

MICHAEL P. SPRADLIN

Action. Drama. Humor. And things BLOW UP.

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The Youngest Templar Keeper of the Grail

BOOK ONE

by Michael P. Spradlin

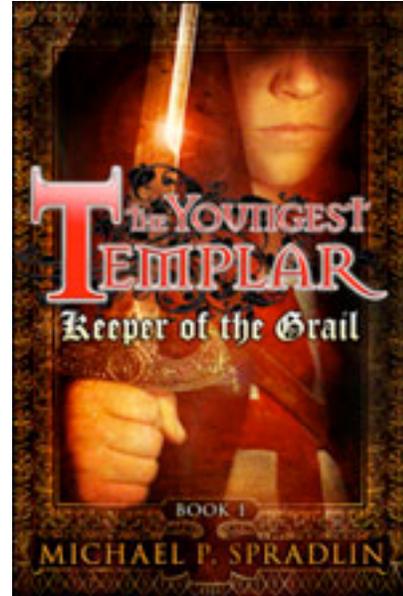
About the book:

A young squire of the Knights Templar with a heritage shrouded in mystery. A war-weary King's Archer returning to his home in Sherwood Forest. A deadly Al Hashshashin warrior, an assassin, who also happens to be a girl. Pursued by Saracens, corrupt knights, and secret agents of Richard the Lionheart, can they escape the Holy Land and protect the most sacred relic in all Christendom...the Holy Grail?

About the author:

Michael P. Spradlin is the author of more than a dozen books for children, some of which have actually been published. He grew up in a small town in Michigan not far from the Indiana border, which may explain his irrational fear of Hoosiers. (Both the inhabitants of the state of Indiana and the movie starring Gene Hackman).

Surrounded by books in his formative years, he grew up loving to read, imagining himself the hero of numerous epic battles and indulging in his favorite pastime, which was smuggling fireworks across the Ohio border so that he could blow up his collection of Plastic Green Army Men and Matchbox Cars.



Author Interview:

1. **What inspired you to write this epic adventure novel?**

I always try to write the kind of books I love to read myself. I really enjoy epic, sweeping yarns where the heroes are facing impossible odds, yet triumph by their friendship, their love for one another and their inability to accept defeat.

I've loved the Crusades and this particular period of history since I was a small boy. Some of my favorite books were about Robin Hood and Richard the Lionheart and the other heroes of the time. When I began writing, I just knew I had to set a novel or series there.

2. **How much research did you do to make the book feel authentic?**

A lot. A couple of years worth at least. Really since I've read so much about the Crusades over my lifetime you could say I've been researching this book my entire life. I've loved delving into the Knights Templar. They are a fascinating story in and of themselves.

The thing about research, especially in historical fiction, is that it can't come at the expense of the story. Most of the research that I did never ended up in the book. The characters are what matters in a novel, at least to me. If they don't work, then all the research in the world won't matter.

3. **When will Book Two come out?**

Look for *The Youngest Templar: Trail of Fate*, in Fall of 2009!

Pre-reading:

Read the prologue. Determine and discuss the main character and his quest. Predict why you think this duty has become a curse.

After reading chapter one, create a list of all the facts you know about Tristan.

Compare Tristan's life at St. Albans to his new life in Dover. Why do you think Sir Thomas chose Tristan? Would you have accepted the offer made by Sir Thomas?

Who are Tristan's enemies in the story? How are some who should be allies his enemies, and some enemies, his ally? Can you predict the difference as you read? What about in real life?

Do you think Sir Hugh despises Tristan for the initial incident with his horse or for something else? What evidence do you have? How is Sir Hugh's character revealed throughout the novel?

Describe what Tristan's role is in the battle in the Outremer. How does he act beyond his duties? Despite their success Tristan feels no glory. Why? How is he rewarded for his deed toward the king?

"The fighting usually starts when the talking ends. It lasts until the men grow weary of the fighting and seek to talk again." (p. 106) Is this still true with world conflicts today? Do you think it is "what men must do?" Is war ever necessary and justified?

Describe what happens in the city siege of Acre. Why does Sir Thomas send young Tristan off with his sword? What do you think happened to the knights who stayed? What is Tristan's duty and quest?

List the events that happened along the road to Tyre. Who are Tristan's constant companions on this leg of his journey? How is the assassin not what they expect?

How is Tristan aided by the grail along his journey? Does he begin to believe in the importance of the relic?

How is Tristan treated in Tyre? How does he escape? Why do you think he decided to bury the grail rather than carry it into the headquarters of the Templar? How did this prove to be wise?

Explain how the assassin ends up on the vessel to England. Do you think the assassin will be safe in an English country? What do you think will become of the trio? Do you believe they will finish the quest together?

Which part of the novel was your favorite? What can you learn from Spradlin's story that you can use in the creation of your own stories? What makes a story great?

Projects:

Writing:

Create a reader's theater script from a scene from the novel and act it out for your classmates. Be true to the characters and the plot but don't give away any spoilers so the audience will still want to read the story!

Reading:

Good readers stay connected to a story by making predictions about what might happen next. They base these predictions on evidence from the story, the motivations of the main character and minor characters and by thinking about the genre of the story. At the end of each chapter create a prediction in the form of a question that you hope is answered in the following chapter. Ex: I wonder if the Knights Templar have anything to do with the note left in Tristan's blankets?

History:

Research the historical crusades. What precipitated this war? Who battled against each other? What were they fighting for exactly? In the end, how did it change world history?

-or-

"Symbols can make human beings behave in less than honorable ways."
(Prologue) What symbols are most important in your family? religion? country? school? Have people ever fought over these symbols? To what end?

Art:

Design a map, sword, costume or setting for the movie adaptation of the novel. You can use any materials you like to bring your imagination to life!

-or-

Design your own flag, banner, or shield to represent you and your family. Choose symbolic colors and objects to represent your heritage and beliefs.

This guide was created by [Tracie Vaughn Zimmer](#), a reading specialist and children's author. Visit her website to find hundreds of guides to children's literature.