

J. W. GILBERT



SAMPLE CHAPTER

MOJAVE RIFT

OTHER WORKS BY J.W. GILBERT

The Moment

Published by Outskirts Press

Not Your Ordinary Praise and Worship

Published by Elisha Records

Escaping Ignorance - Pursuing Wisdom

Published by Inkwater Press

PRAISE FOR MOJAVE RIFT

“Author J.W. Gilbert did an incredible job of creating a believable background for the story, setting the tone early on and then taking me on a journey alongside Arcon and Elaina. The imagery of the forest and the descriptions of the tribe’s life blew me away. It was all so very vivid and picturesque that I had no issue imagining every scene in my head. I could hear Arcon’s voice in my head, feel his emotions and enjoy the ride. Mojave Rift is a fast-paced, incredible journey of a lifetime and you shouldn’t miss it for anything.”

— Rabia Tanveer for Readers’ Favorite: ★★★★★

“Accessible to all readers due to its moderated content and accessible plotline, this is a thrilling adventure that could be read by young adults and older generations alike. [...] Overall, author J. W. Gilbert triumphs in Mojave Rift, presenting an authentic and well-developed adventure and a promising start to a whole new series.”

— K.C. Finn for Readers’ Favorite: ★★★★★

“Mojave Rift by J.W. Gilbert is an exciting adventure that takes a biblical approach to a post-apocalyptic tale that is endearing, charming, and delightful.”

— Liz Konkel for Readers’ Favorite: ★★★★★

“If there is one thing that gives this novel its strength and depth, it is the handling of character. [...] Mojave Rift is fast-paced, deftly plotted and skillfully written.”

— Ruffina Oserio for Readers’ Favorite: ★★★★★

MOJAVE RIFT

BOOK ONE

J.W. Gilbert



MOJAVE RIFT

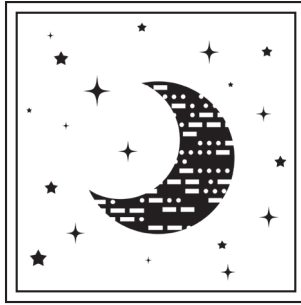
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This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, names, and events as well as all places, incidents, organizations, and dialogue in this book are either the products of the writer and illustrator's collaborative imaginations or are used fictitiously.

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CHAPTER ONE

MONDAY

“Is this the spot?” Ranger Dan Wilson wrestled with the drone controls to hold its position. Wind gusts were not helping.

Jonathan Greywolf adjusted his wire-rimmed glasses and studied the readouts more closely. “Pull it a little to the west, slowly. When I give the signal, drop it through the clouds.”

“Roger that,” replied Dan, instinctively searching out the window of the observation tower for the drone. Remembering it was nine kilometers away, he joked, “Jonathan, can I borrow your glasses? I can’t see the drone.”

Jonathan turned and saw Dan’s big, round face smiling at him. He kept the wrinkles on his Native American face unchanged as he replied, “Then we would have the blind leading the lame.”

“Touché,” said Dan, as he turned to his compass readout for direction.

“Approaching position,” said Jonathan. “Now!”

With a smooth movement of the joystick, the stars disappeared from the monitor. “We’re in the clouds,” said Dan. “Mery, let me know when you have any visuals.”

“On it,” said his wife, Meredith. She leaned forward, poking her small nose closer to her monitor. “Nothing yet.”

“What’s the altimeter reading, Jonathan?” asked Dan.

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“Twenty-seven hundred feet. Dropping ten per second. We should be clear by twenty-three. Closing in on twenty-six hundred.”

Dan’s heart raced as the drone made its descent. He could hear Jonathan’s strained voice ticking off the altitude, his wife commenting on the gray in the monitors. But his mind was focused on the mysterious people below the drone. *What had they morphed into during a century and a half of hiding in the Mojave Forest? Had their hearts changed when Jesus returned? Or was this place of theirs still the Devil’s Playground?* He hoped to find out soon. “Jonathan, you’re the expert on this tribe. Are you sure they’re peaceful?”

“I never met them.”

“I didn’t think you had. I mean, you’re only about a hundred years old. But your father did, right?”

“Many times. He said they were good people. But they went into hiding before I was born.”

“The last people to see them were met with gunfire,” said Mery.

“I wouldn’t worry,” said Jonathan, it’s only a drone.”

“Thanks a lot—sure would put me in a tight spot,” said Dan.

Meredith sat straight up in her chair. “I’m starting to see definition,” she exclaimed. “Oh, Dan, I’m seeing trees.” A tear rolled down her cheek. “This is so exciting.”

Dan pushed forward on the joystick to stop the drone’s descent, then turned to his wife and smiled. “Thanks for being here.” He studied the monitor. “Jonathan, I’m holding position. Are we still at the right spot?”

“A little too far west now. There appears to be less wind in the lower atmosphere.”

“Roger. That’s good news. Are we all ready to take a look around?”

Meredith rested her hand on her husband’s shoulder. “Are you excited to see what’s in this forest?”

“You have no idea,” he responded.

Mery clicked her tongue and shook her head. “Dan, you’ve talked about this mission incessantly for months. You’ve obsessed about the

Mojave People for decades. I have some idea you're excited. We could be the first people to see one of them in over a hundred years!"

"Don't get your hopes too high. It's after midnight, so they're probably not out walking around. The main thing is that they don't see us. Central Authority insists that we don't disturb them. That's why we're using this military spy drone."

"*Antique* spy drone."

"Well, with no military for a century, we get what we get. Shall we take a look?"

"Let's go!" said Jonathan. "You're stealth at twenty-three hundred feet. We can expect the props to be heard at twenty-one."

"I'll drop a little so we can see better, and move east. In the middle of the twenty-first century there was an industrial building at the target location. Triangulation placed the source of the code-like radio static in the same area. We should be close."

Meredith lurched in her seat. "I thought I just saw some lights."

Dan reversed direction. "Yeah, you're right." He leaned forward, examining the monitor. "I'm going to head towards them. Watch the thermal imager for a campfire or something. Jonathan, keep tabs on the altimeter. You're right—at twenty-one hundred they'll hear us for sure."

"Got it. You're at twenty-one seventy now, so be careful."

As they moved the drone toward the lights, Dan said, "The archives put the structure around here. Let's hope there's something left of it."

"There it is!" said Meredith, as they flew past a hill.

"Great. I'll start flying a grid pattern around it and record images. We can analyze them later. Try to keep me at twenty-two hundred."

"You're at twenty-one thirty, so go higher."

Dan pulled back on the stick and Mery yelled, "Dan! The other way! Go up!"

"Oh, yeah, sorry." He pushed the stick forward.

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“Okay, that’s good,” she said in a calmer voice. “Whoa, that’s high enough. Don’t go up into the clouds.”

Dan stopped the ascent and hovered the drone. Then he lurched forward, his chair groaning under his bulk. “Uh-oh. Look.”

“There’s a person down there,” she said.

“I can see that. He seems to be looking up at us. He may see the silhouette of the drone on the moonlit clouds. Oh, now he’s running. We may need to cut our surveillance short.”

“After all this trouble?” asked Jonathan.

“You’re right. These people are under my jurisdiction now. I can’t serve them without knowing something about them. This may be our only chance. I’ll back off and make a few quick passes over the area to gather information. At least now we have proof the Mojave people still exist.”

Dan was silent as he flew the drone in a grid pattern around the area. A beep came from the control panel. “That’s not the altimeter, is it?”

“No. It’s the battery level,” Jonathan grouched.

“Okay. We need to hurry. Mery, have you seen anything on the infrared yet?”

Mery shook her head. “I’ve seen a few spots near the big building, but not much.”

“Okay. I’ll drop down a little and take another pass.”

“Won’t they hear the drone?” she asked.

“We have to risk it. If you see another spot, holler. I’ll try to hover over it.”

Meredith kept her eyes focused on the thermal imaging screen as the beeping became more rapid. “Oh, there was one. Go back. That’s it. Back, back, back. Right there.”

Dan captured the image with the push of a button. “Okay, got it,” he said. “That wasn’t a very large spot, but it’s something.”

Mery turned to him. Pushing a strand of her long brown hair away from her face, she asked a question she already knew the answer to, “This isn’t what you expected, is it?”

“These Mojave People are elusive, that’s for sure. But this is a cold night, so I did expect we’d see some kind of warming fire. We didn’t even see fading embers. I really thought we’d find more infrared signatures.”

Just then, the battery signal went steady. “Guess that’s all we can do. We’ve got just enough battery power to get back. Going up!”

Dan pushed on the stick and the monitors went dark as the craft reversed through the clouds. When stars appeared, he heard Mery exclaim, “There it is, the tower light!”

“Great. You earned your pay. I’m bringing it home,” Dan said.

“You’re paying me?” asked Mery.

Dan laughed. “Absolutely...nothing. And you earned every penny.”

“I’ll invest it on dinner Tuesday night, when Jonathan comes over to help analyze the drone footage,” countered Mery.

Jonathan protested. “Wait a minute. Don’t I get paid?”

“Same as me,” said Dan, with a nod to the affirmative. “Trust me, my wife’s cooking is worth it.”



Arcon Franklin slipped into his two-room apartment, used a light touch to lock the door, and hurried to undo the leather ties that kept his rabbit skin protective gear secure around his forearms. He tugged them off, stepped out of his moccasins and darted into his bedroom. Crouching down, he slid a tanned goat hide out from under the bed, bringing several electronic parts with it.

He assembled the pieces into a radio and transmitter on at the dining room table as fast as he could and plugged it in. A message from Elaina should be coming through soon, and he didn’t dare miss this one. Last night, Raymo the night guard had talked about seeing

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a spying machine in the sky. *Could the outsiders have located my transmitter?* Luckily no one took Raymo seriously.

Pushing his long blonde hair behind his ears, Arcon donned earphones and listened. He checked the clock, but it'd stopped again. Stretching the cord on the earphones, he leaned to look out his window at the southern courtyard of the Facility. The tree shadows were just striking the upper story, which assured him he wasn't late.

His homemade crystal radio made a faint crackling noise, a hiss, and then went silent. Arcon's heart pumped a little faster beneath his leather tunic, but the static had been a false alarm. He checked the connections.

Most nights he'd pass the time reading a technical manual, but not tonight. This transmission would be Arcon's last contact with Elaina before he left the confines of the community—a place she referred to as The Mojave Forest.

To Arcon his place of home was far more than just a forest. It was the creation, the fortress, and the very lifeblood of the only people he'd ever known. Their official name for this place included the trees, the land, the people, and even the ideals they lived by. This was ArcPoint, and after twenty-two years he was about to turn his back on it, maybe forever.

Elaina. He wondered what she was like. He'd heard her voice once on the radio, but had had no way to respond except by Morse code. At first, her voice had been so garbled, he'd had to ask three times for her to repeat her message. She'd been asking, "Are you one of the Mojave People?" He hadn't known if he was or not, but knew his location had once been called the Mojave Desert. After he'd tapped out the Morse code for [MAYBE], the connection had gone silent.

Months later he'd still been scanning to connect with the outside world when there came another transmission, this time in Morse code. It was the same person, and she'd given him her name. Elaina. She'd said it wasn't safe for her to communicate with him—someone

might hear. He understood. Communication with the outside world was not permitted.

Five long, high-pitched tones jerked Arcon from his memories—Morse code for the number zero. It was zero hour. He tapped out a response on his spark-gap transmitter—four dots, one dot, dot-dash-dot, and then a final dot—the word [HERE].

He didn't know what the Morse code sounded like on Elaina's side of the rift. She said others might hear, so they were never on for long. Once a day, two minutes max. That's it. On his end he needed only to lock his door. But even that could draw suspicion. He listened and smiled when Elaina's Morse code came through. [STILL ON FOR DATE?]

Arcon didn't hesitate. He deftly tapped, [ABSO]—short for absolutely. Looking at the cheat sheet in front of him, he quickly added [WANT TO HEAR YOUR VOICE]. He'd written the code for that phrase months ago and now was the right time to use it.

[ME TOO. ANY CHANGE?]

Arcon paused and considered how to keep it short: [NOT ME. YOU?]

[MAY GO EARLY]

He didn't like the thought of her waiting for him to arrive at the rendezvous point. He didn't know what the risks were if she got caught. [WHY?]

[CUZ]

He wasn't about to argue with her. It would eat up time, and over the years he'd learned that Elaina was a strong-willed woman, and he liked that. But, he still hoped to warn her if anything went wrong from his side. He tapped back, [WAIT TWO DAYS].

[FINE].

The report from Raymo the night guard made him nervous. *Do I dare mention the spy machine to Elaina?* He decided not to, just in case the Outsiders were listening. This had to be his last communication with Elaina until they were face to face. [LAST COMM TIL RONDAVU. OUT].

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No response. He hoped she understood he'd be maintaining radio silence unless something went wrong. Then a flurry of tones came through [YAY. NO MORE STATIC FROM YOU. ELAINA OUT].

He smiled and dropped the antique earphones on the table. He wouldn't need them again. *Soon, I'll hear her voice, and watch her lips speak the words. But a lot will have to go right before that happens.* His mind reeled with thoughts about what lie ahead, and what he was leaving behind.

Some day the ArcPoint Community would leave this forest. But, until everyone was prepared to risk it, The Elders said no one should venture beyond the forest's edge. The Elders would decide when the time was right. Arcon was convinced they'd wait until the outsiders invaded the forest. Surrender to an invading force would surely cost fewer lives than the dangers in the land surrounding them.

Arcon was only a day away from facing those unknown dangers, but he had a plan, and he was prepared. He owed it all to his friend and mentor, Jarden. No one knew the land around the forest better than he did. For years Jarden had pointed out the hazards, and recommended the best routes.

Their beloved home in the forest was surrounded by a maze of earth cracks that could swallow a person whole. Some were small enough to step over, while others would require a bridge. The worst were hidden under a thin layer of soil and debris that could disappear under your feet. At least three people had to be roped together to survive such an encounter.

Rock outcroppings used to be easy to avoid, but trees and needle-brush hid them now. A person could spend most of a day trying to hack a trail around them. Jarden pointed out the ones he knew about. Arcon's escape route would take him where Jarden had never been. He'd used ancient maps of the area to plot a jagged course that should skirt around the rocks.

The needle-brush was a different threat. It was everywhere. But Jarden was the master at conquering that twisted mass of berry briars and thorny tree rhizomes. Since Arcon's boyhood, Jarden

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had taught Arcon ways to climb into trees to avoid the thorns. He learned how to walk the branches and jump from tree to tree.

Over the years Jarden had developed a thoroughfare through the trees using ropes to tie distant branches together. His best invention, however, was the rope swing. With rope swings, long distances could be traveled safer in a short amount of time. There were now swingways going four different directions out of the ArcPoint compound. And now there was one more swingway that only Arcon knew the location of—he hoped.

Only the hunters had the skill and upper body strength to handle the swings. Arcon had built his secret swingway to be difficult to find and even harder to use. Hunter Tawny was as tall as Arcon, but he was too young to have the necessary skills. Others had skill, but were too short to reach the branches Arcon had used. All the hunters knew he was building the swingway, but he didn't think they'd found it. They wouldn't suspect he'd built towards the Rift.

For some unexplained reason, the big canyon that everyone called the Rift frightened Jarden. Arcon wasn't considering going that way at first, but Elaina told him if he could get to the Rift, she could get him across. It was the shortest route to the outside world, and was free of earth cracks—according to Jarden. Arcon expected to be at the edge of the Rift within a week.

This journey would be much easier if he could've persuaded any of the hunters to join him. Jarden would've been his first choice, but now he was too old and much too important to the Community. He was considered an Elder, and would certainly try to stop Arcon from leaving.

For over an hour, he tried to discipline his mind to prepare for his exit. Instead, he got sidetracked thinking about those he was leaving behind. He knew a lot of people, but he was close to very few. *Maybe that's just as well. It'll be easier for them to forget me and move on.*

Arcon abruptly stood and unplugged the radio equipment. He reached under his bed and pulled out the other items he'd collected. It was time to get ready.

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His people have been trapped for a century in a dense forest. Arcon wants out. There is a world waiting for him to discover. And Elaina. Blocking his way is a huge canyon called the Rift. His people forbid him to get near it. Her people are forbidden to cross it. God help him.

Mojave Rift is a speculative look at the future of mankind, combining down-to-earth science with Bible prophecy. Filled with action and adventure, this post-apocalyptic tale avoids the murder and mayhem of a typical dystopian setting. Where suspicion and fear once divided us, discovery of truth seeks to unite.

READERS' FAVORITE 5-STAR REVIEWS

An exciting adventure that takes a biblical approach to a post-apocalyptic tale that is endearing, charming, and delightful. – L. Konkel ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

The imagery of the forest and the descriptions of the tribe's life blew me away. It was all so very vivid and picturesque. – R. Tanveer ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

This is a thrilling adventure that could be read by young adults and older generations alike. – K. C. Finn ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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