



THE FOOL RETURNS

by Tom Block

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In Block's newest, Bill Willis is a Jew who doesn't realize he's Jewish until he discovers he's heir to a spiritual obligation originating with 13th-century philosopher Moses Maimonides.

Bill grew up without religion, failed at professional baseball and became a bartender, all without realizing his family was inextricably intertwined in the great polymath Maimonides' desire to heal the Abrahamic rift by creating a covenant between Jewish cabala and Sufism theology. Long ago, "a 40-card deck [was] dispersed to the four corners of the world...imbued with spiritual powers...[to] bring these two religious paths together" by "the transposition of reality—perceived as well as unseen—into numerology." The axis was Cáceres in Andalusia, and the impetus was the Inquisition. Even Christopher Columbus carried one of the cards to the New World. Not knowing that "the ingathering of the cards will repair the original injury to creation," Bill has the final card, the Fool Card, tossed into his lap while riding the subway. Trapped by the prophecy, Bill is soon compelled to journey to the Iberian Peninsula and contact Jews who've lived as Christians since the Inquisition. There are visits to dank and dark underground reliquaries, meetings with scholarly relatives, a brief tragic love affair, a retired madam and assorted mystics. In fulfilling this "*Tariqah*...to acknowledge the injustice visited upon Hagar and Ishmael," Bill's travels come to symbolize the Fool passing from the Formative World "into the Creative World, where everything is lost in a haze of ulterior meanings." While the writing is literary and full of imagery, the story is extraordinarily dense, heavily laden with surrealistic numerology and metaphors, especially the latter third, "the distillation of destiny."

Think of a Dan Brown-like adventure penned by an erudite Talmudic scholar.