



## The Confessor (Gabriel Allon Series Book 3)

By Daniel Silva

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**Dark secrets are revealed in Vatican City in this Gabriel Allon thriller from #1 *New York Times* bestselling author Daniel Silva.**

In Munich, a Jewish scholar is assassinated. In Venice, Mossad agent and art restorer Gabriel Allon receives the news, puts down his brushes, and leaves immediately. And at the Vatican, the new pope vows to uncover the truth about the church's response to the Holocaust-while a powerful cardinal plots his next move.

Now, as Allon follows a trail of secrets and unthinkable deeds, the lives of millions are changed forever-and the life of one man becomes expendable...

*From the Paperback edition.*

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## **The Confessor (Gabriel Allon Series Book 3) By Daniel Silva Bibliography**

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## Editorial Review

### Review

"A shrewd, timely thriller that opens the heart of the Vatican."—*Chicago Tribune*

"Daniel Silva has now indisputably joined the ranks of Graham Greene and John Le Carré."—*The Washingtonian*

"Utterly compelling...uncommonly intelligent."—*Booklist* (starred review)

"Accomplished...elegantly written...a compelling piece of fiction, one that manages to be both superior entertainment and a hard look at serious issues."—*The Washington Post*

"Provocative historical revelations will keep readers enthralled."—*Publishers Weekly*

### About the Author

**Daniel Silva** is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Unlikely Spy*, *The Mark of the Assassin*, *The Marching Season*, and the Gabriel Allon series, including *The Kill Artist*, *The English Assassin*, *The Confessor*, *A Death in Vienna*, *Prince of Fire*, *The Messenger*, *The Secret Servant*, *Moscow Rules*, *The Defector*, *The Rembrandt Affair*, *Portrait of a Spy*, *The Fallen Angel*, *The English Girl*, *The Heist*, *The English Spy*, and *The Black Widow*. His books are published in more than thirty countries and are bestsellers around the world.

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MUNICH

The apartment house at Adalbertstrasse 68 was one of the few in the fashionable district of Schwabing yet to be overrun by Munich's noisy and growing professional elite. Wedged between two red brick buildings that exuded prewar charm, No. 68 seemed rather like an ugly younger stepsister. Her façade was a cracked beige stucco, her form squat and graceless. As a result her suitors were a tenuous community of students, artists, anarchists, and unrepentant punk rockers, all presided over by an authoritarian caretaker named Frau Ratzinger, who, it was rumored, had been living in the original apartment house at No. 68 when it was leveled by an Allied bomb. Neighborhood activists derided the building as an eyesore in need of gentrification. Defenders said it exemplified the very sort of Bohemian arrogance that had once made Schwabing the Montmartre of Germany, the Schwabing of Hesse and Mann and Lenin. And Adolf Hitler, the professor working in the second-floor window might have been tempted to add, but few in the old neighborhood liked to be reminded of the fact that the young Austrian outcast had once found inspiration in these quiet tree-lined streets too.

To his students and colleagues, he was Herr Doktorprofessor Stern. To friends in the neighborhood he was just Benjamin; to the occasional visitor from home, he was Binyamin. In an anonymous stone-and-glass office complex in the north of Tel Aviv, where a file of his youthful exploits still resided despite his pleas to have it burned, he would always be known as Beni, youngest of Ari Shamron's wayward sons. Officially, Benjamin Stern remained a member of the faculty at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, though for the past

four years he had served as visiting professor of European studies at Munich's prestigious Ludwig-Maximilian University. It had become something of a permanent loan, which was fine with Professor Stern. In an odd twist of historical fate, life was more pleasant for a Jew these days in Germany than in Jerusalem or Tel Aviv.

The fact that his mother had survived the horrors of the Riga ghetto gave Professor Stern a certain dubious standing among the other tenants of No. 68. He was a curiosity. He was their conscience. They railed at him about the plight of the Palestinians. They gently asked him questions they dared not put to their parents and grandparents. He was their guidance counselor and trusted sage. They came to him for advice on their studies. They poured out their heart to him when they'd been dumped by a lover. They raided his fridge when they were hungry and pillaged his wallet when they were broke. Most importantly, he served as tenant spokesman in all disputes involving the dreaded Frau Ratzinger. Professor Stern was the only one in the building who did not fear her. They seemed to have a special relationship. A kinship. "It's Stockholm Syndrome," claimed Alex, a psychology student who lived on the top floor. "Prisoner and camp guard. Master and servant." But it was more than that. The professor and the old woman seemed to speak the same language.

The previous year, when his book on the Wannsee Conference had become an international bestseller, Professor Stern had flirted with the idea of moving to a more stylish building, perhaps one with proper security and a view of the English Gardens. A place where the other tenants didn't treat his flat as if it were an annex to their own. This had incited panic among the others. One evening they came to him en masse and petitioned him to stay. Promises were made. They would not steal his food, nor would they ask for loans when there was no hope of repayment. They would be more respectful of his need for quiet. They would come to him for advice only when it was absolutely necessary. The professor acquiesced, but within a month his flat was once again the de facto common room of Adalbertstrasse 68. Secretly, he was glad they were back. The rebellious children of No. 68 were the only family Benjamin Stern had left.

The clatter of a passing streetcar broke his concentration. He looked up in time to see it disappear behind the canopy of a chestnut tree, then glanced at his watch. Eleven-thirty. He'd been at it since five that morning. He removed his glasses and spent a long moment rubbing his eyes. What was it Orwell had said about writing a book? "A horrible, exhausting struggle, like a long bout of some painful illness." Sometimes, Benjamin Stern felt as though this book might be fatal.

The red light on his telephone answering machine was blinking. He made a habit of muting the ringers to avoid unwanted interruptions. Hesitantly, like a bomb handler deciding which wire to cut, he reached out and pressed the button. The little speaker emitted a blast of heavy metal music, followed by a warlike yelp.

"I have some good news, Herr Doktorprofessor. By the end of the day, there will be one less filthy Jew on the planet! Wiedersehen, Herr Doktorprofessor."

Click.

Professor Stern erased the message. He was used to them by now. He received two a week these days; sometimes more, depending on whether he had made an appearance on television or taken part in some public debate. He knew them by voice; assigned each a trivial, unthreatening nickname to lessen their impact on his nerves. This fellow called at least twice each month. Professor Stern had dubbed him Wolfie. Sometimes he told the police. Most of the time he didn't bother. There was nothing they could do anyway.

He locked his manuscript and notes in the floor safe tucked beneath his desk. Then he pulled on a pair of shoes and a woolen jacket and collected the rubbish bag from the kitchen. The old building had no elevator, which meant he had to walk down two flights of stairs to reach the ground floor. As he entered the lobby, a

chemical stench greeted him. The building was home to a small but thriving kosmetik. The professor detested the beauty shop. When it was busy, the rancid smell of nail-polish remover rose through the ventilation system and enveloped his flat. It also made the building less secure than he would have preferred. Because the kosmetik had no separate street entrance, the lobby was constantly cluttered with beautiful Schwabinians arriving for their pedicures, facials, and waxings.

He turned right, toward a doorway that gave onto the tiny courtyard, and hesitated in the threshold, checking to see if the cats were about. Last night he'd been awakened at midnight by a skirmish over some morsel of garbage. There were no cats this morning, only a pair of bored beauticians in spotless white tunics smoking cigarettes against the wall. He padded across the sooty bricks and tossed his bag into the bin.

Returning to the entrance hall, he found Frau Ratzinger punishing the linoleum floor with a worn straw broom. "Good morning, Herr Doktorprofessor," the old woman snapped; then she added accusingly: "Going out for your morning coffee?"

Professor Stern nodded and murmured, "Ja, ja, Frau Ratzinger." She glared at two messy stacks of fliers, one advertising a free concert in the park, the other a holistic massage clinic on the Schellingstrasse. "No matter how many times I ask them not to leave these things here, they do it anyway. It's that drama student in 4B. He lets anyone into the building."

The professor shrugged his shoulders, as if mystified by the lawless ways of the young, and smiled kindly at the old woman. Frau Ratzinger picked up the fliers and marched them into the courtyard. A moment later, he could hear her berating the beauticians for tossing their cigarette butts on the ground.

He stepped outside and paused to take stock of the weather. Not too cold for early March, the sun peering through a gauzy layer of cloud. He pushed his hands into his coat pockets and set out. Entering the English Gardens, he followed a tree-lined path along the banks of a rain-swollen canal. He liked the park. It gave his mind a quiet place to rest after the morning's exertions on the computer. More importantly, it gave him an opportunity to see if today they were following him. He stopped walking and beat his coat pockets dramatically to indicate he had forgotten something. Then he doubled back and retraced his steps, scanning faces, checking to see if they matched any of the ones stored in the database of his prodigious memory. He paused on a humpbacked footbridge, as if admiring the rush of the water over a short fall. A drug dealer with spiders tattooed on his face offered him heroin. The professor mumbled something incoherent and walked quickly away. Two minutes later he ducked into a public telephone and pretended to place a call while carefully surveying the surroundings. He hung up the receiver.

"Wiedersehen, Herr Doktorprofessor."

He turned onto the Ludwigstrasse and hurried across the university district, head down, hoping to avoid being spotted by any students or colleagues. Earlier that week, he had received a rather nasty letter from Dr. Helmut Berger, the pompous chairman of his department, wondering when the book might be finished and when he could be expected to resume his lecturing obligations. Professor Stern did not like Helmut Berger, their well-publicized feud was both personal and academic, and conveniently he had not found the time to respond.

The bustle of the Viktualienmarkt pushed thoughts of work from his mind. He moved past mounds of brightly colored fruit and vegetables, past flower stalls and open-air butchers. He picked out a few things for his supper, then crossed the street to Café Bar Eduscho for coffee and a Dinkelbrot. Forty-five minutes later, as he set out for Schwabing, he felt refreshed, his mind light, ready for one more wrestling match with his book. His illness, as Orwell would have called it.

As he arrived at the apartment house, a gust of wind chased him into the lobby and scattered a fresh stack of salmon-colored fliers. The professor twisted his head so he could read one. A new curry takeaway had opened around the corner. He liked a good curry. He scooped up one of the fliers and stuffed it into his coat pocket.

The wind had carried a few of the leaflets toward the courtyard. Frau Ratzinger would be furious. As he trod softly up the stairs, she poked her head from her foxhole of a flat and spotted the mess. Predictably appalled, she glared at him with inquisitor's eyes. Slipping the key into his door lock, he could hear the old woman cursing as she dealt with this latest outrage.

In the kitchen, he put away the food and brewed himself a cup of tea. Then he walked down the hallway to his study. A man was standing at his desk, casually leafing through a stack of research. He wore a white tunic, like the ones worn by the beauticians at the kosmetik, and was very tall with athletic shoulders. His hair was blond and streaked with gray. Hearing the professor enter the room, the intruder looked up. His eyes were gray too, cold as a glacier.

"Open the safe, Herr Doktorprofessor."

The voice was calm, almost flirtatious. The German was accented. It wasn't Wolfie, Professor Stern was sure of that. He had a flair for languages and an ear for local dialects. The man in the tunic was Swiss, and his Schwyzerdtsh had the broad singsong accent of a man from the mountain valleys.

"Who in the hell do you think you are?"

"Open the safe," the intruder repeated as the eyes returned to the papers on the desk.

"There's nothing in the safe of any value. If it's money you're..."

Professor Stern wasn't permitted to finish the sentence. In a swift motion, the intruder reached beneath the tunic, produced a silenced handgun. The professor knew weapons as well as accents. The gun was a Russian-made Stechkin. The bullet tore through the professor's right kneecap. He fell to the floor, hands clutching the wound, blood pumping between his fingers.

"I suppose you'll just have to give me the combination now," the Swiss said calmly.

The pain was like nothing Benjamin Stern had ever experienced. He was panting, struggling to catch his breath, his mind a maelstrom. "The combination?" God, but he could barely remember his name.

"I'm waiting, Herr Doktorprofessor."

He forced himself to take a series of deep breaths. This supplied his brain with enough oxygen to permit him to access the combination to the safe. He recited the numbers, his jaw trembling with shock. The intruder knelt in front of the safe and deftly worked the tumbler. A moment later, the door swung open.

The intruder looked inside, then at the professor.

"You have backup disks. Where do you keep them?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"As it stands right now, you'll be able to walk with the use of a cane." He raised the gun. "If I shoot you in the other knee, you'll spend the rest of your life on crutches."

The professor was slipping from consciousness. His jaw was trembling. “Don’t shiver, damn you! Don’t give him the pleasure of seeing your fear!” “In the refrigerator.”

“The refrigerator?”

“In case”—a burst of pain shot through him—“of a fire.”

The intruder raised an eyebrow. “Clever boy.” He’d brought a bag along with him, a black nylon duffel, about three feet in length. He reached inside and withdrew a cylindrical object: a can of spray paint. He removed the cap, and with a skilled hand he began to paint symbols on the wall of the study. Symbols of violence. Symbols of hate. Ludicrously, the professor found himself wondering what Frau Ratzinger would say when she saw this. In his delirium, he must have murmured something aloud, because the intruder paused for a moment to examine him with a vacant stare.

When he was finished with his graffiti, the intruder returned the spray can to his duffel, then stood over the professor. The pain from the shattered bones was making Benjamin Stern hot with fever. Blackness was closing in at the edges of his vision, so that the intruder seemed to be standing at the end of a tunnel. The professor searched the ashen eyes for some sign of lunacy, but he found nothing at all but cool intelligence. This man was no racist fanatic, he thought. He was a professional.

The intruder stooped over him. “Would you like to make a last confession, Professor Stern?”

“What are you”, he grimaced in pain, “talking about?”

“It’s very simple. Do you wish to confess your sins?”

“You’re the murderer,” Benjamin Stern said deliriously.

The assassin smiled. The gun swung up again, and he fired two shots into the professor’s chest. Benjamin Stern felt his body convulse but was spared further pain. He remained conscious for a few seconds, long enough to see his killer kneel down at his side and to feel the cool touch of his thumb against his damp forehead. He was mumbling something. Latin? Yes, the professor was certain of it.

“Ego te absolvo a peccatis tuis, in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti. Amen.”

The professor looked into his killer’s eyes. “But I’m a Jew,” he murmured.

“It doesn’t matter,” the assassin said.

Then he placed the Stechkin against the side of Benjamin Stern’s head and fired one last shot.

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Joseph Nixon:**

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