed a change be-

ginning to come over his companion. He became quiet and withdrawn, spending his time staring off absently into space. Equally strange was the fact that he insisted on visiting Johnson's Clearing before Aria, despite the fact that it would force them to cross back through Kawts on two occasions. Despite his concerns, however, Gearwire said nothing, trusting his companion's judgement on the state of affairs in Kawts.

Yet as Elijah began to drag the cart up the hill to the gates of Aria, Gearwire couldn't help but notice how his perpetual smile had morphed into a worried frown, and how he took each step slowly, as if struggling against some massive weight.

"Are you feeling okay?" Gearwire asked as Elijah suddenly came to a stop. Elijah stared up at the city, unhearing.

"Elijah!" Gearwire said, snapping his fingers near the librarian's ear.

Elijah started. "Sorry," he said. "What were you saying?"

"I asked if you were feeling all right," Gearwire said, alarm bells ringing in his head. "Are you sick? We can wait awhile to finish the deliveries if we need to."

Elijah shook his head, plastering a smile across his face that Gearwire could tell was forced. "I'm fine," he said. "Just... thinking, I suppose."

Gearwire examined him silently, certain that Elijah was hiding something from him. Had it been anyone else, he might have worried that a betrayal was afoot.

I don't think I have anything to worry about on that front, Gearwire reassured himself. Once Elijah commits to something, nothing more than death or an act of God could get him to betray that commitment. Still, he thought, noting the sorrowful look on Elijah's face. There's definitely more going on here.

"Would you care to tell me what about?" he asked, but Elijah shook his head.

"Later," he said. "Before you go back to Kawts, I promise."

Gearwire studied him for a moment longer before finally deciding

that he would get no further explanations out of him before he was ready. The pair resumed their journey, making it through the gate to Aria just as they had made it into the previous three cities.

Despite his concerns for his companion and the mission, Gearwire felt a smile spread across his face as he walked through the mountaintop city. With its lofty towers and carefully cultivated gardens, Aria was by far the most whimsical of the five cities of Kawts. Even the outer wall around the city was decorated with intricate carvings and a ring of short bushes. And yet, Gearwire knew that behind that beauty lay many hidden defenses. With the possible exception of Garrington, Aria was the most well-fortified city, acting as a watchtower for the rest of Kawts. It was just the way he had always envisioned it.

Strength and beauty, he reflected a hint of sadness tainting his thoughts. *A fitting tribute.*

His own thoughts hundreds of years and hundreds of miles away, Gearwire didn't notice as Elijah's pace grew slower and slower. It took them nearly half an hour to reach the library, finally standing before the massive, castle-like building.

After a moment of hesitation, Elijah pushed the door open and stepped inside. Gearwire followed and walked over to the librarian's desk. To his surprise, however, it was manned not by the aged bibliophile they had expected to meet, but rather a harried young man, no more than thirty years old. Gearwire stopped short, waiting for Elijah to introduce themselves and their mission. But Elijah said nothing, and Gearwire realized after a few seconds that it was up to him.

"Could you tell us where we might find the head librarian here?" he asked. "Daniel, I think his name was."

Immediately, the young man's eyes filled with tears. "Daniel is dead," he said. "He was convicted of treason a few days ago. I'm the head librarian now."

Gearwire glanced back at Elijah, wanting to see how he reacted to

the news of his friend's demise. With how he had been acting lately, he worried that this fresh development would be too much for him. But Elijah's face remained impassive, the only sign that he had heard the man was a slight deepening of his frown.

"We... we have a book delivery from the Kawts Library," Gearwire said slowly, the frightening tension in the room putting his nerves on edge. Something big was going on here, but he couldn't determine what.

Warily, he picked up one of the Bibles from the cart. He started to take it over to the newly appointed librarian, but Elijah grabbed his arm.

"Deactivate your disguise," he whispered urgently into his ear.

Gearwire hesitated for a moment, his brow furrowing in confusion as his mind raced to figure out what was happening. Elijah gripped his arm tighter, fear beginning to show in his eyes.

"Do it. Now."

Startled by the deadly seriousness in his voice, Gearwire quickly deactivated the disguise module in his robotic legs. The librarian yelped in surprise as Samuel's likeness suddenly melted away, revealing the leader of the growing resistance movement.

Elijah turned his eyes to face the young librarian, but he didn't relinquish his grip on Gearwire's arm. "Promise me," he said. "That as soon as you leave, you'll have your men hack into the Council's records to show that this man was never even in the same area of town as we were."

Gearwire's eyes widened. "Elijah, what's-"

Before he could finish his sentence, the doors to the library burst open, slamming against the walls with a bang as a dozen Blanks poured into the room.

Elijah was the first to react, shoving Gearwire to the side and snatching up a book from the cart, throwing it like a frisbee into the ranks of the Blanks just as they opened fire. The book collided with

the security officer leading the attack, knocking him into the Blanks behind him and temporarily disrupting their formation.

As the Blanks began to recover, Elijah turned and ran towards the librarian, knocking him to the ground just as a second volley of gunfire ricocheted through the space.

Gearwire recovered quickly from his shock, whipping out his glue gun and firing several shots in rapid succession, sticking the Blanks and their commander to the wall. The immediate threat negated, he jogged over to the back of the desk, where Elijah was still sprawled out on top of the young librarian.

As Gearwire approached, Elijah slowly pulled himself to his feet, breathing heavily.

“Are you okay?” he asked the stunned librarian, extending a hand to help him to his feet. The man took it hesitantly, eyeing both of them warily.

“What - what’s going on?” he stammered, looking from the Blanks to Gearwire, then back to Elijah. “Who are you people?”

Gearwire ignored the man’s question, his eyes drawn to something else - the three bullet holes in Elijah’s back.

“Elijah,” he said, trying to come up with a way to break the news gently. “You’ve been hit.”

Elijah looked him in the eyes, a faint smile tugging at his lips. “I know,” he said. “I’ve known for a few weeks now.”

Gearwire raised an eyebrow, but before he could speak, the librarian interjected.

“You saved my life,” he said, noticing for the first time Elijah’s wounds and the bullets lodged in the wall where he had been standing. “But you’re criminals. Why...” He trailed off, struggling to make sense of what was happening.

“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends,” Elijah replied. “Jesus laid down his life so that I might

inherit everlasting life. It is because of his love for me and for all the world that I did what I did.”

The man stared at him, even more confused than before. Beside him, Gearwire wore a similar expression.

“What does that even mean?” the man asked. Elijah looked at Gearwire and nodded.

Of course, Gearwire thought. *The Bibles!* He took one of the Bibles from the cart and handed it to Elijah, who passed it on to the man.

“This book will explain everything,” he said. “It was to deliver copies of this book to some friends of ours here that we came here today. Daniel was to receive them and distribute them to where they could be of the most use. That task has now fallen to you.”

“Me?” the man asked, aghast. “But I don’t - how will I...?”

“You are a keeper of books,” Elijah said. “It’s your job to lend people books. And I suspect that you’ll know who to give them to when the time comes. Only make sure that you keep a copy for yourself.” His breath hitched, and he grabbed the edge of the table to steady himself. “We will leave the rest of these books for you outside the school. Make sure you’re far away from here by the time the Blanks get free.”

Elijah took a step toward the cart, then stumbled, only barely managing to catch himself. Gearwire was at his side in an instant, helping the wounded man to the cart. Without saying a word, they both began pulling, dragging the remaining books to the place Elijah had indicated.

Elijah grew steadily worse as they continued on, but he refused to let Gearwire tend to his wounds until they were clear of the city entirely. As soon as they passed out of sight from the city walls, Elijah sat down on a boulder.

“I don’t have long now,” he said with a grimace. “These wounds were mortal from the beginning,” he added before Gearwire could protest. “I’ve known this was coming since the day we left Kawts.”

CHAPTER 1

“You knew you were going to get shot?”

“I had a vision of what was to come. A vision of my own death, but also of the furthering of the Kingdom,” Elijah said, his breathing labored. “I knew what we would find in Aria. That’s why it had to be last next to Kawts itself.” He took a long, shuddering breath, then let it out slowly. A wan smile crossed his face. “I’m afraid you’ll have to finish the deliveries on your own now, Gearwire,” he said. “I’ve already labelled them with who they should be sent to.”

“You might still recover,” Gearwire said, pulling out his battered first aid kit.

“You’re welcome to try,” Elijah said, “But it won’t do any good. The vision was very clear - I will die, but in doing so, I will produce a testimony to the truth. Just like in Bunyan’s tale.”

“Don’t say things like that,” Gearwire snapped, removing a roll of bandages from his kit. “You’re going to be just fine.”

Elijah laughed quietly to himself. “You’ll see I’m right soon enough,” he said. “Just promise me you’ll finish the deliveries once I’m gone.”

“I promise,” Gearwire said. “Now hold still. This might hurt a little.”

* * *

Despite Gearwire’s best efforts, Elijah soon lost consciousness, and only three hours later, he slipped from this world to the next. Gearwire somberly laid the body of Kawts’ courageous librarian and pastor in the back of the cart, dragging it back to his ship and flying him back to the rebels’ newly completed base for a proper burial. As he did, Elijah’s last words ran through his mind.

“Through all trials, we are more than conquerors through Christ.”

The last crate of Bibles shifted in the back of the ship, and Gearwire

THE SMUGGLERS

knew at once that he had to deliver them. He owed it to his friend to finish what he'd started.

* * *

Atticus Shepherd was awakened the next morning by a knock on his door. Yawning, he rolled out of bed and climbed down the stairs. He opened the door and peered out into the street. "Hello?" he called, glancing around in confusion.

There was no one there.

As he turned to leave, his eye caught on a small, rectangular package on the edge of his porch. He picked it up and took it inside, unwrapping it at his dining room table. His heart raced when he saw its contents. It was a Bible, bookmarked by a note in Elijah's handwriting.

To Mr. Shepherd,

I have been in ministry for a long time, and I know faith potential when I see it. You have a sincere love of the Lord and an eagerness to learn all you can about your faith. If you are reading this now, it means that Gearwire must have followed through on my dying request. The church in Kawts needs a leader. Would you consider it?

* * *

Edeline Deogol glanced around furtively, making sure no one was watching before she approached the hiding spot. She reached under the flowerpot, hoping to find some further instructions from Gearwire,

CHAPTER 1

Instead, she found a brown paper package.

Puzzled and excited, she ducked into a nearby shed and unwrapped it. A handwritten note fluttered to the floor as she opened the book inside. Picking it up, she began to read.

Dear Edeline,

Over the course of our work together, you have many times asked me the basis for my hope for the future of Kawts. I fear that I may not have been terribly clear about it then, and for that, I beg your forgiveness. The contents of this book are my answer to that question. I would suggest beginning with the second section, titled "New Testament." I hope that you find it as liberating as I did.

* * *

Samuel opened the door to the library, walking over to his desk. As he sat down, he noticed a small, rectangular package sitting on top of his latest manuscript. He groaned, knowing already what would be inside. This was not the first time that Elijah had tried to give him a Bible. It was with great reluctance that he unwrapped the package, confirming his hunch. As he set the Bible on the corner of his desk, he noticed the note for the first time.

Samuel,

I know that we've had this conversation many times before. But this time, there is one important difference - by the time you read this, I will already be dead, having been killed while delivering Bibles to Aria. You are now Kawts' Head Librarian. All the books in this building are your domain now, not mine. You've become so cynical since what happened to Jane, and I guess I don't

THE SMUGGLERS

blame you for that. But as the new keeper of Kawts' reservoir of knowledge, I urge you to read as many of the Council's banned books as you can (which includes this one, by the way). It is my prayer that you will read this Bible and, if not agree with it yourself, at least come to understand my position. I pray that one day, we'll meet again.

Samuel slowly lowered the letter. For a long moment, he was silent, trying to process everything he had just read. Then, for the first time in a long time, he began to cry.