

★ **The Confessions of Gabriel Ash**

Lee Polevoi

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In Lee Polevoi's historical thriller *The Confessions of Gabriel Ash*, a besieged ambassador shares his life story.

Gabriel, the UN ambassador for Keshnev, is imprisoned in a mountaintop castle. A rotating cadre of guards bring him questionable food and occasional beatings. A visitor gives him a tape recorder and instructs him to detail the events leading up to his imprisonment; if he refuses, he'll face retribution from Keshnev's ruthless dictator. Thus, Gabriel alternates between recalling explosive events in New York in 1980s, where he indulged his carnal urges and he fell prey to a tabloid reporter who leaked his vitriolic words, and chronicling his present lockdown.

As Gabriel's imprisonment winds down, the tapes fill up. They contain partial truths and obvious lies; his voice is sometimes cynical, sometimes manipulative, and always gripping. He treats the tapes as his final testimony, hoping that the tribunal who hears them will show him mercy. And as he explains himself (rewinding the tapes to reword his account when it's needed, and tweaking it to cast himself in a better light), he reveals himself not only as ambitious, but also as someone who's used to perilous situations. There's a sense that he's behaved in a despicable manner, too.

Beneath the book's extraordinary, slow-burning pace, tension mounts; the sense of dread is taut throughout. Even when Gabriel is engaged in mundane events, the specter of the dictator's disdain toward him hovers. As he slouches toward an uncertain fate—a result of a lifetime of defiance—a bizarre sense of satisfaction is attained.

In the riveting thriller *The Confessions of Gabriel Ash*, a probably condemned diplomat tries to talk his way out of his harrowing predicament.

JOHN M. MURRAY (May / June 2023)

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